

Lighting & Sound

international

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entertainment, presentation, communication

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Classic Gear: The Littlite

Rob Halliday takes a nostalgic but instructive look back at the tools that have shaped the industry ...

This one definitely falls under the "so taken for granted it's not noticed until it's missing" category. But it's an unusual product: so many of our tools are based on things created for other industries - much rarer for something made for us to find its way out to the wider world. Yet that's exactly what is happening with the Littlite: that dependable friend throwing light onto your console keyboard or mixing desk faders can now be found all over the place, even built into cars ...

To describe, it's a simple enough product: a gooseneck task light with a tough, flexible stem, rugged metal lamp hood with a finned top that does double duty adjusting the direction of the light and as a heat-sink for the bulb, and a high but controllable light output. Originally this was from tungsten lamps, but LED versions (with a smooth rather than finned hood) are now available, albeit less useful for warming your hands over on a cold outdoor gig!

While the description is simple, it's the execution that's important: a measure of the Littlite's success is that there are all kinds of - let's be polite and call them 'imitators' - now available, but you can generally tell pretty quickly that they're not the real thing, when the stalk won't stay where it's put or there doesn't seem to be as

much light falling where you need it. Real Littlites are built up to a standard by their manufacturer.

Manufacturer? Littlite LLC, of course - but that name somewhat hides the light's history. It's unusual for the product of one entertainment industry manufacturer to be widely used by others, but it turns out that all those companies supplying Littlites with their products are buying one originally created to go with one particular lighting console - the first Leprecon.

The company responsible was originally known as Custom Audio Electronics (CAE) formed by Jim Fackert from his basement in Ypsilanti, Michigan, perhaps as a way of getting off the road. His first project was to build a sound system for Emerson, Lake & Palmer, including a touring console that was the first to offer stereo submasters and three-band equalisation.

As a follow-up, he started doing all kinds of special projects for production companies, including modifying theatrical lighting equipment to make it more 'rock-and-roll', adding bump buttons and chasers. This led to building his own consoles, first the Rainbow, then the Leprecon LP-1000, a portable touring console with submasters.

Every time he modified or built a console, Fackert added worklights - but, frustrated by



how bulky and fragile existing options were, he designed his own. Fitted to the Leprecon consoles - then and now - they caught the attention of others; demand from those others led to the creation of the separate Littlite division that flourishes to this day.

It flourishes because the core product is good - and because the manufacturer makes all the parts you might need to use them in just about any application. As a result, the 'products using us' list on the Littlite website reads like a who's-who of the entertainment lighting and sound industry, and the lights are found on discerning production desks worldwide - the tiny controllable light with the weighted base and built-in dimmer greatly preferred over the cheap desk lamp with colour gaffer-taped over the front!

> www.littlite.com

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