



Shakespeare-on-Sea . . .

A beach-themed *Twelfth Night* might challenge even the most prolific of lighting designers. Here's how David Eversfield created the look . . .



Lighting designer
David Eversfield.

New Zealand - Working on a sun-kissed beach that stretches out to the horizon was a welcome break from the outside chills of an Auckland winter in August. In the middle of the Auckland Theatre Company's Winter Season, New Zealand director Michael Hurst utilised the Kiwi association of Christmas time with hot summer sun, barbeques and beaches to bring Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to life on stage. The challenge for the creative team was to achieve this in The Maidment Theatre with a stage just 17m wide by 8.5m deep.

Designer John Verryt's set consisted of a beach, the sky and the sea. At the front of stage a steeply-raked 'sand' floor which curved off upstage to disappear into the horizon; in actuality, a painted sky cloth hung on the back wall of the theatre just a metre away. Squeezed in between, a 3m high flat created the sea and served as a crossover space for the actors. As there were no substantial set changes in a performance of two hours, most of the visual dynamics of the show were to lie in the hands of lighting designer David Eversfield.

"The most enticing area for me to light was always going to be the Sky. I chose fittings that would provide me with a wide palette so as to create as many weather conditions and aspects of time as possible," said Eversfield. "By placing the right lights in the right places on my plan it allows the really fun stuff to happen during the plot session. Since Michael Hurst also enjoys this creative process, I like to have some surprises up my sleeve to keep the sessions ticking along. This time they would be on the sky," he said.

There were serious spatial constraints on lighting the sky cloth. The groundrow mounted in the back of the Sea flat were only 1.2m from the back wall, so the units would need to be very close together to provide an even coverage. Using Selecon Acclaim Cyc units Eversfield was able to achieve a four-

colour (Rosco #25, Lee 107, Lee 147 and Lee 174) wash up the Sky cloth, useful for touching in colour at the horizon, particularly for sunsets and dawns.

From above there were Selecon Aurora Cycs in three different blues (Rosco #68, Lee 202 and Lee 119) that gave a rich, saturated depth to the sky. There was enough intensity on the Sky that it was never overpowered by the general stage lighting.

Realistic cloud effects can be challenging. Owing to hanging constraints, Eversfield could only project clouds onto the cloth from oblique angles, and although this is great for turning any linear gobo into wispy stratus clouds, it presents something of a problem for achieving rather more bulbous cumulous clouds. A quick session in Photoshop, stretching a few simple shapes and skewing them to keystone correct for the angles in the venue, resulted in custom gobos which were ideal for this application.

Eversfield explains further: "I didn't attempt to copy on stage what our sun produces so wonderfully from eight light minutes away, but it did give me clues when choosing the type of lamps that would be useful in sculpting a sunset. As our sun disappears over the horizon it lights the underside of clouds and colours them differently from the sky behind. Those colours fade faster on clouds higher in the sky and slower on those closer to the horizon. Scrolling gel wouldn't be subtle enough for these colour changes so I chose Martin MAC 2000 Performance lights for their CMY colour mixing. Additionally, the MAC 2Ks proved appropriate as their wide zoom and added beam expander provided good coverage for the short throw distances of the venue. The end result was subtle enough, and I feel Mother Nature would be very pleased with how it turned out."

Using the MAC 2Ks solely as cloud projectors may seem extravagant, but David justifies their use by having the animation wheel ripple waves on the sea flat. Finding the optimum position to hang the lights for both cloud and wave projection was made easier using some pre-visualisation software.

"The theatre and set were already modelled in 3D with Vectorworks Spotlight, so I could create my light plot. I placed the MAC 2K performances where I thought they might be useful then exported the file to ESP-Vision. There, I could control the moving lights in real time and see how well they worked for the tasks I had planned for them. ESP-Vision allows full visualisation of all attributes of the fittings, so I was able to trial my custom cloud gobos as well as view the animation wheel rippling away on the sea flat. Experimentation within these programmes allowed me to pinpoint optimum position to hang the lights for maximal use."

Set design presented Eversfield with another challenge when considering the general stage cover. The curved stage, made out of polystyrene, would make accessing the overstage lamps rather difficult. The tight hanging plot made the use of a bosun's-chair for focus impractical and using the hand-powered winch LX-bars would have made him quite unpopular should he have attempted a bounce focus. He explains how he solved this dilemma: "I settled for focusing to a grid before the set went in, so specified Selecon Rama FFT lens luminaires to speed this process along. The Ramas have scales on the yoke for degrees of pan and tilt, while the body is marked with a beam angle scale. By specifying the beam angle I now have a Fresnel with all the efficiency of fixed beam fittings and the pan/tilt scales can be pre-focused before the bar is flown out."

To position his fixtures, Eversfield used a plug-in for Vectorworks called BeamDraw, which allows him to view all his work in 3D - work that he used to do in a sectional view by hand. He can specify a beam angle and it will draw a light cone from his hanging position. By copying and pasting these along the bars David gets a guide for the optimal position of his fittings. Using the Spotlight library in Vectorworks he can then drip the symbols at the ends of the light cones providing all the information required for pre-focusing the Ramas. This process created instrument schedule paperwork that was a little unconventional as it included three additional columns for degrees of Pan, Tilt and Beam Angle/Zoom. But the results were impressive.

"The Ramas just required the barndoor cuts to be set and only very minor tweaking during the focus session. The initial effort of calculating the angles of the Ramas before arriving at the venue saved time during the focus and gave an alternative solution when overstage access was obstructed. Using visualisation software to pre-program moving lights is a standard industry tool; being able to pre-focus my conventionals is an exciting new development," says Eversfield.

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