

Lighting the Visible Radio Station

By: David Barbour

The streetside studio at WNYC offers public radio, in more ways than one

It's become standard practice for television networks in New York to have a street-level studio with a view. CNN, Fox, *The Today Show*, and *Good Morning America* all attract crowds of tourists each day. A radio station with such an arrangement is another matter entirely; however, WNYC, the city's public radio station, recently opened the Jerome L. Greene Performance Space, which is visible to passersby on Charles and Varick Streets in Greenwich Village.

The 125-seat venue opened early in the spring, not long after WNYC moved into its new home. Although the idea of a visible radio station might seem counterintuitive, Indra Etwaroo, the producer for the Greene Performance Space, says it makes perfect sense: "As a radio station, we were more than ready to come face to face with our New York City public. All of our shows have a web component. In the Greene Space, they can go live, online, with a live video webcast. It really is an opportunity to break outside the traditional walls of radio." Among the shows that are broadcast from the venue are *Evening Music*, with Terrance McKnight and David Garland; the talk show *Soundcheck*, hosted by John Schaefer; *The Brian Lehrer Show*, with its talk/news/call-in format; and *The Leonard Lopate Show*.

The space contains a small stage, theatrical lighting, and a curving zipper sign; however, getting a fully equipped studio in the space was easier said than done. According to Mark London, vice president of systems at Lighting Design Group, the designer of the space's lighting system and repertory performance lighting, "The building had a very limited amount of power and cooling available. To add any



Photo: Courtesy of WNYC

additional electrical or air-conditioning capacity would have involved tremendous expense." He adds that there is 60A single-phase power for lighting the entire space, including the six circuits for house lighting.

Obviously, London adds, low-power gear was indicated: "We were given the challenge of coming up with a lighting design for this multi-purpose room that would be able to service everything from live stage events to town hall meetings to radio broadcasts to webcasts—all with the equivalent of three wall outlets worth of power." He adds, "Michael Steinberg, the project designer, immediately said, 'This is going to be an LED installation.'"

This led to the installation of 30 Elation Lighting Opti Tri Par intelligent RGB color-mixing LED PAR cans. The unit is designed like a theatrical PAR can, but is powered by eighteen 3W LEDs, drawing only 70W. Among the product's selling points, each of its LED lamps is composed of three differently colored LED sources—one red, one green, and one blue. This allows color mixing to be done within each individual lamp, an approach that produces smoother, more even colors and eliminates the multi-color shadows that can be created by RGB fixtures with single-color LED lamps.

"We used the Opti Tri Pars around the perimeter of the

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room to provide ambient color washes on the walls—to give the room some life and color when people see it from the outside when it's not in use," says London. "We also installed a system of the units over the stage, for backlight and sidelight color washes for the performers."

The rest of the studio's rig include three ETC HID Source Four Zooms, 14 Source Four Zooms at 375W, 18 Source Four PARnels at 375W, four De Sisti CST (Ceramic Studio Theatre) Fresnels, four Kino-Flo Parabeam fluorescent studio fixtures, four LitePanel 1 x 1 floods, two LitePanel 1 x 1 spots, and 24 American DJ pinspots. Most of the units are hung on the pipe grid that covers the entire space. The Source Fours are used to provide sidelight fills; the HID units project the station's logo onto the walls. The De Sisti units, says London, come with an optional iris that sits between the lamp and the lens. "They're DMX-controlled, and it gives you the option of dimming a CDM fixture," he adds.



Despite their low power draws, London notes that the Opti Tri Pars have a lot of punch. "We were a little concerned about them being bright enough, but they actually

have surpassed our expectations," he says. He adds that Michael Steinberg treated them with Lee 251 diffusion, to get a softer look. (Rosco and Gam filters and patterns are also used on the conventional units.)

For control, the Elation and De Sisti units are handled by an ETC Ion console on those occasions when a lighting tech is on hand to run things. Also, using an ETC Unison system, LDG created multiple pages, setting up different looks for different situations, including performances and special events, which can be easily accessed by the station's staff. "We can change from intimate evening looks to parties," London says, adding that the American DJ pinspots are useful for the latter. "We also programmed some subtle color changes for those times when the room isn't being used, so passersby have something to see."

While London and his colleagues are pleased that they were able to accomplish so much inside the building's low-power parameters, Etwaroo enjoys discussing the green aspect of the venue. "The technology is so aligned with the mission and concept of the space," she says. "It's serendipitous that our founding funder was Jerome L. Greene—we couldn't resist the idea of playing with the green concept; in fact, we're going after a silver LEED rating for our new headquarters. We have a bamboo stage, our LED lighting system, and the large plate glass windows. It's been exciting trying to create a model for what a theatrical space could do in terms of sustainability." 🌱



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