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Lighting Dimensions



Tips

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## Lighting the Light of the World

Amy L. Slingerland

Lighting Dimensions, May 1, 2002

More and more churches are adding theatrical technology to their worship services and special events like concerts and Easter and Christmas pageants. The Manassas Assembly of God in Bristow, VA, recently upgraded its Easter musical, which it has performed with the same script for over a decade. The church wanted to bring some theatrical effects to the crucifixion and resurrection scenes to make more of an emotional impact on its audience. They contacted lighting designer Tony Hansen of the Orlando, FL, area last fall to consult on the production.



**Amy L. Slingerland:** Tell me how you got involved in this production.

**Tony Hansen:** I've been involved heavily with other church productions in the Orlando area. I'm a freelance designer out of the Orlando Vari-Lite office. I worked with another church in this area, and another magazine did an article on a production they had done, and they contacted me through that. That article had mentioned that I've done design with Universal Studios, and a little bit with Walt Disney World and some other areas, and they were interested in basically bringing everything up, and bringing in a lot of effects and theme park action. So we did a consultation, and the production company I work with down here provided scenic, lighting, the whole ball of wax; it became a

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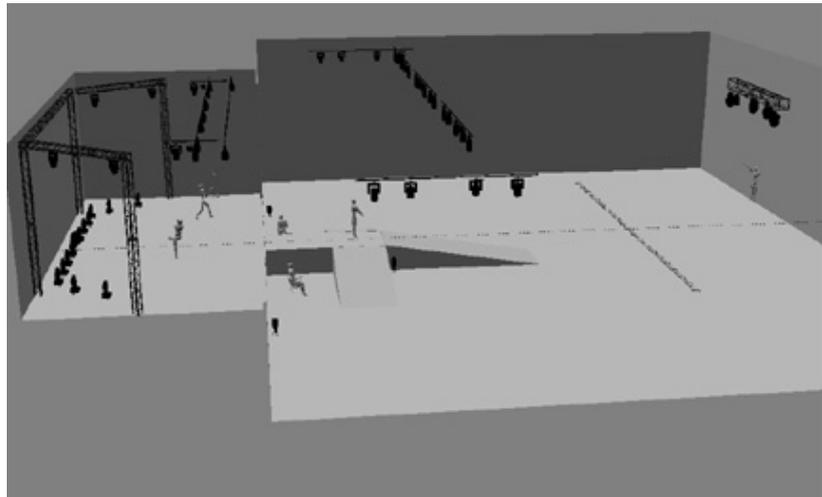
Catriona Strom-Forcer

turnkey operation.

For the scenery, they decided to make a purchase and not do a rental. They wanted to be able to maintain an equity and a value in it. So all the scenic was custom-built for them through an Orlando scenic shop. The idea there was to keep it close to my base, and this way I could work directly with the scenic designer and the scenic company in Orlando and then we just ship everything at one time as compared to having it built up there. It offset the shipping costs nicely to do that.

**ALS:** So you were able to work with them to make sure you had lighting positions, things like that?

**TH:** Exactly. We did a visit, a site survey, in mid-October of last year, at the church in Manassas. At that time we did all the layout, our position inspection, and where we were going to get everything into the space. They had some unique requirements for the size space, such as that at one time their entire cast be on the stage, which was about 100-120, and it's not that large a stage.



**ALS:** How big is it?

**TH:** The stage would have been 52' wide by 38' deep, but most of that was taken up by very large scenic units.

**ALS:** Tell me about these wagon units that open up, and the turntable system.

**TH:** The turntable ended up shrinking a bit. We tracked quite a bit, there was also a custom-made gray cyc with a star curtain built into it, a scrim in front of that, a sharkstooth in front of that so that we could do a full night sky operation without ever moving it, plus a main show scrim that was also custom-painted for them. It was a scrim action, plus a scenic piece, plus we had UV paint on it, to do a final show effect. The Last Supper scene is in the upper level of the two-story scenic units. The walls open up to reveal the interior.



**ALS:** That's a wagon unit?

**TH:** Both of them slide together and create that. Normally they'd be separate boxes.

**ALS:** So, one from stage right and one from stage left?

**TH:** Exactly. They could track onstage and connect and then open. It was quite a nice modular design. The scenic designer did a nice job with that end of it.

**ALS:** What was the UV paint used for?

**TH:** This particular show has an ending moment where the entire town gathers around Christ after he's risen and he stands in a pose. What we decided to do was have this custom-painted onto the scrim in the UV paint format, so that we could do a blackout and maintain a blacklight unit and do the image of Christ in front of the crowd on the scrim.



**ALS:** Is that the only time the UV is used?

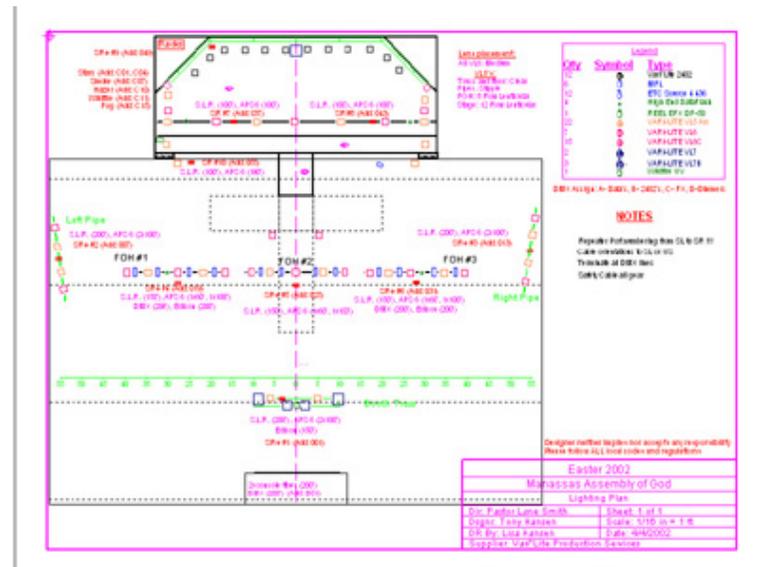
**TH:** That's the only time we used it in this show. There's talk of Christmas of doing a whole UV layover of the entire village to try to shift into another tone or feel, we haven't really figured out where we're going with it yet.

**ALS:** How many times did you go up to Virginia?

**TH:** We did the site survey, we also did a small Christmas concert. I usually like to try to do that with any large project so that we can get an idea of the people we're working with. So, we were up there in mid-December also and we actually brought equipment at that time.

**ALS:** When did you start working on the Easter production?

**TH:** It would have been mid-October. Scenic construction started mid-December, and by that time we had all our initial drawings and concepts, and from there lighting-wise there isn't much we can do until we get on-site. It was probably a good four- or five-month project. We did some mockups here working with the UV paint and some of the paint colors, and had the opportunity to work with the console in advance and did a lot of pre-programming on the Virtuoso.



The Vari-Lite Orlando office was very supportive. They set up a small work area at one point for us to start demoing looks and gear. To do a cheap sales plug for the Virtuoso DX, the offline editor of that program and the offline viewing ability of the program was how I was able to pre-program the better part of the show before arriving in Virginia, which was necessary with our time constraints. It was tight.

**ALS:** How much tech time did you have there?

**TH:** Scenic, unfortunately, was not as prepared to arrive and go in quickly. Because of that our five days of load-in went very much toward scenic. Lighting-wise we probably had three days of install and we were only allowed to hang one piece of truss. Everything had to go into existing positions and there was not a lot of opportunity for running cable, so the majority of that three days was trying to fish cable through existing ceiling. They wanted to maintain the look of the facility while we were doing this, which for a temporary install was unique.



**ALS:** You have some floor units.

**TH:** We had the new VL2402; it was very new to us at that time. It was used for our cyc fixture as an upright, and there was a row of 12 of them all the way upstage. Wonderful fixture for that use--we were thrilled with it--especially because you don't have to make any modification, the zoom range of the fixture allows it to become a cyc wash, and we had very tight quarters upstage, so it allowed us several nice opportunities. Beyond that, very traditional floor unit placement, just streaks of light for the more dramatic scenes, there were a couple of units on either side of the proscenium arch to give us some color up the arch walls when we needed it.

We used the VL7B with its framing functions for the opening of the tomb. And the set had to be custom-designed to accommodate its weight. It sits on a ground row. The turntable not only rotated but it also wagoned and traveled upstage-downstage, and it had to store underneath the VL7B, so a custom bridge was built for the 7B to sit on so that it could still make the shot through the tomb.



**ALS:** Tell me some of the looks you did for your favorite scenes.

**TH:** One of the things we felt could use a boost was everything from the crucifixion to the resurrection. That's one of those moments where the tech is going to have to carry it quite a bit. And we wanted to do the resurrection a little different: We felt that the classic opening of the tomb with the rock rolling away had been done and we wanted a different approach.

We put us, the entire audience, in the tomb with Christ, and simply started out in a very dark environment, very hazy, smoky, and had Christ stand up. At this time we didn't know who he was, we simply saw a figure standing in the dark, and the tomb was played away from us. What we see is a large, blinding light in our faces as the door opens and daylight is revealed into the tomb for the first time in three days. And then this person would walk into the light. We were going for the symbolic feeling here of the classic "walking into the light" in addition to the going out into the new day. And as he would walk up into the opening of the tomb, that's where the turntable came into play. The turntable rotated along with the lighting shifting, so that he was now walking out at us. He simply walked up to the turntable, it spun, giving us the front view of him, while the lighting shifted, to give us the early morning view from the front of the tomb, and he walked out of it with the stone already rolled.



From there we went to the sunrise and the shift you can do with the intelligent lights. That was our biggest moment, and that was the one where we were trying to prove ourselves and prove to the church what we were doing.

The Last Supper was another of our big technical moments that we were really thrilled with. What we were trying to do was put a diorama on the stage and do the classic da Vinci painting brought to life. We didn't want them walking into the Last Supper, we were trying to find a way for the show to keep flowing as it needed to, but that all of a sudden we could reveal the Last Supper and they'd be in place. The walls were closed on the front of that house, and there were staircases on the exterior that they would walk up to go into this building, at which point the sun would go down slightly and two characters would come out and swing open the front of the building and we had the classic Last Supper pose.



**ALS:** What were some of the challenges on this project?

**TH:** One of the issues with this show was that the crucifixion was very gory. Both the scenic designer and I were doing the best we could to try to tone it down a little bit. It was performed right in the middle of the audience, so there was not much we could do, but the scenic designer at one point was modifying the drop cloth so that the blood would not show as much, and I was doing what I could to work with green light to try to get the glint off the blood.

**ALS:** This was done in the middle of the audience?

**TH:** Large ramps were built off the stage that extended a good deal of the show right into the audience. The ramps made a cross, and in the middle of that cross is where we put the crucifixion cross. It was built into a special holder so it could be mounted right in the middle of it. And the crucifixion took place right in the middle of the audience. I've done several Easter shows, but never one this graphic.

The other problem that we faced was that the church was surprised that we needed keys. They figured we would be there 9am to 5pm, and we had a crew there for a week and a half from the day we rolled in, straight through, somebody was there rotating our times through, trying to get the show up, so there were a lot of eye-openers when it comes to the church's end of it. There was quite a bit that they needed to learn, at the same time as us, about how a production of this level is done, what they could and couldn't work with. But in the end it worked out very well. They immediately approached us about doing Christmas.

### **Manassas Assembly of God Easter Musical**

#### **Lighting Designer/Director**

Tony Hansen

#### **Assistant Lighting Designer**

Lisa Hansen

#### **Master Electrician/Photographer**

Charlene Maise

#### **Lighting Programmer/Technician**

Scott Reynolds

#### **Scenic Designer**

Douglas Huston

**Soft Goods/Fiber Supplier**  
Goldleaf Productions

**Lighting Supplier**  
Vari-Lite Orlando

**Partial Equipment List**

12	Vari*Lite 2402s
22	Vari*Lite VL5Arcs
15	Vari*Lite VL6Cs
7	Vari*Lite VL6s
2	Vari*Lite VL7s
3	Vari*Lite VL7Bs
2	Vari*Lite Virtuoso DX consoles
4	High End Systems AF1000 Dataflash strobes
1	Reel EFX DF-50 hazers
2	High End Systems F100 Performance Smoke Generators
1	LeMaitre LSX fogger
12	Source Four 36° ellipsoidals
1	Altman UV fresnel
2	SuperVision fiber illuminators

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