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### **The Role of the ‘Standard Rig’ in Illuminating a Production of Reginald Rose’s *Twelve Angry Men* (1954).**

#### **ABSTRACT**

*Lighting is one of the most ephemeral elements in a theatre production. Lighting is cued, illuminates objects in space and is gone. This temporal aspect is reinforced throughout the design process – costumes are sketched and swatches acquired, actor’s movements and lines are recorded, sets are detailed and constructed, yet the physicality of lighting is illusive. The lighting designer’s primary artefact articulating their intentions is a lighting plan, yet this document is often already constructed in a standardised form by the performance venue. This paper examines the lighting design for Twelve Angry Men presented at the Zenith Theatre, Sydney and the impact of a ‘standard rig’ on the process for realising the illumination of this production. The lighting designer’s experience will be used as a platform to evaluate the functions of a standard rig in contemporary community theatre practice. The paper briefly discusses, through a practice led research project, the intersection of the creative praxis of the lighting designer and the standards many venues impose upon the realisation of the illumination of any given production.*

#### **KEYWORDS**

theatre  
company  
lighting  
performance  
*Twelve Angry Men*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Lighting is one of the most ephemeral elements in a theatrical production. Lighting is cued, illuminates objects in space and is gone. This temporal aspect is reinforced throughout the design process – costumes are sketched and swatches acquired, actors’ movements and lines

are recorded, sets are detailed and constructed, yet the physicality of lighting is elusive. The lighting designer's artefact, to articulate their intentions, is a rendering (an image showing shading and texturing of a scene), yet the technical information on how to achieve this picture is still recorded on two-dimensional plans with accompanying documentation. These two-dimensional plans are often already constructed and standardised for the lighting designer by the performance venue: traditionally referred to as the 'standard rig'. This paper examines the lighting design for *Twelve Angry Men* presented at the Zenith Theatre, Sydney in October and November 2014 and the impact of a standard rig on the process for realising the illumination of this production. The lighting designer's experience will be used as a platform to evaluate the functions of a standard rig in contemporary practice. The paper also briefly discusses the intersection of the creative praxis of the lighting designer and the standards many venues impose upon the realisation of the illumination and how this serves to enforce another set of prescriptions upon the lighting designer, superimposed upon the demands of the script and the director.

## **LIGHTING DESIGN PRAXIS**

Stanley McCandless (1897-1967) is often credited as the grandfather of stage lighting (Lampert-Greaux 2007). He was the first person to define the praxis of modern theatrical lighting design through his 1932 text *A Method of Lighting the Stage*. The tradition of discussing the praxis and the craft in a range of situations – be they amateur theatre, small scale state subsidised productions or large commercial musicals – is well documented (See: Fraser 1999, Moran 2007, Pilbrow 1997, Reid 2001 and Walters 1997), however, it would be remiss of this paper not to briefly address some of the tools utilised and creative processes a lighting design entails.

The tools of the designer have changed significantly since 1937 when George Devine (1910-1966) was acknowledged in the programme for John Gielgud's (1904-2000) *Richard II* at the Queen's Theatre marking the first creative credit for a lighting designer (Morgan 2008: 208). Automated fixtures and computer controls have replaced large resistance dimmers and footlights. Limelight superseded by incandescent globes, which are themselves on the verge of being overtaken by LED fixtures. Two-dimensional plans accompanied by pages of schedules have been replaced by virtual three-dimensional models and portable devices. It has been observed that '[t]heatre has always used the technology of its period' (Stanton and Banham 1996: 349) and lighting design is no different.

The lighting designer's workflow can be segregated in three broad phases, which follow the overall production process: preproduction, rehearsal, and production. Each phase results in a slight shift in the focus of the lighting designer's exercise of creativity as their role evolves from an occasional participant to active participant in the realisation of the production.

During the preproduction phase, the focus is on understanding the 'world of the play', working with the director and other designers to understand the space through collecting venue and budget information necessary to realise the design. The next phase includes attending rehearsals and formal production meetings to coordinate the delivery of the design and complete the necessary documentation to facilitate the move into the theatre. The production phase is the busiest for the lighting designer. The scenic and costume designs have been realised, yet the lighting designer's job has only just begun. The lights need to be hung in position, coloured and focused and then levels set for each of the cues – all in accordance with the documentation that was completed in the previous phase. This is the first time when the lighting designer will be able to experience the lighting in conjunction with the set and costumes in the performance space.

It is also worth noting that although the scale changes between a small community or school production, commercial theatre or large scale musical, the lighting designer's role remains essentially the same: interpreting a text in collaboration with the director and other designers to creatively contribute to, and enhance the production.

## **THE STANDARD RIG**

In this paper, the term 'standard rig' has been used but not yet defined for readers who are perhaps unfamiliar with theatre parlance. In general terms, the standard rig refers to a prevailing lighting installation, that was designed by the venue for the overall requirements of the users in general, rather than a specific production that has been partially or fully realised. The standard rig is usually (but not always) focused<sup>1</sup> and coloured<sup>2</sup> to give the stage a 'wash' in two or three colours, some back light and occasionally some sidelight<sup>3</sup> and 'specials'<sup>4</sup>. If

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<sup>1</sup> The lights are said to be focused when they have had their aim, size and shape set.

<sup>2</sup> Colour (filter or gel) is a plastic or glass medium inserted in front of the lighting fixture used to alter the colour of the light. The colour of the light can also be altered by dimming, with lower intensity resulting in 'warmer' yellow than light at a higher intensity, which appears 'cooler'.

<sup>3</sup> Back and side light indicate the origin of the light relative to the stage and is predominately used for modelling, whereas most lighting is from the direction of the audience and is usually referred to as the stage wash.

<sup>4</sup> Specials are light that fulfil a specific function or effect and do not form part of the general stage wash.

the venue has the facilities, the standard rig would include cyclorama and footlights. The lights are all allocated to channels on a control desk in such a way that a lighting designer can arrive at the theatre and immediately start work, tailoring the illumination of the stage for their particular needs. Some venues, such as the Zenith Theatre are flexible and the option to use the standard rig or schedule, staff and thus budget permitting the standard rig can be completely removed to facilitate a design specific to the incoming production. Other venues, especially those with productions in repertoire, such as the Joan Sutherland Theatre at the Sydney Opera House permit a small number of additional fixtures to be added, but the standard rig is never changed, lights are neither added to nor subtracted from the set up.

The origins of the standard rig are unknown, but possibly emanate from the original lighting of theatres with either candle lanterns or gas lighting, which by their nature were fixed in position with limited possibilities for adjustment. These limited adjustments suited venues, which worked in repertoire – that is a different production, each performance as is the case with the Joan Sutherland Theatre, rather than season work which sees the same production delivered – evenings and matinees – for a given period<sup>5</sup>. Other possibilities include early producers wanting to limit the productions outgoings by installing a fixed number of lights for use by the designer and reduced illumination requirements.

The need for a standard rig may be diminishing as more theatres turn to automated lighting to meet their base needs. These fixtures allow for almost infinite adjustments, which can all be recorded on a computer-controlled system for playback at a future point in time. Yet, the use of a standard rig is often seen by the lighting designer as a constraint, removing from them a range of choices in the realisation of their design, or perhaps at an extreme, viewed as an obstruction to design by providing a set of highly defined parameters from which they must work. There may be some merit to these views, but this paper argues for the advantages of using a standard rig, especially as it was applied for *Twelve Angry Men*.

## TWELVE ANGRY MEN

Despite being considered Reginald Rose's (1920-2002) best work, *Twelve Angry Men* was not an immediate critical or popular success. Originally written in 1954 as a teleplay for CBS's anthology series Studio One in New York (Bergan 2002) it was not until the 1957 film adaptation, shown predominately in art house cinemas, that a cult following began.

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<sup>5</sup> For example a few weeks such as the New York City Ballet's production of *The Nutcracker* to many years such as *The Mousetrap* which has been continuously performed in the UK since opening at the Theatre Royal, Nottingham on 6 October 1952.

The allure of this work may be remote to modern audiences who expect big name Hollywood stars, colour film, flashbacks, numerous special effects, and a clear denouement to resolve the central question – all elements absent in *Twelve Angry Men*.<sup>6</sup> It is not surprising that a stage version quickly followed the film with Patric M. Verrone observing that ‘[t]rials appeal to film makers because of their theatrical trappings’ (1989: 96). These theatrical trappings revolve around the drama that unfolds as twelve jurors retire to consider the fate of an 18-year-old Spanish American boy who is accused of murdering his father. The jury is given strict instructions: they must unanimously, ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’ decide a verdict of either ‘guilty’ or ‘not guilty’. The judge adds significant weight to his instructions, as a guilty verdict will be accompanied by a mandatory death sentence.

Stripped of names on stage and within the text, the personalities of the jurors are slowly revealed through their deliberations which simultaneously unpack their occupations and personal biases. This is realised by a lone dissenter that votes ‘not guilty’ in the first ballot before convincing all eleven of his peers that ‘there is reasonable doubt’ arising from the reliability of the witness statements and thus the boy should be found ‘not guilty’. This reduction of the characters to stereotypes allows an audience to quickly identify with both the situation and the personalities. The setting is similarly reduced only to its essential elements, a drab nondescript room on a hot New York summer’s evening without air-conditioning.

As a play, *Twelve Angry Men* is regularly presented by community (amateur) theatre companies<sup>7</sup> and has enjoyed several professional productions, including seasons in London (1964, 1994 & 2013), New York (2004), Washington D.C. (2006), and Chicago (2007). For this paper, the examination of the role of the standard rig in a lighting design is based upon the amateur production of *Twelve Angry Men* mounted by Epicentre Theatre Company in October and November 2014 at the Zenith Theatre, Sydney.

## **LIGHTING DESIGN AND THE STANDARD RIG**

Given the temporal nature of light and lighting, the use of a standard rig is perhaps paradoxical – it is both permanent and static representation of lighting within an ever-changing performance environment, an environment that at its heart is the momentary illumination of an object in space.

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<sup>6</sup> In the 1957 film version, Henry Fonda would be an exception to this list as he was already an accomplished Hollywood actor, however also missing were any female roles.

<sup>7</sup> A search of [www.stagewhispers.com.au](http://www.stagewhispers.com.au) on 11 November 2014 returned four Australian community theatre productions in 2014 alone.

The decision to use the Zenith Theatre's standard rig was two-fold. Primarily it was a significant time saver and secondly, it was for academic interest – with the research question of: how successful would the illumination of the production be using the standard rig?

The saving in time (and therefore in a commercial environment, cost), may appear self-evident, however this is frequently less prominent as community theatres often have an army of ready and willing volunteers seeking to extend their skills and experience in a technical arena. Without a cost consideration, the focus often shifts to engagement and education of the company's members. This, in turn, has the effect of placing considerable additional pressure on the lighting designer as they are now faced with not only realising their design and managing a large team of people (perhaps with limited skills) in conjunction with the ever present workplace health and safety demands resulting from this supervision. This supervision requirement often comes at a time of high pressure with numerous concurrent activities in the theatre as the various departments work towards the deadline of opening night, preceded by technical rehearsals. Thus the use of a standard rig can be a considerable resource to the lighting designer, speeding up realisation of the design and reducing the supervision burden while facilitating improved stage access for the other technical departments.

For lighting designers with limited design experience in the venue, or who are unable (due to time, cost or simply distance) to undertake extensive venue specific research, the standard rig provides a tested and safe basis for a design. The standard rig is usually developed by an in-house venue technician, who may have as many as 300 events a year to refine the design with. These technicians have a far greater understanding of how to deploy the lighting equipment, included in the venue rental fee, to build on the uniqueness of their facility and deliver a high quality design by avoiding some of the weaknesses or difficulties of working in the space.

There are some weaknesses of a standard rig. As the name implies it is a standardised, design to meet the needs of the majority of the facility's users, which may not necessarily be suitable for the production the lighting designer, is working on. For instance, a standard rig designed for a concert hall or conference centre is unlikely to be suitable for a theatre production. Fortunately, the Zenith Theatre recognises this duality and has both theatre and conference standard rigs, which are mutually exclusive, yet simultaneously installed, thus ensuring allowing each activity a high degree of customisation of the standard installation without one impacting upon the other.

Another consideration is that the standardisation may have been highly customised by a past user which has not been picked up by the venue technician resulting in a ‘non standard’ installation. The quality of the documentation also varies considerably from a simple sketch to a fully dimensioned scale drawing and associated patching schedules. For the production of *Twelve Angry Men*, the documentation consisted of a plan drawn in a diagramming programme (Microsoft Visio), which was scaled at either 1:107 or 1:76 depending on the paper selected rather than the more traditional 1:50 or 1:25 used in theatre drafting. The drawing lacked a key, making it difficult for someone unfamiliar with the venue to determine which lights were being used while several new fixtures that had been recently added, were conspicuously absent from the plan. The final obstacle in documentation was the lack of a current patch schedule, as the plan does not show what channel each of the lights is controlled by.

This leads to the research question. Epicentre Theatre Company staged a production of Reginald Rose’s *Twelve Angry Men* at the Zenith Theatre in October and November 2014. The illumination of this production was based on the venue’s standard rig to facilitate an academic investigation into how successful would the lighting be if using the standard rig?

The set for *Twelve Angry Men* was to be stylistic of a 1950s government building – a flat for each site of the stage to represent the jury room walls, the upstage one with a practical sash window and a long table that could accommodate twelve people. The set was dressed with some coat hooks on the opposite prompt flat, a clock on the prompt side flat and a backing flat of an abstract cityscape for the window flat. A water cooler, rubbish bin, legal books, note pads and pens and fourteen chairs scattered around the room completed the stage setting. The simplicity of the set legitimised the decision to use the standard rig, which was designed to illuminate a wide-open stage.

The requirements of the lighting design appear simple enough – a drab, nondescript room on a hot New York summer’s evening without air-conditioning – where a group of twelve male jurors debate over two hours the fate of a young man on trial for murder. Yet the lighting must do more than just illuminate. By necessity, the illumination interacts with the staging and the actors to support and reinforce the communication within the performance environment in the theatrical transaction of performer and spectator, an idea first theorised by Peter Brook.

It is the strength of the plot in *Twelve Angry Men* that challenges the lighting designer. The illumination must convey the heat and tension in the room, but not in such a way that the

location becomes discernable or the light a player in its own right. An element of the plotline is that the setting could be any courtroom, not a specific one. Similarly, the lighting has to represent a government courthouse, a drab and perhaps slightly run-down facility designed for utility rather than for any overt display of status. The action happens in real time without need for special effects such as storms or sunsets.

The established standard rig was supplemented with an additional six lamps on stage arranged over the jury table to give the effects of a hanging light at this point. They were coloured<sup>8</sup> in Lee 780 Golden Amber to provide contrast to the Lee 506 Marlene in the front light and Lee 061 Mist Blue used as a fill. Additional lights were also added for the window-backing flat in Lee 200 and a front light in Lee 506 to add a subtle highlight for the window detailing. Another lamp was used to highlight the flat behind the water cooler and waste paper basket. The backlight and booms were left in the primary colours<sup>9</sup> of the standard rig. All the general washes were coloured and focused to the standard positions by the venue technicians with the additional lighting being coloured and roughly focused in advance of the company's move into the theatre.

From the design perspective, the standard rig did not provide any impediment into the illumination of this production. A number of lights were not used demonstrating the flexibility of the venue's standard rig. The colours that were available worked well with a neutrally stylised set and authentic period costumes to paint a vivid scene on stage. Using the standard rig achieved a time saving and made the stage available longer for construction of the scenery and for the actors to work on. An additional benefit of using the standard rig rather than a bespoke design was additional time could be devoted to working with the lighting operator and stage manager to refine cues and their execution. As a research opportunity, the project met its objectives – a successful use of the standard rig to deliver lighting that supported the production and its theatrical exchange with the audience.

## CONCLUSION

The lighting for *Twelve Angry Men* demonstrated that a well-designed and documented 'standard rig' can significantly contribute to the designer's praxis. The Zenith Theatre's 'standard rig' facilitated the lighting requirements of the director and text, as well as

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<sup>8</sup> There are two main suppliers of colour Lee and Rosco / GAM. The colour is supplied in thin sheets or rolls of polycarbonate or polyester which is easily cut to the size and placed in front of a lighting fixture.

<sup>9</sup> The back light colours were Lee 026 Bright Red, Lee 363 Special Medium Blue and Lee 770 Burnt Yellow while Lee 106 Primary Red, Lee 165 Daylight Blue, Lee 105 Orange and Lee 090 Dark yellow Green were used in the boom lights.



contributing to the efficient mounting of the production through increasing stage time for set construction and technical rehearsals. The designer's creativity was not impinged on through the preselected use of fittings and colours while the flexible use of additional lights to meet specific requirements was facilitated by the venue. The production requirements were easily met through the use of the standard rig without any impacting upon the lighting designer's creative practices.

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## **PRODUCTION TEAM**

*Twelve Angry Men* by Reginald Rose

Presented by Epicentre Theatre Company

At the Zenith Theatre, Sydney

31 October to 8 November 2014

### **Cast**

Juror 1	Philip Lye
Juror 2	Brett Joachim
Juror 3	Enrico Babic
Juror 4	Scott Clare
Juror 5	Ben Scales
Juror 6	John Rhys Goodsell
Juror 7	Luke Reeves
Juror 8	Richard Drysdale
Juror 9	Tim Hunter
Juror 10	Tony Bates
Juror 11	Darrell Hoffman

Juror 12	Alex Cubis
Court Guard	James Graham

### **Production Crew**

Director	Tonya Grelis
Production Manager/Epicentre Vice President	Tony Bates
Stage Manager	Susan Jack
Composer and Sound Designer	George Cartledge
Scenic and Graphic Designer	Murray Grelis
Lighting Designer	Simon Dwyer
Costumes	Helen Kohlhagen
Properties	Mary Bentley

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### CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

**Simon Dwyer** has over twenty years of experience working in many technical and production roles in the entertainment industry across Australia and New Zealand. He is currently a doctoral candidate at Central Queensland University examining the theatricality of the lighting of the Sydney Opera House. Simon has presented original research in the creative industries at numerous conferences and has written on a wide range of topics including architecture, education, facilities management, literature and the performing arts.

**Dr Rachel Franks** is a Conjoint Fellow, The University of Newcastle and a Coordinator, Education & Scholarship at the State Library of NSW. Rachel is the Area Chair, Biography and Life Writing and the Area Chair, Fiction for the Popular Culture Association of Australia and New Zealand. She is also a Member of the New South Wales Readers' Advisory Services Working Group and serves on the Editorial Board of *The Australian Journal of Crime Fiction*. She has delivered numerous conference papers based on crime fiction, food studies and information science. Rachel's work can be found in books, journals and magazines.

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