

# A Festival of Fraser

Julie Reikai Rickerd | Oct 01, 2002

For the 2002 Stratford Festival, LD Kevin Fraser designed two very different productions, Shakespeare's *All's Well that Ends Well* and Lerner and Loewe's *My Fair Lady*. On *All's Well*, he says, “The biggest challenge is the Festival stage itself and the relationship between the stage and the audience. The theatre has a brown hardwood thrust stage, with balcony, and a solid wood back wall that matches the stage floor. In *All's Well*, as in most traditional Shakespeare productions, very little scenery is used. This allows for fast scene changes but the show relies heavily on lighting. In *All's Well*, I convey a sense of outdoors for garden scenes by putting leaf gobos on the wall behind the stage, making it look like the exterior wall of a house. For interior court scenes, I put window gobos on the same walls to look like interior walls, with windows showing daylight outside.”

The Festival Theatre has a basic repertory lighting plot designed by resident LD Michael J. Whitfield. It changes slightly from year to year, but the basic structure has remained the same since the mid-1970s (moving lights have been recently added). It provides open white area lighting for the full stage. A small stage, it is divided into 28 areas, each of which has between two and six instruments. “Using these area lights, I can nicely light a performer's face from all audience points of view, no matter where the performer is standing on the stage. The plot also includes a full stage scroller wash from each diagonal direction (DSL, DSR, USL, and USR), full-stage template washes with scrollers from DSL, DSR, and from directly overhead, and a non-scroller wash from each diagonal direction that can optionally take a template as well. We have added 16 [City Theatrical] AutoYokes, all with 19° [ETC] Source Fours. Fourteen have a DMX-controlled iris, frost, and a scroller, and are used for soft-edged specials that can be

changed between cues. The other two have scrollers, but no iris or frost, and are most useful with gobos.”

Approximately 220 instruments are devoted to the basic plot. The rest are divided, according to the complexity of lighting requirements, among four shows this season. *My Fair Lady* makes more lighting demands and was allotted a larger share of the inventory. The AutoYokes cut down on the number of specials needed per show.

“As a repertory theatre,” says the designer, “we often have a matinee of one show, an evening performance of another. All scenery and lighting changes are made in one hour. One electrician does the lighting changeover. He gets to the rig by catwalk and can change color and/or template in any instrument. We are unable to refocus instruments between shows, so the crew has developed a way to make templates of shutter cuts. If I want different shutter cuts for each show, they make up multiple templates from those required. In this theatre, we usually work in a ‘white light’ style, according to our repertory plot. Rather than mixing several warm and cool colors from different directions to achieve some version of ‘white,’ white light is used to illuminate the performer, often from all sides. This is mixed with one or more washes, in one or more colors, from one or more directions, with or without templates, to create the required mood, location, time of day, key.”

*My Fair Lady* posed additional challenges. The production's deck expands the stage floor to accommodate big dance numbers. “I added some lights to extend the basic plot area lighting to the edges of the larger floor,” says Fraser. “The basic balcony is removed and another balcony, with two curved staircases and four large lampposts, is put in place. These are white, creating a nice surface for gobos, but cause some problems getting the actors to stand out against the background.

“*Fair Lady* has many dialogue scenes,” he continues. “In musicals, I usually keep them fairly unsaturated, using saturated colors in musical numbers, emphasizing side- and

backlight in dance numbers. On a thrust stage, there isn't any side or backlight. The angle that would be high sidelight for one audience member may be frontlight for another. No low-angle sidelight is possible because it shines into the audience's eyes on the other side. So I use diagonal back washes like I would use sidelight in a proscenium theatre. During musical numbers, I bring in saturated colors from diagonal back positions. This is either back- or sidelight for most seats. I also put saturated color onto the stage floor where it can be appreciated from the back of the orchestra and the balcony. To viewers, backlight bouncing off the floor towards them will seem brighter than a light on the floor from any other angle. This can be especially useful for patterns. I have a set of cobblestone gobos that come from the diagonal back positions on both sides, which I use in both shows. The extreme end seats will see the patterns on the performers a bit, but most of the audience sees only the pattern on the floor, helping to define street scene locations.

“I use four followspots, spaced about 60° apart horizontally,” the LD concludes. “I need to pick up the performers from at least two sides. Most of the songs in *Fair Lady* are solos; for duets, I put two spots on each performer, paired, so that the SL spot works with the DSR spot, and the SR spot works with the DSL spot. Our four spots are 1,200W HMI, but in *Fair Lady* I always use them with frost, color-corrected to 3200K. The soft-edged spots are used to highlight the main characters. Hard-edged spots would have been inappropriate for the style of this production.”

Both shows are running on the Festival's main stage through November 24, in Stratford, Ontario.