STRAND News

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Woman in White:
From the West End to Broadway
by Bobby Harrell

"Woman in White", the popular West End musical, is making the trek across the pond from The Palace Theatre in London to The Marquis Theatre in New York this fall. The show goes into previews on October 28th with an opening night on November 17th.

I asked David Howe, Associate Lighting Designer for Paul Pyant, to tell me a little about the process for selecting control for this show.

"We chose the Strand 500 Series console for 'Woman in White' for a variety of reasons:

Strand consoles are well used in the UK especially as many houses (theatres) own their own consoles. For the West End we augmented the house desk with an upgrade of channel software to their existing 520i console and 510 backup. For the production period we then rented a larger 550 console as a programming surface which acted as a slave console to the house desk, allowing our Programmer, Vic Smerdon, to use the extra sub masters and faders for the plotting of the show.

For the New York production it made sense to transfer the show and console spec directly from London, we used a 550i console and 520i backup console and imported the existing show file as a starting point for programming. Due to the network capabilities of the console also we were able to provide the amount of video output for the LD and team both via Video Nodes and also the xConnect software to our PC's at the tech table to save on the multiple number of Video Monitors.

From a designers point of view the console gives us a very stable control platform from which to light the show, the flexibility of the software enables us as designers to work in either tracking or Genius mode dependant on the show requirements and our approach. In New York and London, our programmer, Vic Smerdon, has worked hard in her set-up of the console and software to allow us to quickly respond to what is happening on stage, attributes, color and Moving Light templates are all laid out on the sub masters for ease of access.

In the UK the relationship between a designer and the programmer is integral to the lighting of the show, we rely on the operator to undertake a great deal of the 'behind the scenes' programming and the 500 series software and consoles give us and the programmer this high degree of control."

Vic Smerdon is programming in New York on a Strand 550i with a 520i for backup. She is controlling 13 VL3000Q Spots, 14 Clay Paky Halo Alpha Washes, 18 ETC Revolutions, 10 City Theatrical Auto Yokes, 6 Strand Pirouettes with Rainbow Scrollers, 14 Strand Tocatta Effects Projectors with White Light VSFX Discs, 1 PANI 2.5k HMI projector, over 100 Wybron scrollers, over 200 conventionals and 15 Look Solutions Unique Hazers and Viper NTs. All the lighting equipment is provided by Hudson Sound & Lighting.
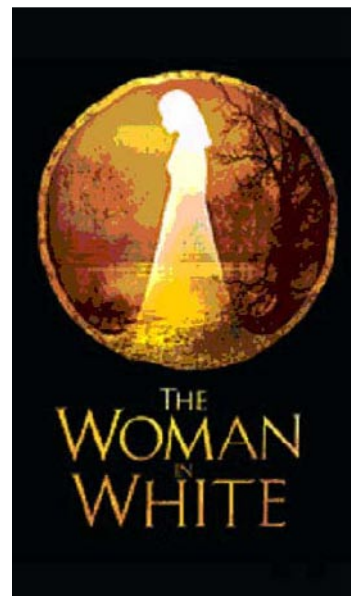
Here are her comments on the desk:

"As someone who is very familiar using the 500 series as a theatrical lighting console, for a show like this I feel that it is absolutely the best for the job. It enables us to control both the generic and automated units with ease and fluidity, and gives us a greater control of cue structures than is perhaps available with some of the more common 'moving light' desks.

Because each cue sequence is closely tied in with complex projection and automation cues, we quickly discovered during the original process in London that if we could create a sequence of cues that would run happily along with the various scene changes, it would make life easier for the DSM (Stage Manager) and board operator alike. Thus for every scene change there is generally a linked sequence of cues and part cues, which means that in a fairly busy show there are little more than 50 called cues for each act, but a total of at least 400 cue parts for the entire show. The ease with which we did this is, I think, down to the Strand's functionality and versatility in building such sequences.

Furthermore, from my point of view, the presence of preset focus groups made transferring the show much easier than I expected - coupled of course with FocusTrack it became a very straightforward process for focusing all the moving lights - even without focus notes we would have been able to figure out how it should have looked with preset focus groups for positions, zoom, gobos etc.

From a programming point of view, the Strand is one of the most versatile systems I have ever come across. Things like the user-edited ATC pages mean that you can set up the console exactly how you might like, and with the ability to double or even triple macro buttons by using the submaster bump buttons, almost everything is accessible at the touch of a button. Hence we're able to keep up with changes from automation and video very easily, and so we all look good!"

Vic mentions FocusTrack.

Go to http://focustrack.co.uk/ for details.

One of the things that David mentions is the xConnect software that Strand has developed to expand the way that designers think about video for the tech table. With xConnect, the design staff can choose their own screens in their own format independent of the programmer's choices on the console itself.

Here is what Jared Sayeg, the US Assistant Lighting Designer, had to say about xConnect:

"X-Connect became an invaluable aid during production by providing a unique way of viewing information through customizing screen displays and user settings. This gave me the information I needed to be viewing without interrupting the command line of the programmer or interfering node display's on the network.

For year's designers, assistants, and technicians have become used to viewing the typical 2-screen node display, only changing at the keystroke of who is operating the console. Now with xConnect, not

only have you gained flexibility in viewing the console's information, you have completely bypassed taking the programmer away from their work by asking to 'PAGE'...a dream finally realized!"

Jared has setup his laptop with a four screen view using multiple logins. The top two screens are in Monitor mode. This means that xConnect is simply monitoring the console screens. (This is what we are all familiar with using an SN100 video node.)

The unique thing is the bottom two screens that are in Login mode. In Login mode, Jared is logged in as a console! If this were a non-union situation, Jared could actually have control of the lights. He could bring up channels, dimmers, run cues…anything a console can do. But since this is a Broadway show, I have restricted the functionality to conform to Local 1 limits. That's to say, he can't actually control any lights, but he can control how his screens are configured. With Vic programming the show in Genius mode, she likes to use the Galaxy screens which layout the channels in a vertical format.

Since this is a screen format that most American designers are not used to, Jared has configured his screens for LightPalette mode. These limits are actually a good thing. This way, Jared can't accidentally press the wrong key and affect the programming of the show. He can look at any screen he wants, (live, preview, groups, subs, fx, or macros) or page to a different channel screen whenever he wants and not affect the programming…ever!

xConnect can be utilized with any current 500 series installation and any 300 series console that has a network card.

Intelligent programming…that's what it's all about!
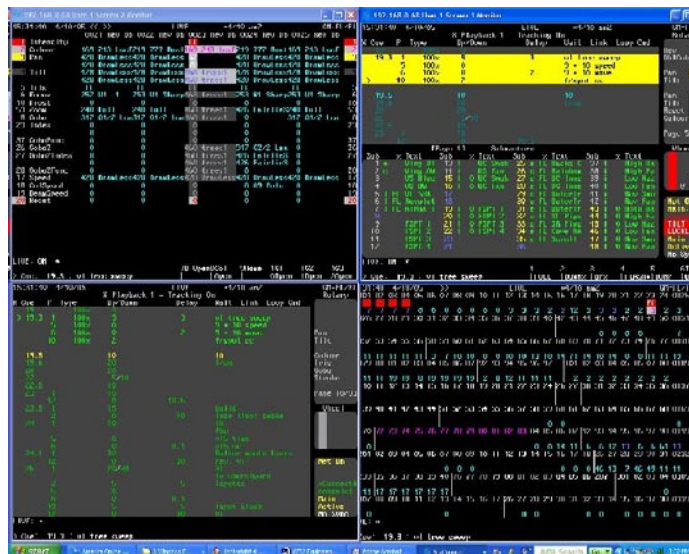
Assistant Lighting Designer Jared Sayeg's xConnect screens at the production table for Woman in White

Additional production staff includes:

Vivien Leone - US Associate Lighting Designer John Lawson - Production Electrician