

IN THIS ISSUE:

Theatre: Network
Combining stage and screen

Tech Focus: Robin MegaPointe
Robe's all-purpose moving head

Review: JTSE, Paris
Showfloor highlights

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classic gear

Claypaky Sharpy | by Rob Halliday . . .

"What Claypaky did was re-invent the beamlight for the modern age . . ."

➔ Nowadays, there's a trend for multi-skilling, multi-tasking, trying to cram as many functions as possible into each product. But you know what they say - a jack of all trades is a master of none. Sometimes it's better just to do one thing, and do it spectacularly well. Claypaky's remarkable little Sharpy is a perfect case in point.

At a time when each new generation of moving lights seemed to get bigger, heavier and with an even higher wattage lamp than the generation before, this tiny little thing appeared with its ability to project a beam of light that just seemed to go on forever. And I mean a true beam: parallel sided, zero degree, not the cone of light every other fixture created.

Parallel beam lights were by no means new, of course. There have been traditional beam lights or beam projectors in the catalogues of many lighting manufacturers for decades: usually a parabolic mirror plus a crown-silvered lamp giving a delicious quality of light. For a more robust, more tourable (if less precise and less elegant) solution, there was the low-voltage ACL lamp in a PAR Can. And there have even been attempts to make those thick beams move - two of DHA's Digital Beamlights continue to perform nightly on *Les Misérables* in London - but they were big and just a bit fragile.

What Claypaky did was re-invent the beamlight for the modern age. They took a tiny discharge source, the MSD Platinum lamp, and designed a remarkable optical system around it to collect the light and throw it forward through a big front lens as



↑ The Sharpy complete with Union Jack livery

a tight, clean, parallel-edged beam, almost laser-like in its precision. In terms of brightness, the lamp was just 189W, but 20m away you'd still measure almost 60,000lx. "Who thought we'd ever see a 190W fixture that we could use in Wembley Arena," said product award judges at the PLASA Show in 2010, awarding it an Award for Innovation.

Just as importantly, the compact lamp and optics delivered a compact fixture. You could fit a lot of them in your truck and then in your rig, packed close together for dramatic looks. That tiny size also meant the fixtures could move fast, the kind of speed rarely seen since the heyday of the moving mirror light.

The Sharpy's debut coincided with a growing range of major events, particularly TV shows with significant lighting demands that could create never-seen-before looks. The Sharpy provided such looks and very quickly it was everywhere. Not that it was quite a one-trick pony - its compact body also packed in a gobo wheel, a zoom lens (billed as 0 - 3.8°) and a prism alongside the mechanical dimmer and a 15-slot colour wheel; you could also do variations on its beam. But what sold it to the world was its parallel beam look, that solid shaft of light that seemingly went on forever. Though if you wanted to make your Sharpys stand out, you could order them in chrome finish - or, if you were working by royal appointment, even with patriotic Union Flag casing! ✕

Rob has been working in and writing about lighting for more than 25 years, on shows around the world. He wonders if this makes him a classic... or just old!

Sharpy at Claypaky:

➤ www.claypaky.it/en/products/sharpy

And the patriotic version:

➤ [//plasa.me/unionjack](http://plasa.me/unionjack)

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