

Additional lighting for special events

John Black provides several economic ideas for adding extra lighting for special events

ANY HOW TECHNICIAN KNOWS AND has experienced the variety of special events that can occur, particularly around holidays. These events may not involve additional lighting needs in smaller facilities but, in some, weekly service routines can turn into massive productions, such as around the holidays of Christmas or Easter, with highly produced pageants.

As these events are in the planning phases, you may be asked how you can provide something special to really make the event unique. You may have a large budget for purchasing or renting equipment not in your inventory, or you may have no budget and be tasked with coming up with creative solutions using only equipment already at your disposal.

If you've been reading the lighting KnowHOW section over this past year, you would have read about setting up a basic lighting grid and where to hang lighting fixtures within that grid to be able to light weekly services as well as special drama performances.

In this final piece of the year, I'm going to explore in some more detail three of the ways that I employ additional lighting for special events.

Specials

Let's refer back to setting up a basic lighting grid. In all of the facilities that I manage, I have included a number of 'specials' in the house plot for the specific purpose of being able to quickly and easily set up a lighting request for a one-off event. It could be a short drama presentation that needs a tight spotlight as opposed to using one of my stage lighting zones. It could be a cross brought onstage during an Easter service that needs to be lit independently of the rest of the stage. It could be anything. Having these fixtures ready to go in my rig means I don't have to hang a new fixture and program it with every new request. The fixture is sitting in my rig, plugged in, patched and ready to go with only the need to refocus.

MEET THE AUTHOR

John Black serves as the theatre manager for Seoul Foreign School in Seoul, South Korea. Holding a degree in Theatre Design, he provides technical production support and design in three state-of-the-art performance venues on campus for over 40 major concerts and productions a year in the areas of sound, lighting, video and staging. John especially enjoys sharing his passion for entertainment technology with high-school students each year through his student production team, *Crusader Live!*, giving students the opportunity to learn and work with professional-level technologies in a demanding production environment.



John Black, theatre manager for Seoul Foreign School

The ease of building specials into your rig and adjusting them depends on the architecture of your facility and how you can access your lighting fixtures. In one of my theatres, I have catwalks for accessing all of the

lighting positions without the need for ladders, genie lifts or focusing from a lowered pipe. This makes it easy for me to be able to manipulate these fixtures. In another one of my theatres, the AP positions hang over



the audience and are accessible only by lowering them in, focusing the fixture(s) and flying the pipe back out. To make meeting special lighting requests easier, I went ahead and installed automated lighting fixtures as my specials so that I refocus, colour or otherwise manipulate the light as needed directly from the lighting console.

When considering where to place these fixtures, I would recommend starting primarily with front-light positions. In my experience, the majority of requests that I receive are in relation to lighting a speaker, actor or object from the front in a unique, customised way. This may be a certain beam size adjustable with an iris, the addition of a gel for a front colour wash, a gobo for a special projection onto a surface or simply providing front light in an area not covered in the standard stage zones. I typically always have 6–10 fixtures dedicated to meeting these needs on an event-by-event basis.

Fairy lights: fast and economical

Particularly true of the Christmas season, the addition of fairy lights to the stage or auditorium can simply – yet effectively – introduce some sparkle to the room that is not normally there during the rest of the year. I like to add warm-white fairy lights to Christmas trees and garlands around the stage, around



Gobos on the back wall for a special concert

controlled – through the lighting system to be able to dim them if need be.

I have also used these strands in creative ways outside the methods I just mentioned. For example, I have hung a series of fairy light strands from pipes upstage to create a star-like backdrop effect. When placed against a black curtain or backdrop, but upstage of where your backlighting begins, it can create the effect of a deep, endless space even if your actual stage depth is quite shallow. The trick here is to not light the strands with your other lights. Additionally, if you use video in your service for IMAG or broadcast, this can create an interesting video backdrop with a bokeh-type effect in

almost endless range of creative possibilities.

Changing lighting direction

Another addition that I do for lighting special events is to place fixtures in locations that provide lighting in a different direction than attendees are typically accustomed to during a ‘normal’ service. For me, this is usually accomplished by the addition of fixtures placed on and around the stage on floor stands or lighting trees. Adding these fixtures to the system is simple as they can be set up quickly without having to haul out ladders or work at heights. In fact, I will even use flight cases around the stage to provide variations in height that the fixtures are sitting at. The flight cases can be left exposed or covered with a material matching the theme of the event.

Most of my special events have additional scenic elements added to the stage design but, even when they don’t, adding lighting at different directions can change the look and feel of the room for that special occasion. As I just mentioned, I will often do this through floor-mounted fixtures, and I personally broadly categorise their focus in two ways – aerial and structural.

Aerial lighting refers to fixtures that are changing the lighting look in the space through effects that can be seen in the air. The key element to this is hazing the room, and without that ability creating these effects is not possible. When a space is hazed, it becomes possible to see the light beams. It then becomes possible to create additional depth and texture and colour through the focus – and movement – of these light beams in the air. Sometimes I employ colour wash fixtures to create large shafts or washes of coloured lighting in the air.

More often, however, I will use fixtures – automated or conventional – that I can place a gobo in to create unique beam effects in the air. If the fixture is equipped with a gobo rotator, it is also possible to animate these beams to create interesting movement effects.

Structural lighting refers to fixtures that are changing the lighting look in the space through illuminating elements of the existing room or set in ways that the congregation or audience isn’t accustomed to. For example, I have placed LED wash units at the base of my auditorium walls extending out from the stage,



Fixtures on floor lighting up with haze and up-lighting home-made material pillars

providing up-light washes on the walls of various colours. This is an effect that I wouldn’t necessarily use on a regular basis. Another example would be to place lighting fixtures underneath raised platforms that are wrapped in spandex or another light-coloured material that would then also be lit up in a variety of colours, creating not only a cool visual effect but the appearance of the platforms floating.

Conclusion

As with many creative endeavours, the possibilities truly are endless. Whether you are a big-budget HOW or a small-budget facility, creating special lighting looks and atmospheres for Christmas or other special events is possible. I hope that these three techniques that I use have provided a bit of insight into the many ways that you employ additional lighting. Start with what you already have available to you and identify creative and unique ways you can use that equipment that your congregation may not be accustomed to. Often, subtle changes can provide that ‘wow’ or ‘a-ha’ experience simply because it is different from what the observer expects.



Fairy lights lining scaffolding to create a unique effect

the stage apron and around the front lip of the balcony in my auditorium. The commercialised, flashing multi-colour or cool-white strands detract (in my opinion) from a HOW setting, whereas the warm-white strands give the room a glow that is both inviting and uplifting, not to mention festive during the Christmas season. Though many of these strands have gone LED, I still prefer to use the incandescent-type fairy lights that can be powered – and therefore

that the fairy lights will be out-of-focus behind your subject depending on the depth between the subject and the fairy light strings.

One last way that I have used fairy lights is to line structural elements or to create structural elements (such as Christmas trees) on the stage. This can take on many different forms depending on the lines, patterns or images that you create using the strands, and therefore can provide an