

Uniquely Showlight



The best professional show lighting conference in the world took place in Český Krumlov in May 2013. Lee Baldock joined the mix . . .

If you have never attended a Showlight event, I would urge you to make sure you don't miss the opportunity next time. Showlight is special. It happens only once every four years, and its location depends largely on that of its essential main sponsor: this time around, with Robe taking that role, it took place in the beautiful surroundings of Český Krumlov - a World Heritage site in the south of the Czech Republic.

Showlight is part trade show, part networking event and even part tourism (the social aspect continues on various coach trips), with all those elements pinned to a backbone of conference papers presented over three days. It's a relatively small event: around 200 delegates mixed with exhibitors, Showlight committee members, speakers and staff from the Robe team, totalling around 400 people in all, from 35 countries. And that mix includes everyone from young students, through technicians, manufacturers and consultants, to multi-award-winning lighting designers. What's more, it really is a *mix*, because the Showlight audience stays together. The exhibitor-sponsored dinners, the ample breaks between papers and the coach tours give those students a real opportunity to meet with and speak with the established professionals.

As Showlight committee chairman Ian Dow states elsewhere in this issue, Showlight *shouldn't* exist. A not-for-profit event which relies on a large volunteer force for its organisation, a generous main sponsor (who doesn't mind having their competitors along for the party) and also a group of exhibitors (who must sponsor a student to attend) for its funding, and a phalanx of industry expert speakers (who receive no fee) for its intellectual content. However, what every one of those students, manufacturers, speakers and delegates get from the event is an unrivalled, shared networking experience and a valuable opportunity to see various light and lighting issues from new and diverse perspectives.

That breadth of perspective was demonstrated on Day 1's sessions, which began with Tim Routledge's account of operating the lighting for the 2012 London Olympics Ceremonies. This was followed by Frieder Hochheim's look at the history of Kino Flo Lighting Systems through the 1980s and '90s, and at the new challenges arising from LED technology. Icelandic designer Fridthjofur Thorsteinsson then discussed the viability of 'design led performance'. Later, Danielle Feinberg delivered one of the most talked-about sessions of the day, *From Pixels to Pictures: The Cinematography of Pixar's Films*. Her insight into the process of lighting for animated films - such as *Brave* and *Wall.E* - fascinated everyone who saw it. Sadly, I wasn't one of them, as I didn't arrive in Český Krumlov until that evening (having been busy representing the UK at *Eurovision*: see next issue . . .).



From top: The spectacular venue for the 2013 conference.

Don Holder presents 'How *Spiderman* prepared me for *Smash*'.

Victoria Coeln reveals how 'Colour is a Gift of Light'.



Top: Lighting designer Jeff Ravitz takes the mic during a Q&A session.



Above: Durham Marengi presents 'Lighting the Diamond Jubilee Concert'.

Other sessions included Alfred Sturla Bodvarsson, the man responsible for designing set and lighting for Iceland's versions of shows like *Pop Idol*, *X Factor* and *MasterChef*, who discussed how he keeps designs fresh when his budget is (like his viewing public) relatively tiny. Later, LDs Beverly Emmons and Ken Billington discussed the Lighting Archives, a project designed to preserve leading lighting design documentation for future generations. This was followed by Jim Tetlow (himself a Showlight committee member) of Nautilus Entertainment Design, Fred Foster of ETC, Ryan Fletcher of ARRI and Fabiano Besio of LDR discussing the use and misuse of LED fixtures.

Come Sunday evening, and each Showlight exhibitor hosts a dinner, for 10-12 people, at a restaurant in the town. Everyone attends one of the dinners - there's no sliding off to do your own thing - and the atmosphere is informal and inclusive. And of course, for those who are *really* dedicated to networking, there were other venues in town which could carry on through the small hours.

Monday saw another diverse collection of papers. Austrian light artist Victoria Coeln demonstrated some of her beautiful lighting techniques using etched glass and colour media; Wayne Howell of Artistic Licence discussed the present and future of lighting control, before leaving the audience with the spectre of LiFi data transmission technology and the declaration that in five years this would be "the most important data transfer system that any of us has ever heard of". Expect more on that subject in a future LSi.

Back to design issues, and Don Holder gave a brilliant account of the tortuous creative process behind the troubled Broadway production of *Spider-Man: Turn off the Dark*. He was followed by Bernie Davis' excellent insight into lighting stage performance for camera - citing his work with the National Theatre's NT Live shows. Durham Marengi described his design for one of 2012's memorable moments, the Diamond Jubilee Concert, followed by Professor Christopher Baugh who discussed the work of legendary Czech lighting designer, Josef Svoboda.

Switching perspectives again, Zoi Katsarou, an architect from Greece, discussed approaches to social lighting, with examples

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Clockwise, from above:

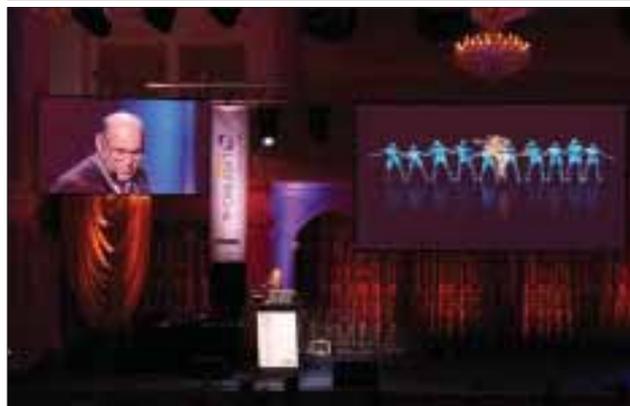
'It was OK before they added water,' presented by David Gray.

Wayne Howell discusses the future of lighting control in 'Lighting the Future'.

Katharine Williams discusses art versus practicality in concept-driven design during 'Committing to Concept'.

Main sponsor Robe treated delegates to a spectacular candle-lit finale in the castle gardens (photo: Louise Stickland).

Avi Yona Bueno (a.k.a. Bambi) discussed lighting opera at the foot of the Masada Mountain.



Student Comments:

Baruch Shpigelman (Israel), sponsored by Canara Lighting Industries:

"The business outside of Israel is very new to me, and it was great to see all these companies that I knew by name, and to meet them face-to-face - and also to get to meet a lot of great lighting designers . . . it's opened a lot of doors for me."

Sophie Rose Sussex (UK), sponsored by GDS:

"Meeting people has been the big thing for me - all these people who you look up to, and they're just chatting away to you . . . the networking has been great. I've been given a few opportunities for working with people and visiting companies to learn more."

Adrian Sandvaer (Norway), sponsored by Martin Professional:

"We are here because companies sponsored us . . . so we need to tell them, 'thank you'. We are very grateful for the opportunity that they have given us."



Some of the students attending Showlight 2013, L-R: Adrian Sandvaer (sponsored by Martin Professional), Katie Blacker (sponsored by Premier Lighting Products International), Sophie Rose Sussex (sponsored by GDS), Dorthe Wing Anderson (sponsored by Chauvet Europe), Baruch Shpigelman (sponsored by Canara Lighting Industries), and Jack Elsley (who attended as a delegate). Dorthe Wing Anderson studies at Central School of Speech and Drama: all the others pictured here are students at Rose Bruford.



from the Social Light Movement's work in the Hjulsta suburb of Stockholm; Martin Lupton talked about lighting design in the context of light pollution, with his paper on *Noche Zero: Our Time to Embrace Darkness*. David Gray then entertained with the ups and downs (and round-and-rounds) of designing lighting for the huge Yas Waterworld in Abu Dhabi. He was followed by LD Katharine Williams, who explored the pros and cons of concept-driven design.

Dare to Light, a group from Estonia offering 'lighting workshops for non-technical professionals', used music and satire to make the point that communication between the technical and the creative is key to a successful lighting design. Next up was visual designer Tupac Martir, whose energetic presentation on *Nierka* - a multidisciplinary show written, directed and lit by Martir - made sure none of the wilting delegates nodded off during Day 3's after-lunch session. The final paper was presented by Israeli lighting designer Avi Yona Bueno - better known as 'Bambi' - who, despite being beset by nerves and technical gremlins, charmed and amused everyone with his presentation on the hugely impressive staging of opera productions in front of the Masada Mountain.

Closing the event was the legendary, hilarious US television lighting director Bill Klages, who discussed his early career at NBC in the 1950s, and had plenty to say about many things, including HD lighting . . .

As always, this Showlight event owed much to its organising committee and all its supporters, but chief among them has to be the main sponsor Robe, and the determination of its CEO Josef Valchar, who remained committed, through several years of preparation, to bringing Showlight to Český Krumlov - one of the jewels of his home country.

Following the article in our last issue in which Pio Nahum from Clay Paky called for united industry action against product counterfeiting, it should be noted here that Josef Valchar took the opportunity provided by the Showlight gala dinner on the Monday evening to speak on the same subject: clearly this is the issue most exercising the minds of business leaders in professional lighting manufacturing right now.

After dinner, delegates walked up to the ornate castle gardens, where several thousand lit candles had been positioned around the grounds in a stunning recreation of the baroque entertainments of previous centuries, and where a fireworks display marked the climax of the 2013 event - one which all those who attended will remember for many years to come.

Showlight is an extraordinary conference, and should stand as a model for all business sectors which might benefit from a nurturing and inclusive



event, where the young mix with the old pros, where everyone shares their time and their knowledge, and everyone leaves having learned something . . .
 > www.showlight.org



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- Rudiger Benz (lighting designer)
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Veteran BBC lighting man (and Showlight chairman) Ian Dow recalls Showlight 2013, in Český Krumlov . . .

"... delegates were led outside to see the castle gardens outlined with the baroque version of moving lights: 2,800 candles made from an ancient wax recipe contained in pots which had been hand-made by the castle staff."

Showlight 2013 brought lighting practitioners from across the world to Český Krumlov in the Czech Republic to listen and learn. And learn they did . . . Always have a spare pair of shoes; never order potato dumplings and bread dumplings in the same meal; if you stand and look intently at a drainpipe a party of Japanese tourists will photograph it; and if your bus has a puncture, ensure Durham Marengi is on board in case the driver doesn't know how to change the wheel.

Josef Valchar, CEO of Robe Lighting, the main sponsor for this year's Showlight, inspired us to bring Showlight to the Riding Hall of the medieval castle in this UNESCO World Heritage site. This is a large building where horses once exercised in the winter - but horses didn't need raked seating, stage lighting, a PA system, cameras, or lighting trusses squeezed between the 18 chandeliers!

Josef promised that the Czech weather each May guaranteed us a warm and dry evening for the Gala Dinner in the castle gardens. In May 2011 we crouched under umbrellas wearing coats, scarves and gloves. In May 2012 we were driven out of the open air theatre by a thunder storm, with rain so torrential that the steep hill to the town became a river filling our shoes to the brim, which led to the disturbing sight of Showlight treasurer Mark White in the cocktail bar of our 4-star hotel in his bare feet, like a refugee from a stag party. And why did each of the 400 Robe goody bags contain an umbrella?

During the cold war, Prague was a centre of spying and intrigue, and I felt nervous standing alone under the clock in Prague's Central Station for a clandestine liaison to brief a young girl I'd never met. Jiri Baros of Robe had offered his sister's help to interpret for our committee members at the Showlight desk at Prague Airport. Wary of being arrested for approaching lone girls I waited for the appointed time and dialled Adela's mobile. Yards away a beautiful young lady in white knee length boots, trench coat collar turned up, reached into her handbag for a phone - and I was able to whisper "I'm behind you!" Any offers to audition for the next Bond film would be gratefully received.

As Chairman, I know Showlight shouldn't exist. A conference and exhibition run by volunteers with no formal training; Robe as a main sponsor who simply hand over the money and walk away, with no say in the content of the papers; and 31 speakers who come from across the world and receive no fee.

We obtained three cameras and video gear following a chance contact in a pub with two ex-BBC OB cameramen who agreed that an expenses-paid

trip to a castle in the Czech Republic sounded good fun. Their cameras were operated by young Czech theatre design students, some of whom had very little English, so needed a drawing illustrating the shots required, with arrows for pan left, tilt up, and all the other strange phrases used by TV directors.

Where else but in our lighting community could we entice 37 exhibitors to come along with little hope of selling anything, and to have Robe's competitors Clay Paky and Martin Professional sponsoring the Welcome Evening and speaker travel? White Light drove a truck from the UK and offered space on board to other UK exhibitors, as well as bringing "a small amount of AV gear and some admin bits for the Showlight team" - and when this turned out to be 12 heavy flightcases, they simply upgraded the truck to an 18 tonner.

A lighting exhibition should have some light, but checking the marquee before the exhibitors arrived we realised it was very dark, due to a misunderstanding over who provided the lights. Try explaining to a man in the Czech version of B&Q that you really do want to buy 20 halogen floods, and all the cables and connectors that go with them.

The papers will be covered elsewhere in this venerable magazine by a professional scribe. But I must mention the ending of David Gray's talk on the prodigious challenges of lighting a water park in the desert. The proud father videos his daughter's first ride down the tunnels to show her what he has achieved, and as they splash out in the open air at the end of the ride he waits for his daughter's reaction. "I didn't see anything!"

Following the Gala Dinner, delegates were led outside to see the castle gardens outlined

with the baroque version of moving lights: 2,800 candles made from an ancient wax recipe contained in pots which had been hand-made by the castle staff. No batteries, no cables, no DMX or RDM, just 16 "sparks" with many boxes of matches to create the effect - but don't ask for a quick blackout! As the wind rippled through the candles the effect created could have taken days to programme in our electronic world.

Come time to go home, I couldn't find my passport. A policeman explained that it was stolen the process would take two hours, whereas if I had lost it, that would take half an hour. "OK, I've lost it," I said. The British Embassy were shutting early for staff training, so we rushed to get the next train to Prague. I had written a comprehensive guide for anyone travelling by train - and should have read it myself. I knew first class was the front coach, and pulling my suitcase along the platform, eyes down, I sensed the change of coach colour. I manhandled our four bags up the steps into the train, then helped my wife aboard - and found we were in the baggage car!

The British Embassy in Prague is not in a leafy square, but in a side street so narrow we couldn't get the taxi doors open, and had to reverse to get out. One would have thought that the embassy would own a camera, but I was sent to a Fuji photo shop where a young lady makes a good living photographing tourists who have lost their passports.

Those of you who travel regularly will know this, but it is well worth carrying separately a photocopy of your passport and a photo - and having £95 to hand to obtain a "one use only" passport which is then snatched out of your hand at Heathrow and dumped in a bin!