The Rules of the Road

The latest edition of a respected text covers all aspects of lighting for concert touring

By: Sharon Stancavage

Concert Lighting, Third Edition: Techniques, Art, and Business. By Dr. James Moody, with contributing writer Paul Dexter. Focal Press, 2010. Softcover: 352 pages. Available at www.focalpress.com and www.amazon.com.

For many, the premier book on the concert lighting industry is Concert Lighting: Techniques, Art and Business. The book, originally published in 1989, is now in its third edition, and includes chapters on media servers, LEDs, and software programs, as well as the nuts and bolts of designing.

The book is divided into four sections: "Background and Organization," "Equipment Designed to Travel," "Designing with Touring Equipment," and "The After-Word." The first two comprise the bulk of the book while the third, which features interviews from leading designers as well as artists, is much too short. "The After-Word'" is indeed a little more than a page exploring the future of the industry and could have been included as a postscript.
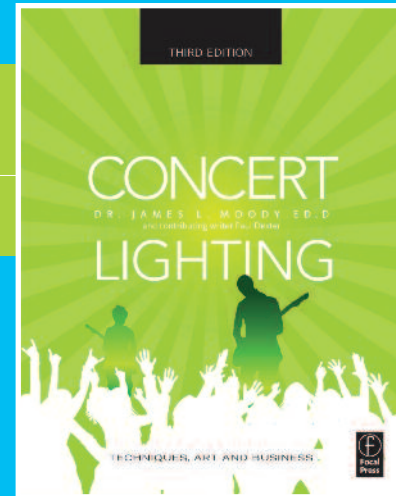
"Background and Organization" begins with an in-depth history of the concert industry, then moves into lighting design and the business aspects of freelance work. There's also a chapter on tour personnel and unions, as well as a catchall chapter entitled "Finding Solutions" that covers a variety of potential problems that designers might confront.

The authors explore careers on tour in the chapter "Road Life." They give an honest look at what a lighting designer or technician will go through on the road; they also remind us that "the road is not for everyone, and, in most cases, the road will choose you." They discuss such unglamorous facts of life as transportation and the average work day on the road, dispelling the idea that it's all about hanging out with the band and meeting women.

Following "Road Life" is the chapter titled "Working Outside the United States." It's one of the most entertaining portions in the book and gives the reader a plethora of useful and amusing information. Who would have known that learning the phrase "No, no, let's not speak Italian [or German, etc.] today. Why don't we practice our English" in a native foreign accent can actually convince a local crew in Europe that you're fluent in their language and encourage their cooperation? And what American would imagine that, in Japan, crews don't get set break times or minimum guaranteed hours?

From there the book moves into "Risk Assessment and Safety." The authors provide a great deal of real-world safety advice, and give ample examples in which something went wrong in real life and why. They cover the Justin Timberlake-Christina Aguilera rig collapse in 2003, as well as the Rocklahoma truss collapse in 2008. The accidents were very different, and, although safety concerns have come to the forefront in the last decade or so, there is still obviously room for improvement. Moody and Dexter give designers and technicians practical advice on how to keep everyone involved in a live production safe.

The most comprehensive portion of the book is "Equipment Designed to Travel," which essentially covers gear. The chapters include lighting trusses, lifts, hoists and roofs, and portable dimming and distribution systems, as well as pyro. There are many photos and easy-to-understand diagrams throughout this section.

If you're a luminaire gearhead, Moody and Dexter have you covered. Units of every shape, size, and price—both conventional and automated—are featured. The "LED Units" chapter is well-written and informative, as is the chapter on moving lights. This section also introduces readers to a wide variety of lighting consoles, from the low-fuss consoles one might find in a college theatre to the high-end boards that readers will find on tour right now.

Moody and Dexter also make it easy for readers to find more infor-

mation on specific pieces of gear—they include extensive manufactu websites in easy-to-find boxes. There are also numerous diagrams, photos, and a glossary, although I'm fairly certain that most people know the definition of "groupie."

"Designing with Touring Equipment" is dedicated to working in the real world. It includes interviews with working lighting designers, as well as some of their clients. This is one of the strongest sections of the book, and gives readers an honest look inside the concert world. It's informative, entertaining, and yet it seems a bit too short.

Although the book can indeed be read cover to cover, the organization of the chapters is a little arbitrary. The chapters are essentially self-contained, and indeed, could be read in any order. Some information is obviously for the lighting industry tyro, while other information (such as the chapter of lighting for video) may be more useful for those who are farther along in their careers. (As the authors note in the accompanying interview, it can be treated as a reference work that you dip in and out of as needed.)

Like the industry, the book *Concert Lighting Techniques, Art and Business* has changed over the years. The update is a very welcome addition to the written world of lighting textbooks. ꭥ

James Moody

Talking to the Authors

Lighting&Sound America wanted to know more about *Concert Lighting: Techniques, Art and Business*, so we went straight to the authors, Dr. James Moody and Paul Dexter.

LSA: Who would benefit most from reading *Concert Lighting: Techniques, Art, and Business*?

James Moody: My intent, from the first edition, was to provide help in understanding this newest of theatrical fields for current students, graduate students specializing in lighting, as well as young professionals. At that time, no school taught this type of lighting. Over the years, especially after the second edition, some schools started classes, or at least encouraged students interested in a concert career to check out the book.

Paul Dexter: The breadth of information pertains to anyone involved in concert touring. As objective as I can be, it's an interesting read. Each person can determine what he or she wants from the book; either read it thoroughly, peruse the parts that do not particularly pertain to you, or have it on hand to use as a reference. There is a section that defines each position on the road and those working on the fringes of road life. We identified about 30 total positions for the largest tours. All positions equal one team per tour, and all of those people should understand what each other's positions are to effectively interface with one another—and to show consideration and respect for the other positions, too.

This will probably be deemed a utopian wish but, if you're sensitive to your fellow road crew's responsibilities, the result will be a cohesive team and road life will be far more enjoyable. This book would also benefit the stage lighting student or new concert lighting designer who yearns to know more. It's particularly good for them, because it dispels the notion that life

on the road is glamorous—but it also tells you what to look out for and how rewarding it can be.

LSA: What do each of you feel has been the single biggest change in the concert lighting industry, outside of the use of LEDs, since the second edition?

JM: Bigger! Brighter! The term "fat light," which we use in the book, is now widely used to describe luminaires such as the SHOWGUN 2.5 by High End Systems, or the Bad Boy by PRG, or the LittleBig Lite by Zap Technology, all of which have tremendous output.

PD: Probably media servers. The ability to incorporate graphics and movie clips using DMX control through a lighting console is the most prevalent new power that has been handed to the lighting designer/director. Thank you, Richard Belliveau.

LSA: Why was it important to include the history of the industry?

JM: I felt from the start that, if we were to become a lasting part of the entertainment industry, there needed to be history. Don't people always say we succeed or fail largely on how we take into account our past history? History repeats itself, and I wanted the lessons I had learned to be used as a jumping-off point. I tried to be very clear and often admitted to mistakes because I want the reader to learn from the history. The industry has certainly built on what we have learned these past 40 years, becoming a superpower in the entertainment business. Look at how many of the original companies are now owned by Fortune 500 corporations. Of course, in the future we will write about what

that phase has taught us, too!

LSA: What didn't you include in the book? Why?

JM: I wrote a chapter on Hispanic television and how they embraced concert lighting techniques almost before anyone outside touring. The use of color and smoke extends even to their regular programming. I admire that boldness greatly, and I wanted to celebrate it. However, the page count caught up with us. I'd also like to see more interviews with seasoned crew members so they can talk, as the designers and artists did, about what the road is really like. We do include some of this, but I think Paul should expand on it in the next edition.

LSA: Chapter 20 covers protocol, control, and ancillary enablers. Why is this information important?

PD: The operative word in that trio is "control." What with moving luminaires that have 20 or 30 attributes each in a system that may have 40, 70 or 100 of them, plus LED walls, digital lights, media servers, strobes, effects, and hazers, touring shows are using four, eight, or more DMX universes (of 512 channels each). Protocol consists of advancements in computer technology that are being applied to lighting control in order to efficiently package and manage all this information. Before long, ACN could replace DMX as the concert lighting's standard protocol, mainly because ACN is a suite of networks designed to transport data in bigger packages as opposed to signals. This is a basic explanation of a complicated subject that is, of course, explored far more in the book. The information is important because this technology is part of our growing arsenal. It makes us far more efficient with control of lighting, media, and, therefore, business.

LSA: Chapter 26 covers music videos, film, DVDs and long-form production. Is this an area that most lighting designers will venture into?

PD: I think so. Carpe diem! If you're going to make money in this business—diversify; don't specialize. Particularly in concert lighting, chances are that, sooner or later, the video crews will show up. If you're an LD on the tour, the video director or film lighting director will come to you straightaway to see if your lighting will be enough to satisfy their needs. It will either be interpreted as a space invasion, or you can put out the welcome mat and accommodate their needs. I think that for a concert lighting designer or director, it is an organic progression to work with film and long-form video crews—and it will make you that much more valuable in your career.

LSA: In the end, what do you want the reader to take with him or her after reading *Concert Lighting: Techniques, Art and Business*?

JM: Take and use what works, and remember what is bad so you don't repeat our mistakes. Remember, we learn more from failure than success.

PD: That they have purchased a reference book. This is not a novel or something that, after one read, you can fully comprehend and instantly use in practice; it's too vast. In any profession—a lawyer, realtor or architectural lighting designer—you may not know the answer to a present problem or, a specific product that will suit the job, but you do know where to get information to make a decision. Now the concert lighting industry has a book that they can take off the shelf and use as a reference. It is probably the most comprehensive book on concert lighting out there today.

LSA: Is there anything else you'd like readers to know about the book?

JM: Just that I am constantly amazed that another book has not been written specifically on concert lighting. Yes, there are several that discuss moving luminaires in depth, but not the history or workings of touring.

Paul Dexter

That's one reason it was so long between editions; I just assumed someone else would jump in. What I am most pleased with is how much people have looked forward to the update and how hard Paul and I worked to bring them the best, most up-to-date, book possible, in spite of a rapidly changing market. And lastly, don't think the story ends here. The market is changing everyday; a good designer must keep up by reading trade magazines, seeing other people's work, and going to trade shows and making connections.

PD: For the very first time in a technical publication, we have expanded the art section by interviewing three, multi-platinum working recording artists with their perspectives on production, interfacing with an LD, and how lighting and effects impact their performances: Ronnie James Dio [the lead singer/songwriter for Black Sabbath and Heaven & Hell], Kevin Cronin [the lead singer/songwriter for REO Speedwagon], and Gil Moore [the drummer/singer/songwriter for Triumph]. As you can imagine, the artist lives a completely different lifestyle from the road crew. The interviews are prefaced with how to approach artists and engage them to help you enhance your designs and cues. If you can make the artists happy and involve them in your design and scripting decisions, you will grow as an LD and have long associations with them in your future. ≫