

Chieng Mai is 700 kilometres north of Bangkok, located in the highlands of the fabulous Golden Triangle. It was here that the first independent Thai Kingdom flourished as a major religious, cultural and trading centre over 700 years ago.

Today Chaing Mai is Thailand's second city, a modern-day Shangri-La, a much sought after destination for tourists, and a rapidly emerging centre for the Performing Arts.

The 1,550 seat KAD Theatre, with state of the art lighting and sound systems, and a stage wider than any in London's West End or New York's Broadway is now open. In addition this impressive Performing Arts Centre has a 500 seat Playhouse theatre, an art library and a gallery. There are facilities for students of the arts, a symphony orchestra, a youth orchestra, as well as a repertory company.

Rob Brookman, director of the Adelaide Festival Centre says it is the "most beautiful new theatre built anywhere in the world in the last twenty years". Such a remark no doubt delighted Lighting Designer John A. Williams whose contribution towards the success of the Centre is reported in this *LIGHTS!* special feature. Brian Hartley asked the questions, the excellent photograph of the auditorium is by Winston Goh.

"It was one of those engagements that just kind of happened", says John A. Williams talking about his involvement with the new, stunning, KAD theatre in Chiang Mai. The KAD theatre being just one theatre space in a new, two auditorium and Performing Art Centre complex in Thailand's second largest city. "Originally I was acting as an adviser to the Theatre Complex and proposed Performing Arts Centre. Then, as the technical specification for the theatre spaces grew and became more complex I was asked to become the project's Lighting Consultant". And the two theatres certainly are equipped to a high technical specification, especially in the areas of Lighting and Sound.

The main KAD theatre is the first of the two main theatres to open. The beauty of its 1,550 seat auditorium cannot be over stated. Its visionary, architect and owner Mr Suchai has designed an auditorium that is so full of Thai culture, depicted in wood carvings, inlays and tapestries that even if one were to be 'beamed' into the theatre from afar, you would immediately know where you were, Thailand. How many new theatres are designed today with such warmth, attractiveness and cultural heritage? As important, Mr Suchai has achieved this while providing excellent lighting and sound positions that do not look in the least out of place.

The stage itself is wide, some twenty seven meters wide with a depth of a little over eighteen meters. Backstage houses all one might expect in a new modern theatre. It needs to. The KAD theatre being the flag-ship of the Complex is to accommodate shows from the West End and Broadway as well as Dance and perhaps national and international Opera productions. The smaller, equally beautiful (from what I have seen of the plans) Playhouse Theatre will be used by local or national Thai performing Companies.

hanging-point plan (bridges, slots, advanced bars, ladder tracks etc), circuit and DMX distribution from the information gained from the transfer exercises. This was given to my assistant, who is also an accomplished lighting designer, to transfer in some of his productions."

He was delighted with the way the space and would-be installation worked for him. "We later planned parallel Socapex outlets for most on-stage distribution boxes, and, there we are! The process was time consuming in some ways, but took out a lot of the guess work. We knew our installation would work in numerous situations."

My next question was (of course) why Strand equipment. Says John, "The inventory at this stage was simply 1K or 2K fresnels, PCs, profiles of varying degrees and wattages etc, etc. Before pursuing an instrument supplier further I wanted to look at what would control all that was hung. I gave this very, very careful consideration for a number of reasons. One was the geographical location of the theatre. Chiang Mai, Thailand. The control system had to have a known and proven history of reliability. It also had to have the back-up of good after sales service from a company with an international network of agents who could respond quickly to a call from somewhere like Chiang Mai. Considering the international flavour of the shows coming in, if possible, the control system (at least in the main house) needed to be one of the industry's 'standards'.

(Right) Lighting Designer John Williams who contributed so much to a truly remarkable project.



# a theatrical Shangri-la in South East Asia

I asked John how he made his decisions to equip the theatres considering their possible usage. "Luckily I joined the project's team very early on. Light bridges had been designed, but I could move them. No FOH slot positions had been planned, but there was still time for them to be incorporated. In fact, I was able to put lighting positions wherever I thought they were needed (within reason of course). So, being a Lighting Designer with well over two hundred productions under my belt I pulled out a number of my dance, drama and musical light rigs (that included "Judy" from the West End) and transferred their productions' rigs into the KAD theatre space. Remember, I could hang wherever I wanted. I had a blank plan and elevation with a markout where the stage would be. It was remarkable how the common hanging points materialised across the productions. Of course, I gave myself the hanging points I really wanted in the original version of the productions that the theatres could not provide. It was also interesting how the general pool of equipment began to form, and be used/duplicated in each transfer exercise. When I thought I had an idea of an equipment inventory using this method I drew out a draft

The level of technical expertise of the local technicians who would staff the theatre was also one of my considerations. This was why I started to look at 'reporting systems' so as to aid the technicians as much as possible. A theatre technician with many years of experience is probably able to track down a system fault quite easily and quickly. A team of technicians new to theatre lighting installations would benefit from a system that would aid them tracking its faults. Putting these factors together, and after looking closely at alternatives, the Strand CD80 dimmers with reporting facilities controlled by Strand's Galaxy Nova was the ultimate choice". And what about the Playhouse? "When talking with Strand about the system for the main house, I was shown their new System 430, and was very impressed. It seemed to fit perfectly considering the requirements of the Playhouse and its possible future developments. I liked the idea of being able to add control 'packages' at a later date, and so did the management."

I asked John about the fixtures he chose, were they also all Strand? "Yes, mainly. I love the Optique so they were almost certainly going to be part of my

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