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Classic Gear: Source Four LED series 2

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

Just before anyone complains: I don't think we've ever said that 'classic' has to mean 'old'. All I've ever said is that they are tools that have shaped our industry. This one is doing exactly that, right now. You may not yet consider ETC's LED Source Four Series 2 Lustr a classic, but I feel certain history will judge it so.

It is, of course, the descendent of another classic, the tungsten Source Four. When that first appeared (inconceivably, to those who remember life before it, close-on 25 years ago), it rewrote the rule book on performance, reliability and energy efficiency, and the industry switched to it at incredible speed. Exactly the same thing is happening with the Lustr: big shows (*Billy Elliot* and *Mary Poppins* to name but two) are jettisoning scrollers for the Lustr, and even people who once declared LED would never be good enough to light theatre are now clamouring to use them. If they can get them - right now demand seems to be outstripping ETC's ability to supply, which is a good problem to have.

The Lustr was not the first attempt to put LEDs into a hard-edged profile spotlight (a tough challenge given the optics involved); it was not even ETC's first go. Their Series 1 was a nice light, but it never quite had enough fire when put next to a traditional Source Four.

It was immediately clear that the Series 2 was different. Set to match the 'open white' of tungsten it had the same richness, warmth and life of the tungsten version. In mixed colours it retained that life, even on the skin or complex fabrics that poorer LED fixtures rendered either flat and lifeless or with a sharp, electric feel. The secret sauce making this possible was the use of seven different colours of LED emitters pioneered some years ago by Selador, a company eventually acquired by ETC, and in particular the lime green emitter that somehow joins all the colours together to give an enormous gamut and a natural-feeling white without using a separate white emitter.

A measure of the success of the lime green: a number of other manufacturers are now doing the same thing. Though I don't know if they're going the extra mile that ETC go, calibrating the lights as they leave the factory so they all match, and so that calling up a traditional gel colour on the console now gives that colour on stage, not a vague approximation of it.

Plus the Lustr felt bright. The figures showed it wasn't as bright as a tungsten S4 in open, but this was a hard comparison to make as in certain colours the LED unit won an easy victory. In real use on real shows, it has proved to be bright enough.




And it felt familiar, comfortable, like the Source Fours we already knew. The back end is about the same size and shape; the front end is the same - same lenses, same accessories. Compatible with things you already owned. Pretty much the same behaviour when you focus it, once you master the new diffuser options. Quiet. A really nice, subtle fade. Just with more colour (I predict the Lustr will bring a new bravery in colour to lighting, because there's no risk involved in trying something new, something outrageous). And, as a bonus, using less power and no dimmer required.

It is a remarkable light.

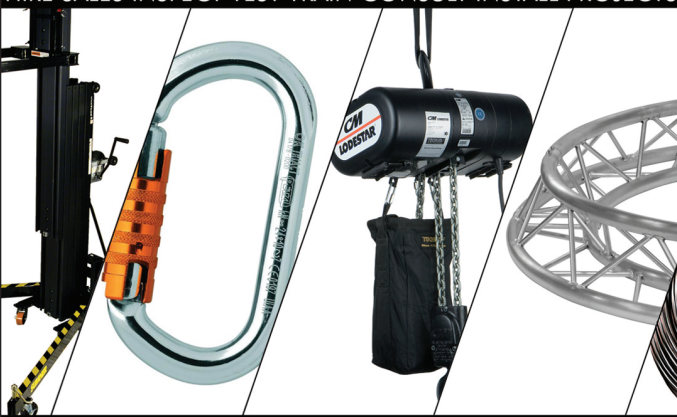
There will doubtless be brighter versions in the future. But this is where the game changed.

A More In-Depth Look: > [//plasa.me/nehqi](http://plasa.me/nehqi)

Why you shouldn't feel too sorry for the lead inventor of the traditional Source Four as the world moves to LEDs: > [//plasa.me/z3b81](http://plasa.me/z3b81)


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