

Angstrom Stage Lighting & Production Services has added Airstar Space Lighting to its line of high-quality, innovative lighting products and services. Airstar's unique lighting balloons fit perfectly with Angstrom's product offerings, service philosophy and comprehensive solutions it provides to its customers. A leading supplier of lighting products and services to the Southern California market, Angstrom Stage Lighting & Production Service has built its reputation on offering excellent service, leading brands and innovative products to the theatre, TV, film and special event industries.

The Entertainment Services and Technology Association's Board of Directors has voted unanimously to open up ESTA's Code of Conduct to allow complaints to be filed by the general public effective January 1, 2003. In 1999, ESTA led the industry in promoting ethical business practices and professionalism by creating and adopting a Code of Conduct for members. Received with enthusiasm by members, the Code was also used as a model by several other industry associations, including PLASA and CITT, in creating their own codes. The ESTA Code of Conduct is available on the ESTA website at www.esta.org. Also available is the Procedure for Filing and Processing Complaints.

Three more distributors have been added to Vari-Lite's worldwide dealer network. The addition of dealers in the Dominican Republic, France and Puerto Rico brings the number of international VARI*LITE® rental and sales dealers to 62. Combined with the 77 rental and sales associates in North America, Vari-Lite's international reach now includes 140 dealers in more than 30 countries. The new dealers are Solumex Audio Visual in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; CSI, based just outside of Paris in Fresnes Cedex, France; and Musique Xpress in Santa Rosa, Bayamon, Puerto Rico.

Design and Drafting, a subsidiary of Chicago Stage Equipment, Inc., is proud to announce a new partnership with Dynatrend Design, a San Diego based Internet technology company. Combining the lighting industry knowledge of Design and Drafting and the technical knowledge of Dynatrend Design, the two companies are teaming up to develop new paradigms in web-based lighting design and CAD. Online block management, project collaboration tools, and multi-user virtual CAD studios are just a few of the exciting new application technologies being developed; using the Internet in new ways to streamline the process of drafting, deployment, and every communication in between. Dynatrend Design offers low cost Internet and technical services. "The Dynatrends staff was courteous, and highly knowledgeable. Every question I had was answered," says Rufus Warren, President of Design and Drafting, "My expectations were greatly exceeded."

East London-based gobo and projection specialists Projected Image have taken on additional new premises at its HQ in the Three Mills Island Studio complex, Bromley-by-Bow. This is part of a steady, on-going expansion plan in line with recent company developments and the establishment of sister company Projected Image Digital. After three years of servicing the gobo industry with quality and specialist services for glass and color effects, in November, Projected Image announced an exclusive UK distribution deal with RADlite, the revolutionary new PC-based computer generated effects package. Expanding to the new, larger, 1100 square ft. premises will allow Projected Image to enlarge its gobo production facilities and move all administration into the new space, leaving the original area free to be set up and utilized as a permanent RADlite demonstration.

"We're very excited about the move," states Projected Image Digital director David March. "The intention is also to offer the facility to lighting designers and video directors wishing to program their RADlite system into the lighting desk and their show ahead of production rehearsals."

The folks at Tampa Bay Lighting recently completed a successful move from MacDill Avenue to 4008 W. Alva Street, three blocks from Raymond James Stadium. They also recently completed work on a major social event for the Tampa Museum, providing all the lighting for the butterfly-themed 'Pavilion'. Along with creating spectacular lighting effects in the main hall using a multitude of computerized lighting fixtures, they lit an entire downtown building that while changing colors also had a 40-foot butterfly fluttering up and down the building that literally stopped traffic.



Photography by Lewis Lee

HEAVENLY HOLIDAYS

PRESTONWOOD'S DALLAS CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Produced annually by Prestonwood Baptist Church in Plano, Texas, The Dallas Christmas Festival redefines imagination with each new adventurous production. Each year thousands attend the three-hour pageant, which operates a dozen performances over several weekends in December.

Throughout its illustrious history, the production has always been spectacular, but 2001 marked the first season in the house of worship's new facility. With a contemporary 7,000-seat venue, the creative team was able to deliver a more professional production to more spectators. For the 2002 run, Executive Producer R. Todd Bell, Director Michael Meece and Prestonwood once again elevated the pageant's production values significantly.

The evening was divided into three acts; the first being a secular 1940's 'American Christmas Revue' production show with a youth number postlude. The cutting-edge performance carries a strong message to the youth crowd and involves over one hundred students from Prestonwood Baptist Church. Act II was a choral concert featuring the 450+ voice Prestonwood Choir, while Act III offered the complete story of the Life of Christ from Nativity to Ascension. This one-hour story of Christ involved over 500 actors onstage at one time, and an array of gear and props that would fill the streets of Jerusalem, including a host of live animals provided by Hedrick Productions.

The show included a live 85-piece orchestra, six angels that fly 70' over the crowd in the Biblical section, a 30' rising illuminated Christmas tree, loads of pyro (by Russell Swinney), a horse drawn sleigh and chariot, 30' air puppets, and over 700 lighting units.

LIGHTING

2002 marked lighting designer Donnie Brawner's first year on the project; he was enlisted by the pageant's director, Michael Meece, who often employs Brawner on his own shows. Meece and Producer R. Todd Bell explained to Donnie that they were looking for more artistry, excitement and punch out of the lighting design.

According to Donnie, "They felt like the show needed more emphasis on lighting. When we designed the show, we came up with a larger equipment package than in the past. They were a little skeptical, but decided not to stand in the way of creativity, and gave us the package we asked for to make the plot

work. We had a lot of stage to cover, and had to deal with the constraints of the facility. We used the Martin MAC 2K as our primary hard-edged gobo effects fixture, and it performed very well; the intensity of the light was great. I also used a lot of Studio Colors in the air for backlight, as well as for lighting drops. In the past, I typically haven't done a lot of drop lighting with moving lights, but there's not a lot of hanging space in the venue, and we had to do as much as we could with as little hanging space and as few fixtures as possible ... so we did a lot of drop lighting with Studio Colors, and with Cybers and MACs for texture."

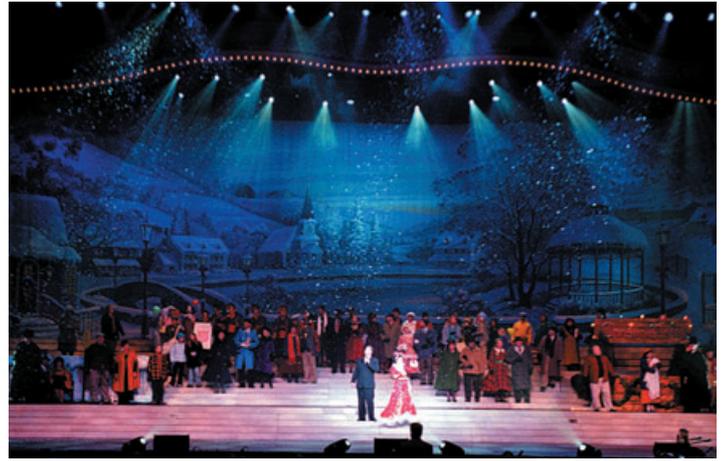
For conventional lighting, Brawner relied on the full arsenal of ETC Source Four fixtures. Donnie explains, "I was told that the show had been critiqued as looking 'muddy' in the past, so we cleaned it up by using ETC Source Fours for front lighting; we had a couple hundred 10 degree fixtures in the catwalks - all with scrollers on them. That really helped us to achieve our objectives - it takes an unbelievable amount of front lighting to cover 450 people on stage stacked on four different levels."

Brawner also employed some 2K fresnels upstage in the choir loft area; he flooded them out and put scrollers on them, where the fixtures complemented the front-of-house ten-degree Source Fours nicely. Donnie also used Source Fours for sidelight to help shoot across the 150-foot wide stage.

While in previous years there wasn't really floor lighting to speak of, this time around Donnie used MAC 2Ks and Cyberlights on the floor, which helped the designer more effectively light the angels and paint the air with light; the fixtures were also used to texture the upstage drops. Ten spotlights were placed three on each side of the balcony, with the four remaining on the back catwalk.

Brawner changed out the stock patterns in the moving lights to achieve dramatic, original looks. "We had separate gobo wheels for the floor MAC 2Ks, for the FOH MAC 2Ks that were doing mostly texture, and for the MAC 2Ks in the air over the stage," Donnie recalls. "The floor fixtures needed to be beamy, the FOH fixtures needed to be patterns that were good for texture - very broken up - and the patterns in the air needed to be exciting to watch."

While Prestonwood sports an extensive inventory of conventional lighting, Brawner's package called for a bevy of automated lighting equipment, and supplying



the gear was Christie Lites (www.christielites.com). "I chose Christie's Dallas office to provide lighting for the pageant because of the impeccable service I have received from them on past shows," Donnie admits. "Gear can come from anywhere, but service is getting so much harder to find in this business. Christie's did a great job handling this show."

In addition to nearly 350 Source Fours, hundreds of PAR cans, over 200 Chroma Q scrollers, six Cyberlights, 40 Studio Colors and 44 MAC 2K Profiles, Christie Lites also provided trussing (1575' Mini Beam truss, 376' Box Truss) motors (98 CM Lodestar 1-ton units), spotlights (six Robert Juliat Korrigan Spots), a second GrandMA console, and various fog / diffusion machines. For atmospheric, Donnie used DF-50s – "it took four of them to keep the room heavy", as well as High End F-100s for special effects during the

crucifixion and ascension scenes. Brawner also used LSG Low Lying Fog units several times during the show for special effects, but the DF-50s were used continuously. "A lot of the front light in the show used to be done with PAR 64s," Donnie emphasizes, "and it's 100 feet from the stage to the catwalk! When you put that much light in the air, it's hard to see the pretty beams with all this halation coming from 100 PARs 100 feet away. The Source Fours helped us control the light, increase the intensity, and lower the spillage all the way around the portal, so you could see more of what was done with the moving lights."

Like his creative partners, Brawner had to work his magic in a functioning house of worship with regular weekly activities. Between funerals, special services and cleaning crews, timing for programming and show construction was critical. "We had to build

over 70% of the show from rehearsal tapes, and then go back during dress rehearsals and fine-tune things." The show was programmed on a Grand MA console by Cameron Yeary. "Cameron is a lifesaver. His speed and accuracy are the marks of a true programming professional. We built about 450 cues over the three-hour show – it's heavily cued and we didn't use SMPTE." Because he had worked with Prestonwood before, Cameron served as lighting director for the performances.

According to Brawner, the major challenge was accommodating the production to the production space. "The event is not really designed for this room," Donnie explains, "so it provided a good opportunity to see what can be created when you step outside of the box. The planning that Cameron and I had to do to get this show up was extreme. I had a cue sheet, I



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knew where the cues needed to be and I had listened to the music. There wasn't much time to edit the plan. There are a lot of shows where pre-production doesn't really mean much ... on this show you had to do most of it up front, or it wasn't going to work!"

Brawner is quick to credit his wife Karen for assistance on this and all Brawner & Associate jobs. He also bestowed kudos to his on-site staff. "The electricians – Moving Light Tech Charles Kinnard and Production Electrician Greg Garrison - were outstanding! Our design called for many of the fixtures to be located where there was no position. Charles and Greg brought the experience of having worked in Prestonwood before, and helped us create the positions we needed. It was not an easy task to merge this huge rental system with the fixture, dimming and distribution systems. I don't know how we would have done this without them!"

SCENIC DESIGN

Peter Wolf of The Wolf Company (www.wolfpresence.com) designed Prestonwood's 15,000 sq. ft. performance stage, along with its associated Christmas Pageant drops and set pieces. To match the spacious proscenium, the drops are 150 ft. wide.

The month long setup prior to opening day included the removal of several rows of pews, building and assembling the mammoth stage, construction of the 180' wide portal / proscenium that created the theatrical feel for the room, and over 1900' of trussing that had to be installed with custom tracks for the nine painted drops that moved on and off throughout the stage production. In addition, a two-section Mainlight Industries fiber optic curtain with illuminators mounted under the stage floor helped set the stage for the performance.

Peter Wolf has enjoyed a 50-year career in scenic design, from famous Broadway shows to Dallas Summer Musicals. Wolf has been involved in the last dozen Prestonwood Christmas productions, and has witnessed firsthand the growth of the performance. Wolf admits that the new building "would present a great challenge to any designer because of its size. I did tell them, 'Let's not change the proscenium', because I can't design a better one!"

Wolf and his workers had to do their jobs around the schedule of Prestonwood's regular activities. They had one week to install the main part of the scenery; they then dropped in a curtain that hides any upstage work. Peter felt the challenge was to present this work to the public as theatrical, dramatic and intimate. "Prestonwood's auditorium has the advantage of many curved surfaces in the proscenium and the balconies, so there's an intimacy brought about by architecture. It's challenging to continue with that, but also to lead it more into a theatrical than a religious environment. It's not the old Baptist tenet of 'no dancing'. We try to compete with what we're seeing in New York."

Wolf recalls, "We had a real problem in a theatre look without a theatre. In a theatre you can do anything you want to, i.e. fly things, move them onstage from the wings, etc. But this church doesn't permit that, so we had to come up with devices that give us the same look as a Broadway show. Scenery travels horizontally whereas in a regular theatre it would be vertical, so we have 150 ft. traveler tracks where the scenery comes out in one big sweep of the stage. We don't have the height to fly things in or drop things in partially."

In describing his collaboration with LD Brawner, Peter added, "We paint everything with justified motivation. We have light from stage right ... that's sunshine. Next we want a cool light on stage left; those are the kind of elements that we paint into the scenery. The lighting designer recognizes that, and he's



able to make the scenery intensify and become more beautiful than it really is."

For Wolf, the question became, 'How do you create a huge proscenium that you can look at all evening?' "We had beautifully carved angels on the walls – lit from above and below – that provided a glorious look, and we used chase lights across the whole proscenium – lit according to the mood. The scope of this production to me was even more intensive than a Broadway show. Not only is it tough stuff to handle, but then how do you hang it?" Obviously one could only trust a family member with that task, and Peter's son Johnny Wolf directed the installation.

RIGGING / FLYING

Because the Dallas Christmas Pageant takes place in house of worship and not a traditional theatrical space, every single pipe used to fly scenery had to be brought in, as did tons of trussing to create a fly system. According to Brawner, "Although there were some permanent catwalk positions, we had to create sidelight positions, and a lot of positions upstage where there really wasn't any place to hang lights – so we had to create those places."

The man responsible for bringing this dream to reality was head rigger Patrick Keller. "He deserves credit for the 99 one-ton CM motors and trussing that we squeezed into a three-pound box," quips Donnie. "We were dealing with inches in the rigging system, and Patrick was very thorough and even-tempered, even after we moved things around a few times!"

Donnie continues, "The air space got so unbelievably tight up there from the many different scenic elements - flying angels, rising trees, pyro, a multitude of Little Blizzard snow machines, lowering drops and custom tracks - that when you include

several hundred lights that have to hang over the stage, it gets very crazy. We spent a lot of time in the design and pre-production phase trying to work out the needs of the lighting hang with the constraints of the custom built fly and rigging system. Patrick located over 100 rigging points for this show ... he only wished he had more than 3" clearance to get some of those drops past the lighting equipment! And it wasn't just about clearance up top. We worked with the facility's HVAC team to alter the air flow in the room to keep the drops from being moved a foot downstage or upstage of their actual hanging position, which would have created multiple traumas for the rigging and lighting departments. Patrick did a great job coordinating the rigging and construction of this show. It's not an easy task for anyone, especially considering the venue, the sheer volume of equipment and complexity of the show."

The movements of the flying angels, which provided several of the performance's major pieces of eye-candy, were choreographed and implemented by ZFX, Inc. (www.zxflying.com). Aerial Choreographer Paul Rubin of ZFX explained how the three-dimensional travel of the angels was achieved. "The track was able to travel from the balcony all the way to the stage. It could move up and down in height, and we also had a remote control turnaround that would orient the performer in any direction they wanted to face. The toughest part is making it safe, but Robert Dean, who designed and built the system, was able to produce what I needed."

AUDIO

Unlike the lighting package, most of the audio equipment required by the Dallas Christmas Pageant already existed at the Prestonwood facility. The backbone of the sound kit is provided via an EAW

multi-zoned installation system powered by Crown MA series amplification. The left – center – right cluster system features over-balcony, under-balcony, and terrace seating delay zones, as well as front fills with Bag End subwoofers – the only non-EAW speakers.

The room is processed (time alignment, phase correction, equalization) by Peavey’s Media Matrix system, which was designed and installed by Acoustic Dimensions Inc. Three contract labor FOH engineers were utilized for the performances; two manned Soundcraft Series5 56-channel consoles (one for the main mix with rhythm section, one for orchestra submix) while a Mackie Digital 8 Bus was used for vocals and dialogue because of its scene-recall ability. A Century LM 52-channel console served up the stage monitor mix, while Shure PSM700 in-ear wireless monitor systems were used by major soloists and actors.

Most of the EAW clusters are installation models with some modifications customized by Acoustic Dimensions. The main boxes used long throw and short throw enclosures – the long throws are MH662EX extended, and the short throws are MH464 along with some KF900 low frequency boxes, in addition to the Bag end subwoofers.

According to Doug Leake, Prestonwood’s in-house audio technician, the entire Crown MA line is utilized in Acoustic Dimensions’ design. “Most cabinets are bi-amped and are all fed by separate channels,” Doug explains. “We have three main racks in the amp room with an average of 15 amps per rack – just for the flown speakers. The 4 front fill speakers and the subwoofers are handled by another two amp racks.”

The pageant design also utilized a flown choir overhead speaker system with more EAW MH464’s,

as well as a portable system with two columns of dV-DOSC elements for additional stage side fill coverage. Leake explains, “The dV-DOSC sidefills added great coverage for the rest of the stage, and that actually helped out immensely for monitoring. We used Hotspot speakers, and in-house EAW SM122 monitors for most of the key areas and soloists, but we also had some Renkus Heinz dual-12” low profile monitors for the front lip of the main stage – so there were 10 zones in all.”

The audio team used 29 Shure UHF U4 wireless channels, with Beta 87 capsules for hand held microphones and Countryman E6 earset microphones on belt pack. Act I utilized the hand held Betas for the more contemporary ballroom style performance, then switched to the Countryman beltpacks for the town singers ensemble. Act II’s choral performance went back to the handheld Beta 87s for a dozen different soloists, while the E6s were used once again in Act III for the narration and dialog.

Leake says there were numerous enhancements recognized from this latest show. “The most noticeable improvement was onstage monitor positions - plus the coverage we got from the dV-DOSC. And having another person mixing at FOH was a big plus! We also set up some additional in-house speakers for surround effects; we mounted them on the back walls, underneath the balcony areas and up above as well for a thunder effect that takes place during the crucifixion scene.

“It added a great element – but we’re already discussing ways to add more programmed effects ... to create more of an environment through surround mixing.”

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

Production meetings for the latest Dallas

Christmas Pageant began in August; rehearsals took place in late September through November, and load-in started the second week of November. A week was spent loading in trussing, motors and staging, and another week on lighting load-in, hanging fixtures, circuiting, dimming, etc. After three days of lighting focus and hanging drops, the lighting team was given two weeks of pre-programming with some rehearsals. After four days of dress rehearsals, the tech period ended.

Cyndi Nine is the Dallas Christmas Pageant’s Production Manager; by day she’s the Children’s Music Minister. According to Cyndi, the new PBC venue was a major catalyst for increased production value. “There was a two-year gap where we didn’t do the show because of the move, and we were trying to make sure we were prepared. There was a larger budget, a bigger building, and more attendees. The production increased immensely, not only the size of the show, but in what we brought in. As it gets bigger, you have to rely on more professional input in some of the areas; it can no longer be handled by volunteers.”

Fortunately for all involved, Prestonwood has prodigious on-site facilities, so pieces can be stored from year to year. Cyndi jokes, “We store everything from costumes to props – the entire set. But no live animals – we draw the line there!” During the performances, Cyndi called the show – everything but spotlight cues.

Like the balance of the creative staff, Cyndi Nine is still in awe of the annual production she manages. “It’s the best project I’ve ever been involved with. You don’t see something of this quality very often, and it’s a privilege for me to be a part of.”

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