

# Studying with the Masters

Reviewed by: Richard Cadena

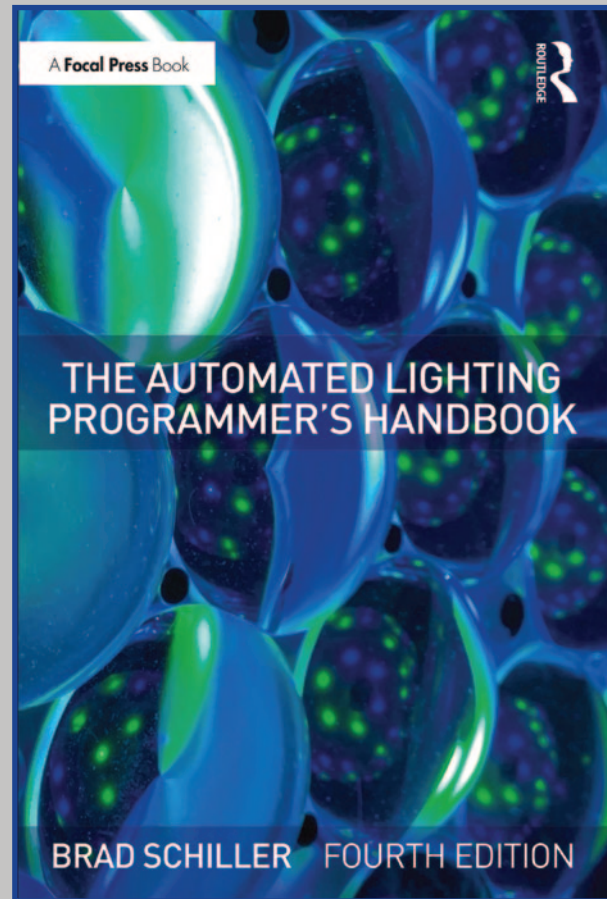
## *The Automated Lighting Programmer's Handbook, Fourth Edition* by Brad Schiller

Routledge: A Focal Press Book

When a book is in its fourth edition, chances are that there is a good reason for it. A publisher is a business, not a charitable organization. When it devotes its precious resources to a new edition, there's a good reason behind it, and it's usually because the book is, and has been, a hot commodity.

Brad Schiller's *The Automated Lighting Programmer's Handbook* has been around since 2004, and it has been a valuable tool ever since. It covers all the bases that a programmer might encounter, from basic definitions to advanced concepts like tracking, magic sheets, macros, pixel mapping, and more. Reading it from front to back is like getting a degree in programming.

Chapters One through Three lay the foundation for understanding the rest of the book by covering programming concepts like DMX, precedence, tracking, and more, plus an overview of the programming workflow and best practices for labeling, color coding, and backing up. Chapters 4 through 6 cover basic, intermediate, and advanced programming, and then chapters 7 through 9 cover "external interactions" (visualizers, using time code, MIDI show control, open sound control, or OSC), media servers and digital lighting, and networking, including RDM and sACN. The next four chapters cover programming genres, troubleshooting, emergency preparedness, and the programmer/designer relationship. Finally, the last chapter, which will probably be most readers' favorite, is a collection of blurbs from notable programmers and industry veterans from around the world. Some of the biggest and most sought-after designers, programmers, and industry luminaries have contributed gems to the chapter. No fewer than 70 of them offer advice, from LeRoy Bennett and Steve Lieberman to Sooner Routhier and Richard Belliveau. New additions to the fourth edition include Jules Fisher and Peggy Eisenhauer, Cat West, Matt Mills, Jeff Ravitz, and Joe Cabrera.



In all, the book does a great job of covering the relevant material from learning the art of programming to perfecting your knowledge of more advanced topics. If you are a lighting console programmer and haven't already read it, there's no question that you should. But a better question might be, if you have read any of the previous editions, should you get the new fourth edition?

In my humble opinion, the answer is a decisive "yes!" The industry is constantly changing and keeping up can be challenging. But it's essential if you want to maintain your skills or move up the ladder. Since the last edition was published in 2016, lighting control and related technology has advanced considerably. If a time traveler from 2016 could pop into 2022, this industry would look very different. When the previous edition was published, there was no GDTF, no Art-Net 4, no ETC Augment3d, no pan-

## LSA BONUS: BOOK OF THE MONTH

demical, and the live entertainment world was in a very different place.

This rapid evolution in live event production presents authors of technology books one of the greatest challenges—keeping up to date. Schiller has done an admirable job, providing lots of updates and additions. The book reflects changes in the industry such as new protocols, augmented reality, remote followspots, and more, while offering information not previously included. It expands on show file structure, cue recording options, updating and editing cues, patching multi-part fixtures, and working with visualizers.

One of the most stirring additions is Keith Hoagland's story about operating the lights at a Jason Aldean concert in Las Vegas when a gunman began firing on the audience. When I first saw the chapter title "Emergency Preparedness," my mind went to power failures and file recovery, but it's more about being ready for the worst-case scenario. Sadly, this is the world we now live in and planning your response in the event of an active shooter is a necessity. Schiller discusses how best to prepare and what to do in case of emergencies like this as well as fire, accidents, and, in another sign of the times, how to deal with safety protocols involving pandemics.

Also notable, although not exactly new to the book, is Schiller's firsthand account of programming lighting for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games in the form of a diary summarizing what the programmers did on certain days. It's a unique insight into the world of programming on the world stage and it's invaluable for aspiring programmers who are just starting in the field. New to this edition is a 20-year retrospective discussing what has changed and what hasn't changed since that event. It's a fascinating discussion with contributions from many who participated in the design and programming of the event.

In addition to the appendix, Schiller talks to Eric Marchwinski and Kirk Miller about their company, Earlybird Visual LLC, and how they approach programming and related skills including drafting, rendering, and previsualization. The book closes with a discussion with Scott Tusing about how he approaches programming Broadway shows.

If studying the front of the book is like studying for a degree in programming, then studying the back of the book is like studying for an advanced degree, although it's a lot more fun than attending lectures. Even if you already have an advanced degree, you'll find this book an enjoyable and informative read. [📖](#)



# Explore the Archives Lighting & Sound America