

High efficiency ETC lighting at London's Arcola



UK - Through dealer White Light, lighting manufacturer ETC has installed lighting at London's Arcola Theatre in Hackney. But the installation was the easy bit for the theatre. The difficult bit was keeping the show's peak power consumption below 4.5kW. And the reason why they had to do that was because the venue has recently had a hydrogen fuel cell installed, as part of its bid to become the world's first carbon neutral theatre.

ETC's technical director Adam Bennette, who happens to live just a couple of streets from the theatre, assisted with the installation, which includes nine 375W ETC Source Fours and a SmartFade ML control desk - which is also able to control the LED and fluorescent lighting on the show. "I have a pet hate of West End shows which are over lit and can even end up dazzling the audience," explains Bennette. "So it was nice to be able to work on a show in which we had to make the lighting work really effectively.

"There is still no alternative to tungsten lighting for getting the right skin tones for actors on stage, but LED and fluorescent works well for wash and effects and makes a little power go a long way. Because you'll never get all the lighting on at the same time, the show uses no more power than a three-bar electric fire."

Dr Ben Todd, executive director at the Arcola Theatre, who spent 10 years studying alternative technologies, including obtaining a PhD in fuel cells, before moving into the theatre, says, "The motivation for using this technology is to demonstrate that theatres can light shows on a budget. The cell, while not carbon neutral, proves the technology works. It also gives us a power limit; we've got a very real understanding of how much power is being consumed. That's a far greater motivator than simply giving a designer an artificial limit."

The first show to be powered by the fuel cell is Simple8's *The Living Unknown Soldier*, produced by Strawberry Vale Productions, and the environmental impact of all aspects of the production have been minimised, including set construction, marketing, company travel and show lighting. The production's environmental footprint will be evaluated by leading sustainability advisers Global Action Plan and the lessons learned published for the benefit of other practitioners.

(Jim Evans) (11 March 2008)

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