

# Rosco's Keystroke

By: Peter Borchetta

Today's theatre audiences expect big productions, with new and improved effects in every area of technology and design. By contrast, theatre budgets don't usually keep with these demands.

Today, we have yet another new production component: video. Now, it often plays a central role in a production. You can't open a trade magazine without seeing article upon article about video technology, projectors, media servers, or playback programs. All these devices add to the cost of production—for equipment, programmers, operators, technicians, and designers, not to mention the additional time needed for cueing and calling a production. For that reason, it's become difficult for educational and regional theatres to keep up.

Today, most educational theatres—even those in smaller community colleges, high schools, and some grammar schools—are into the digital lighting and dimming system game; similarly, it behooves us to make the newest products available to the future directors, stage managers, designers, and technicians we are training. That means video.

There's one major problem, however, besides the expense of video: It's the difficulty of organizing the calling of a production with added design components. The combined effect of these new technologies can be overwhelming to young, inexperienced stage managers. Most high schools and universities offer stage management courses, but few students get the experience of actually calling a production. It's a skill that takes practice—and the scary part is, you get that practice during live performances.

What if a piece of technology could take some operators out of the loop, or keep them from having to perform simultaneous tasks?



Enter Rosco's Keystroke. It's a simple, ingenious piece of technology; all you need is a DMX console and personal computer or laptop. Technology costs money—right? The price of Keystroke is less than the gel budget of most productions. What Keystroke does is inculcate your DMX lighting console with your PC; thus, the lighting operator can remain the lighting operator. In educational and regional theatre, this is an important function: often, the lighting board operator becomes the video operator as well. Many times, this person needs the hands of a concert pianist to operate a plethora of lighting cues as well as the added video playback. With Keystroke, this problem is solved.

Keystroke is nothing more than a DMX trigger that, when plugged into your DMX console, can activate virtually any attribute of a program running on your PC, at least any attribute that has a corresponding keyboard shortcut. Upon seeing a certain value on an assigned DMX channel, Keystroke performs a user-defined "key press" in the program running on your PC. For example, you can coordinate a Microsoft PowerPoint

presentation with lighting cues. Let's say that every blackout in your show needs to trigger a projection element. On your PC, you create your presentation with slides for each of the projections. On your DMX console, you write lighting cues, including the blackouts. In each blackout, the channel assigned to Keystroke is brought to a certain level; this triggers PowerPoint to advance to the slide with your projection element. Basically, the lighting console calls the cues for your computer, activating specific keyboard commands to run, move, and advance the slides in PowerPoint. The Keystroke software allows the user to assign a DMX address to the USB-connected Keystroke box, and define the "keystrokes" to enter when this DMX channel is activated. Keystroke will accept strings of key presses: simply enter the sequence of keys that you want to trigger. When the assigned channel reaches the correct value, that sequence will run the same way each time.

The video solution is a no-brainer for this technology, as we rely on computer power to display and run our video

projectors. (Keystroke is available for both PCs and Macs, by the way.) But what if you need to run a dance piece in which the music and lighting need to change or stop every 32 beats? If you're running sound off a computer, then Keystroke can step in and solve the operator/stage management dilemma. You can tie Keystroke into your computer and give it simple start and stop commands for the music's playback program; each time you run the lighting cue with it, the sound will stop simultaneously with the lighting cue.

I ran Keystroke with Sony's Acid Pro program and it worked flawlessly. I was also able to trigger specific tracks, and play some of the attributes that this program offers. I tried other programs, such as Windows Media Player, Apple's iTunes, and Sony's Real Media Player. Keystroke didn't miss a beat with any of them. Rosco says you can cue such video playback programs as Keynote and Quicktime, and sound programs like ProTools, iTunes, Garageband, and SFX. (Keystroke isn't just for low-budget productions; it's being used in the Broadway production of *Mary Poppins*, where it triggers a Dataton Watchout system that controls two Barco RLM6+ projectors.)

A smart trigger off of something that we already own—what

a great idea! What if you wanted to do a big moving light show, but didn't have the console to support it or the budget to keep the console through the run of the production? Say you're running a 24-channel conventional console and all but one of your channels are being utilized by dimmers. That last channel could save the show; it could trigger Keystroke to run a "go" button on a PC console with DMX output.

This example seems a little far-fetched, but most of us have done more unusual things to get our shows on. I've been head of technology at a university theatre for 15 years, and when a company comes up with a product to help alleviate the problems we face every day, they deserve kudos. When approached to look at Keystroke, I was skeptical. After playing with it, I realized that it is more than a glorified finger; it's an inexpensive way to solve many production operation problems.

*(Peter Borchetta is production manager, design/technology production and academic program director, technical director, resident lighting designer, and senior adjunct professor to Adelphi University's department of performing arts. He's also a theatrical lighting systems designer and consultant to Robert Lorelli Associates, Inc.)* ☺

## Mark Stanley On R361

*R361, Hemsley Blue, is a new color created in memory of the late Gilbert Hemsley. Rosco will donate proceeds from the sales of this color to the Gilbert Hemsley Lighting Programs. Here's what Mark Stanley, Resident Lighting Designer for the New York City Ballet, Associate Professor at Boston University (and a leading Hemsley protégé) said about the new color:*

**"Gilbert had an extraordinary sense of color and was a particular fan of blues. We needed a blue filter similar to those Gilbert used so often on the older lekos ... but updated**

**for the kind of light we get from Source Fours or other modern fixtures. This new filter is a beautiful cold blue that won't turn muddy when dimmed."**

— Mark Stanley



Rosco added five new colors, including R361 Hemsley Blue, to its Roscolux range in 2006. Be sure you have a current swatchbook on hand.



*R361 accentuated this scene from the Huntington Theatre Company's 2006 production of "Les Liaisons Dangereuses". Seth Fischer (top) and Michael T. Weiss played key roles. Photo © T. Charles Erickson.*



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