

Career Counseling

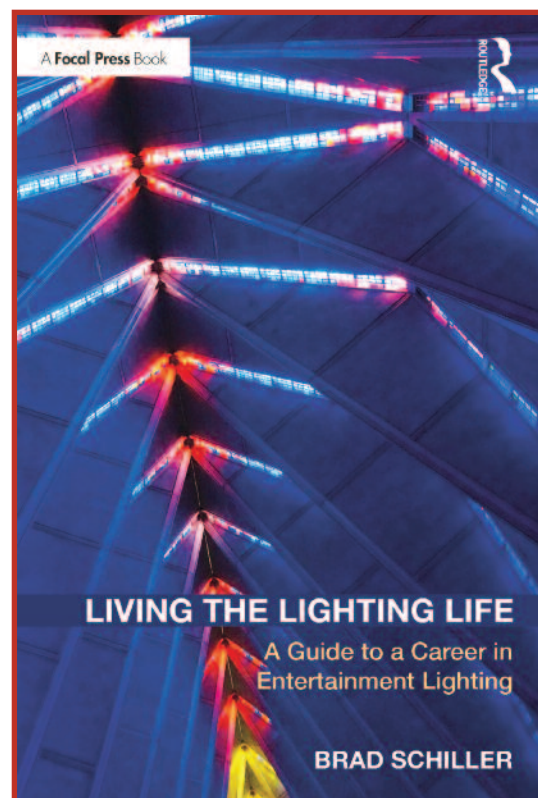
Reviewed by Richard Cadena

Living the Lighting Life: A Guide to a Career in Entertainment Lighting, by Brad Schiller (Focal Press)

Whether you work in theatre, concert touring, television, motion picture production, or corporate events, if you're in the entertainment lighting industry, chances are that you know Brad Schiller (or his son Matt) from his stints with Martin by Harman, Vari-Lite, High End Systems, or as a freelancer programming running consoles for Metallica, the Olympic Opening Ceremonies, or some other gig. There's also a good chance that you've read his book, *The Automated Lighting Programmer's Handbook*. If not, then you're probably new to the industry, in which case you have an opportunity to benefit from his knowledge of and experience in the industry. His new book, *Living the Lighting Life: A Guide to a Career in Entertainment Lighting*, is all about working in the entertainment lighting industry, how to get work, and how to thrive in it.

The first hurdle anyone faces in getting a job in the industry is even knowing that it is an industry with viable jobs. Many times, the parents of a college student have questioned the wisdom of choosing to study theatre technology, and I understand the skepticism. It's not exactly a conventional job or lifestyle. Schiller's book will do much to quell the fears and legitimize the industry in the minds of those who are unfamiliar with it.

The second hurdle is knowing what jobs are available. Before I got in the industry, I was vaguely aware of the existence of people whose job it was to travel with touring bands, setting up their gear, tearing it down after the show, loading it into trucks, traveling to another city, and doing it all over again. I would see them in the shadows, scurrying around onstage before the first downbeat, testing microphones, moving set pieces and backline gear, and scurrying off before the artists hit the stage. What I didn't know is that there were a lot more jobs behind the scenes supporting the artists and supporting those people who were working behind the scenes. Nor was I aware of other similar jobs on cruise ships, theme parks, television shows, hotel ballrooms, sporting events, etc. Schiller's book sheds light on all of them. It opens by describing what those people in the shadows and the people behind them are doing, their responsibilities, and then he moves on to the different facets of the industry and describes where the jobs are. He talks about the skills required for the jobs and gives tips about how best to prepare to enter the industry workforce, where to get experience, how to become certified, and where to get an education. The book progresses logically, with chapters for the newly minted worker and how to



establish a career, growing in experience and knowledge, and using tools like self-promotion and networking to blossom into a successful professional with a solid career. From there, he goes into the details of how best to handle the nuts and bolts of working in the industry, whether you are a company employee or a freelancer. The world of a freelancer typically requires a lot more knowledge of business structures, paperwork and documentation, and tax laws and requirements, and it also requires being a lot more proactive in order to stay employed from one gig to the next. Schiller covers all of this across several chapters, as well as addressing how to stoke the creativity that

can help you in your career.

If you know Schiller, then you know that he lives a very balanced lifestyle and he loves to travel, entertain, and seek out great restaurants, particularly when it involves sushi or chocolate desserts. The chapter that covers work/life balance, living a healthy lifestyle, and emotional health is especially significant. These are real challenges for those of us who travel extensively and who work long hours, and in this industry, long hours are very common, at least in normal times. Schiller gives sound advice in all of these areas, although I wish there were a bit more emphasis on stretching, diet, and exercise. The typical stagehand is very active, but we often don't get aerobic exercise, and too often we substitute donuts for healthy snacks. Schiller does briefly address some of these very important issues like healthy eating, proper sleep, hydration, and moderation with alcohol and drugs.

When it comes to travel, few people have more experience than

Schiller, and he offers great tips for making the experience as good as it can be by being prepared and bringing essential accessories like noise-canceling headphones, snacks, etc. He also addresses tour bus etiquette, including the obligatory rule of number two, which is to say, never on a tour bus.

The book closes with two really great chapters, one of which is a series of bios of industry titans, including Cory Fitzgerald (Bruno Mars, Jennifer Lopez, Skrillex, et al), George Masek (Vari-Lite, ACT Lighting), John Viesta (Theatre Projects, ESPN, ABC, et al), Robert Roth (Roth and Associates, PRG), Ron Schilling (AC/DC, Def Leppard, Guns N' Roses, et al), Sooner Routhier (Muse, Game of Thrones Live Concert Experience, Imagine Dragons, et al), Steve Woods (SMU), and Vickie Claiborne (High End Systems, PRG, disguise). Finally, Schiller surveys the industry and offers data about where the jobs are, who holds those jobs, and other infor-

mation directly related to the topics in the book. There are also some final thoughts and advice that apply to everyone involved in the industry.

No one is better suited for writing this book. Schiller brings a wealth of experience both as a freelancer and also as an employee of three major lighting manufacturers, he regularly attends industry trade shows around the world (in normal times), and he maintains a network of industry luminaries. And if this book reads like it's filled with fatherly advice, there's a good reason for that. Schiller recently helped shepherd his son into the lighting industry and into a promising career. With his father's guidance, Matt Schiller successfully completed an internship with PRG and, immediately upon completion, went work for Upstaging, hitting the road as a lighting tech on a number of tours. Schiller, the elder, knows of what he speaks (and writes). It's really good reading and is highly recommended. 📖