

Lighting & Sound international

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entertainment, presentation, communication

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Technical Focus

Update: Lifting gear for stages large & small

Fashion Designs

Haute production for Edinburgh Fashion Festival

Queensday Celebrations

Amsterdam hosts record-breaking show

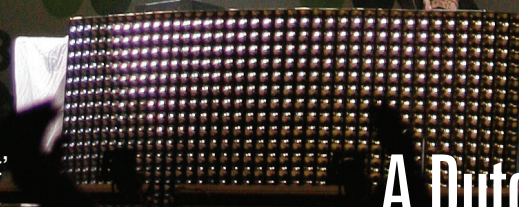
Westlife On Tour

The boyband's latest touring production

PLUS!

- Robbie Williams in Dubai
- RCF's Renaissance
- Take That (almost) together again
- PALME, Dubai in review
- Dynamic Earth leads 'edutainment'
- Live sound upgrade for McGrory's

TIESTO



Queensday

A Dutch record-breaker

Classic Gear: The ETC Source Four

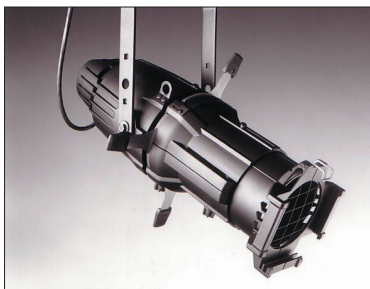
Rob Halliday takes a nostalgic but instructive look back at the tools that have shaped the industry . . .

If you make a better mousetrap, the adage goes, the world will beat a path to your door. The ETC Source Four is lighting's better mousetrap.

It's included here to remove any notion you might have that this is just a column for quirky, old or obsolete gear. It's not: classic, to me, means gear that redefined expectations. This light has done that, so much so that to a generation the generic term for profile spot is not '23' or 'Sil' or 'Leko', but Source Four.

Incredibly, the Source Four has now been around for close-on 15 years. It's hard to remember how revolutionary it was then. Inventors Dave Cunningham and Greg Esakoff of Entertec went back to first principles. Optics suggested the ideal was a point source of light; to get close they developed a new lamp: the HPL's four filament coils gave the light its name. That smaller source let them design a smaller reflector; reduced size meant they could use dichroic glass to take the heat out of the beam, making the shutters and accessories last longer. The smaller optical train meant they could use optical-grade glass lenses. They added in innovations such as the ability to rotate the front of the lantern, spinning shutter cuts and gobos. It was made from cast aluminium and tooled to within an inch of its life, expensive to set up, but then easy to mass produce.

And in a time when lights were getting bigger and boxier and generally uglier, they made it round and compact and sprightly - it looked like a light should look.



The result was a 575W spotlight that outperformed most of the competition up to 2500W. Plus it was smaller and easier to handle, particularly the five and ten degree lenstubes with their plastic lenses, and the lenses had sensible names rather than the '6x9' style nomenclature of other American spotlights. Everyone wanted them - its looks even winning it friends in retail and architectural lighting. The cunning replaced their big old lights with Source Fours funded by green 'eco-friendly' grants.

Arguably, it turned ETC into the powerhouse it is today, though the original brochures billed the light as being from ETC and Entertec and the inventors earn a royalty from every light sold to this day. Over a million so far . . .

So good was the light's basic design that it hasn't changed much since. The six-lens line-up was only expanded last year. It's been hot-rodged to 750W, the lamp now with six filaments, so belying the product's name. The back-end sprouted EU-designated handles. There was a mid-life lenstube re-design. There's a Zoom, but it lacks the compact finesse of the fixed-angle lights, whose advantages are so compelling that even the Brits, notorious zoom lovers, have taken the Source Four to their hearts.

It's still the one to beat. Though one suspects that there are plans for a Source Five somewhere deep in ETC's Wisconsin base, just waiting until someone else gets close enough for them to worry . . .

>>> Read more about this modern classic at www.etconnect.com, or read the original patents at www.uspto.gov

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