
ABC Television and the West Hollywood Center for Early Education a study in contrasts

by Chris Martin

This is an account of two projects, different in every conceivable respect, yet tied together by the vision of one person - Norman Russell, the respected theatrical and television industry consultant, and principal of Norman Russell Design.

I recently spent a day with Norman, at his busy office in the idyllic California city of Santa Barbara. Situated close to the Pacific Ocean, I realized that here was the perfect environment in which to spend time thinking about the true requirements of a project, without pressure of any kind. It was in this setting that the framework for these two projects was developed.

The first job was KABC-TV, Channel 7, Los Angeles, the West Coast flagship station for ABC-TV. Two news studios were constructed on an existing Disney property in Glendale, California. The two studios, mirror images of each other, were approximately 80' x 100' each. Strand Lighting was selected to engineer and manufacture the dimming and control systems for both studios, and provide a comprehensive lighting instrument and spares package. Each studio was specified with over 500 channels of CD80SV dimmers with intelligent feedback, along with Strand's award-winning 550i control console and a distributed DMX backbone.

Strand also supplied several additional systems throughout the facility, including dimming and control systems for a 70' x 70' newsroom, as well as controls in miscellaneous news-desks, edit suites and control rooms.

Mr Russell also specified motorized grid systems for each studio, together with a third in the Newsroom. Each studio grid consisted of 15 independently motorised pods, allowing maximum flexibility in both set and lighting design. The grid systems were engineered, furnished and installed by Stagecraft Industries of Portland, Oregon. ABC-TV remarked that the close relationship between Strand and Stagecraft was a significant factor in producing a well-coordinated and effective installation. Sasco Electric, the installing contractor, was pleased with the Owner's selection of Strand Lighting for this job. Strand Lighting, according to Sasco, is a contractor-oriented manufacturer, with fast response, good documentation and the best-designed equipment.

The entire project was managed by Forman and Associates, the Strand Lighting Representative in Los Angeles.

In contrast to the massive engineering scope and financial commitment of the KABC-TV project, Mr Russell also gave

me his views on another of his jobs - The Center for Early Education, in West Hollywood, California, is a small school, with perhaps 450 pupils. However, like many schools today, CEE suffers from significant financial pressures. Therefore, one constraint on the consultant is to provide a system that is relevant to future technology, and meets a very tight budget requirement.

Strand Lighting was able to engineer a system, meeting all of the project criteria, and yet within the budget. After careful evaluation of many products, Strand Lighting CD80SV dimming and a 300 Series console were selected. An independent house lighting control system was included. There is even sufficient room in the system to allow for future expansion as the school's needs grow.



The school is particularly pleased that Norman's design allows for a full proscenium stage, including two front-of-house electrics, even within the confines of a multi-purpose room. A clever arrangement of roll-out bleachers provides a traditional raked audience seating area. All of this in a multi-purpose space that is also used for basketball!

One service that Norman offers, unique in the industry, is "Stage Lighting 101". While Strand Lighting is very proficient at teaching new users how to the most out of their equipment, Norman produces a short seminar on the techniques of how stage lighting can be used in various scenarios. Strand Lighting products, being extremely versatile, are ideally suited to this type of seminar, where student skills may vary widely. The CEE students were particularly impressed at the ability of the Strand SL lens barrel to rotate through 360 degrees, a design unique to Strand. The installing contractor, who also attended Norman's seminar, said that Strand Lighting and the local representative, Forman and Associates, "always came through" during the construction process.

Interestingly, Norman noted over lunch that in some ways projects like KABC-TV are "easier" to conceptualize and specify, than those like CEE, where much has to be accomplished with less.

Two projects, two different sets of goals, two budgets, but one common thread - the vision of Norman Russell.