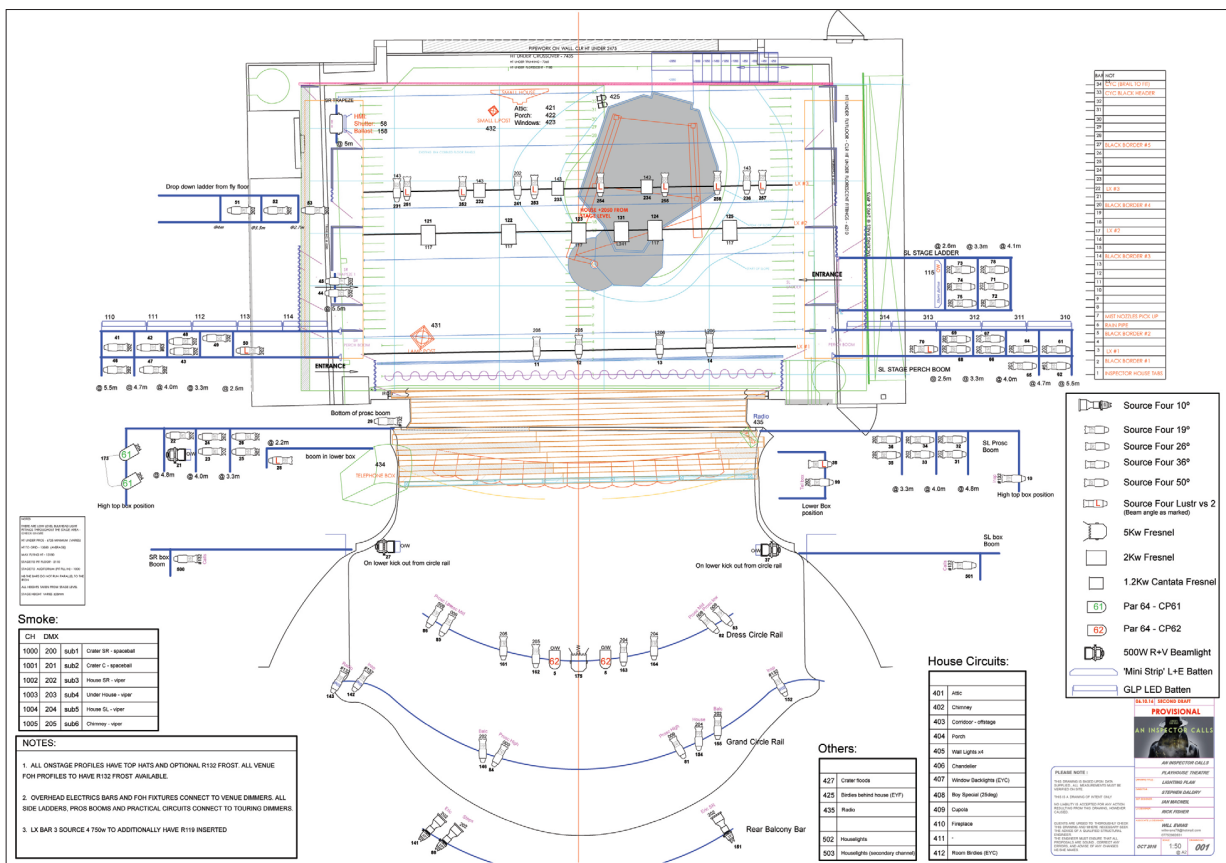


"Producers who wish to avoid this tricky business would be well advised to dispense with an ordinary realistic set..."

JB Priestley

Rob Halliday charts the evolving production and lighting design of JB Priestley's classic play . . .



Now the rig has evolved to incorporate some new technology. "We had plenty of warning about coming in to the West End this time, and we knew there were some things we needed to solve - the PAR battens were becoming hard to maintain, getting to the cyc bar in the event of a blown lamp or burnt-out colour was tricky, but we had plenty of time, and lots of support from our rental company, White Light, to figure out new solutions - though they did ask that in return maybe their weekly payment should enter this century . . ."

In both cases, LEDs have provided a new solution. The PAR battens are gone, replaced by two vertical runs of five of GLP's X4 Bar to give an intense, narrow sheet of light across the rain . . . "though of course now they're there, we do move them a little bit and use some of the pixels at a few other points in the show."

While the rain was lit in a single colour, the cyc was a trickier project. "We used to have four colours, with the lights across the cyc often run at different levels to give just the right amount of blending and just the right colour. I give Will Evans a lot of credit for the way he handled this transition - he went to White Light, rigged the four colours, then matched the resulting mixes in a Source Four Lustr2 on the Gio console we use now. We looked at using the cyc lens, but using a profile spot just felt like we retained more control particularly at the edges of the cyc - this is something that became possible as wider angle profiles have got better - they didn't really exist when we first did the show."

"The Lustrs work really well. Of course, the cloth reacts a bit differently to the LED light, so we took Will's preparation work then just played with it more in the theatre, making individual adjustments. It looks great - plus we know that in one moment in the show we used to have almost all the cyc lights turned on; maybe 36kW of power. Now we're doing it with seven Lustrs."

Lustrs established in the rig, they also snuck into some of the front-of-house lighting positions. "Particularly in some of

the Edwardian theatres the show visits, we've always been hampered by only having so much room in the area where our front-of-house crosslight lives. Having the Lustrs here now just gives us more options in that open white to 202 range, maybe even just a little bit deeper."

Though the Lustrs do nestle between four 500W R&V beamlights, for which Fisher and his team "have not yet found a replacement that quite does the same thing - that extra bit of oomph, that different quality of light that I can't quite define but know is there."

THE INFLUENCE, THE FUTURE

Inspector Calls is back in hibernation now, after a long, successful and largely packed-out West End run at the Playhouse Theatre. It'll doubtless be back, though - it's too good a production to vanish for long, particularly since its message about the need for society to support society rather than everyone being abandoned to their own fate feels in many ways more relevant than ever in this Brexity, Trumpity age.

Even when it is not playing, though, its ongoing influence is clear to feel in other productions, particularly *Billy Elliot*, which the same team went on to create and which is still touring the UK.

For Fisher, the show provided, in many ways, the formation for the way he works to this day. "What I learned from this show about how I like to light people is still in evidence in everything I do. It allows me to give visibility but somehow to retain the feel that darkness is still there."

Look in many theatres today, at the lights clustered low just in front of and behind the proscenium or around the jaws of the National's Olivier, and it's clear this approach has spread far beyond just one designer. "I didn't invent this," Fisher notes. "This show, for very practical reasons, distilled it for me, and maybe other people saw it and took note of it. I just think it's become a way of doing it, allowing you to light people very clearly as they move around the stage." ✕