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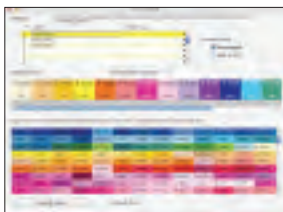
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Classic Gear: Lightwright

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

There are few products in our industry that find almost universal adoption across a field of users. Everyone has their own favourite console, their favourite light, their favourite colours, their favourite CAD program. But everyone working in theatre lighting on Broadway, most working across America and many working around the world use one tool: John McKernon's Lightwright. As McKernon himself occasionally notes, Lightwright has featured on more Broadway shows than ETC's Obsession, supposedly New York's standard lighting console.



and magazines he taught himself enough programming to put together his Electric Assistant, a tool able to keep track of the rig and simplify the task of updating and changing that information. Subsequently expanded and re-written to run on the

then-new IBM machines it was re-christened ALD, then expanded to ALD Pro, throughout this phase of its life distributed by Rosco. The original name did not prove popular, so for the next incarnation, in 1988, it was re-christened: Lightwright.

Part of Lightwright's strength is that it was created and has evolved to meet McKernon's own needs as a working lighting designer and associate LD to others, notably Ken Billington; it soon became clear that what helped McKernon could also help others. Part of the appeal was doubtless that it worked in the way that lighting people work, rather than forcing them to work in the way computers work.

John still likes to light shows, though, and also takes the time to learn what his loyal band of users want, and what new lighting technology demands, before sitting down to work those



requirements into a new version. All of which helps to explain why, though almost 30, Lightwright is also only just about to turn 5 . . .

The first update, not until 1992, saw the release of Lightwright 2 (above). Switching distribution to City Theatrical along the way, Version 3 appeared in spring 1999, changing to a graphical user interface and appearing on the Apple Mac for the first time. Version 4 (pictured left) did not follow until September 2003, adding more tools for ever-growing rigs and moving lights as well as integrated focus charts and more. Lightwright 5, due to debut in the next month or so, promises a feast of new goodies, including one of John McKernon's holy grails - the ability to interchange data in real time with a CAD program, in this case Vectorworks Spotlight.

Lightwright is a remarkable tale of meeting users' needs, more remarkable because it was, is and remains the work of just one person.

A brief history of Lightwright:

> www.mckernon.com/lwhistory.htm

For more on John McKernon and Lightwright, see *Let There Be Light* by Robert Bell. Available from L&S's Online Bookshop:

> www.lsonline.co.uk/books/?tzy3m6

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