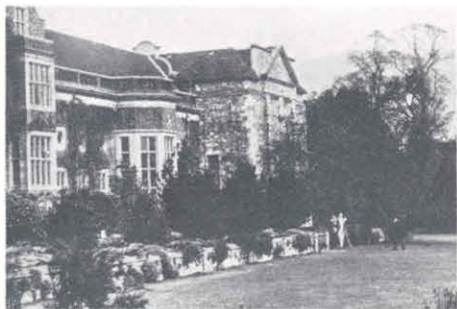


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Styling the Light



Glyndebourne Festival Opera was founded in 1934 by John Christie and his wife, the soprano Audrey Mildmay. They extended their Sussex manor house to include an opera theatre, and engaged Fritz Busch and Carl Ebert to undertake the artistic direction. From the very first performance, Glyndebourne set new standards in musical and acting ensemble. The original opera house (above) had no fly tower and restricted wing space, but continual development has produced an opera house complex with every facility for performance and rehearsal. Yet, as our cover photograph indicates, all this has been achieved in harmonic sympathy with the pastoral idyll of an English country garden. (Cover photograph by Guy Gravett.)

Accent, Atmosphere, Blending, Composition, Concentration, Dimension, Distribution, Emotion, Fluidity, Illumination, Location, Modelling, Mood, Motivation, Orchestration, Painting, Perception, Plasticity, Progression, Punctuation, Selectivity, Texture and Toning.

These are just some of the many words used to describe what stage lighting is about. Most of them mean something. Many of them mean the same thing. Away from a specific production all of them mean nothing.

Except *illumination*—the audience always have to see. But any other function of light is optional—the result of a conscious choice. A choice determined by the role that lighting will play in the production *style*.

Style is not a garnish to be applied from conveniently labelled sauce bottles. Style is not added but grows from within. Style reveals itself in a mass of integrated details which, meaningless by themselves, unite together to give a clarity of approach.

There are two parts to the lighting process: conception and realisation. Before any decisions can be taken about where the hardware should be placed and pointed, it is necessary to ask the fundamental question *What is light doing for us in this production?* The answer—provided by agreement between Director, Choreographer, Designer and Lighting Designer—does not come easily. There is probably no more effective instant conversation-stopper than the question “What is light doing for us in this production?” inserted into the average production conference.

Indeed, the what-is-lighting-doing question is probably not one ever to be asked aloud. Rather it is a question for the lighting designer's check-list. The major part of the lighting design process does not take place anywhere near the stage. The tools of lighting design are not spotlights and switchboards but papers, pencils, erasers and coffee cups. There is a lot of staring into space involved and these are the moments of self-questioning. Asking the questions and providing an answer from a distillation of all the clues and hints that have been absorbed by looking, listening and asking at discussions and rehearsals. Ideally the

questions are broken down until they become answerable by yes or no, but more often the answer is not the black/white of yes/no but the grey that leads to decision as a result of the defining of priorities.

All this depends on the assumption that any script can be realised for performance in a number of alternative styles. Alas, some directors and some designers have a doctrinaire attitude to style and perhaps it is a sign of the coming of age of lighting design that one or two practitioners have developed a similarly rigid approach.

There is also, unfortunately, some geographical rigidity in style. Anglo-American lighting favours the sonority of a large orchestra of small fixed tinted instruments. Central Europe prefers the more positive statement from a smaller soloist group of manned large instruments. And parts of Eastern Europe have a fondness for the choir of massed beamlights. Cross-fertilisation could yield universal benefits in moving towards more stylistically appropriate lighting.

Where does the lighting designer look for style clues? Period, perhaps. And setting. And movement. Directors remarks may, just may, provide a hint (Howard Bay has summarised a certain type of these delightfully, if a touch cynically, as “I See It All Sort of Underwater” and “A Fragile Dream in the Mind's Eye of Dierdre”). But basically it is a matter of absorbing the script and absorbing the discussions and absorbing the rehearsals. Then making suggestions. And suggesting alternatives to these suggestions. And simplifying. Simplicity is often the road to clarity.

The concept must come before the realisation. But the two interact and so the developing concept must be referred from time to time against the available resources. How much, how many, and how long. The concept that cannot be communicated for want of resources for an adequate realisation is stillborn.

The recipe will be a mixture of illumination adjectives. Everyone to their own adjectives, but the Editor's choice is *fluid selective atmospheric dimensional illumination*. How much (if any) of each of these goes into the mix must be derived from the development of a style concept that will give any particular production its characteristic stylistic unity.

Editor: Francis Reid

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