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# Lightwright 6

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Three years ago at USITT, I was walking back to my hotel after the show and I ran into John McKernon, the developer of Lightwright, the theatrical lighting paperwork-management software that can be automatically shared with Vectorworks Spotlight and the ETC Eos family of consoles. He was excited to tell me about the new features that were being added to the upcoming release of Version 6. "There are a lot of new tools for electricians," he said.

Shortly afterwards, I downloaded the updated software, and it wasn't long before I was in total agreement. The new features, like automatically balancing three-phase loads with the press of a button using Auto Balance, were very

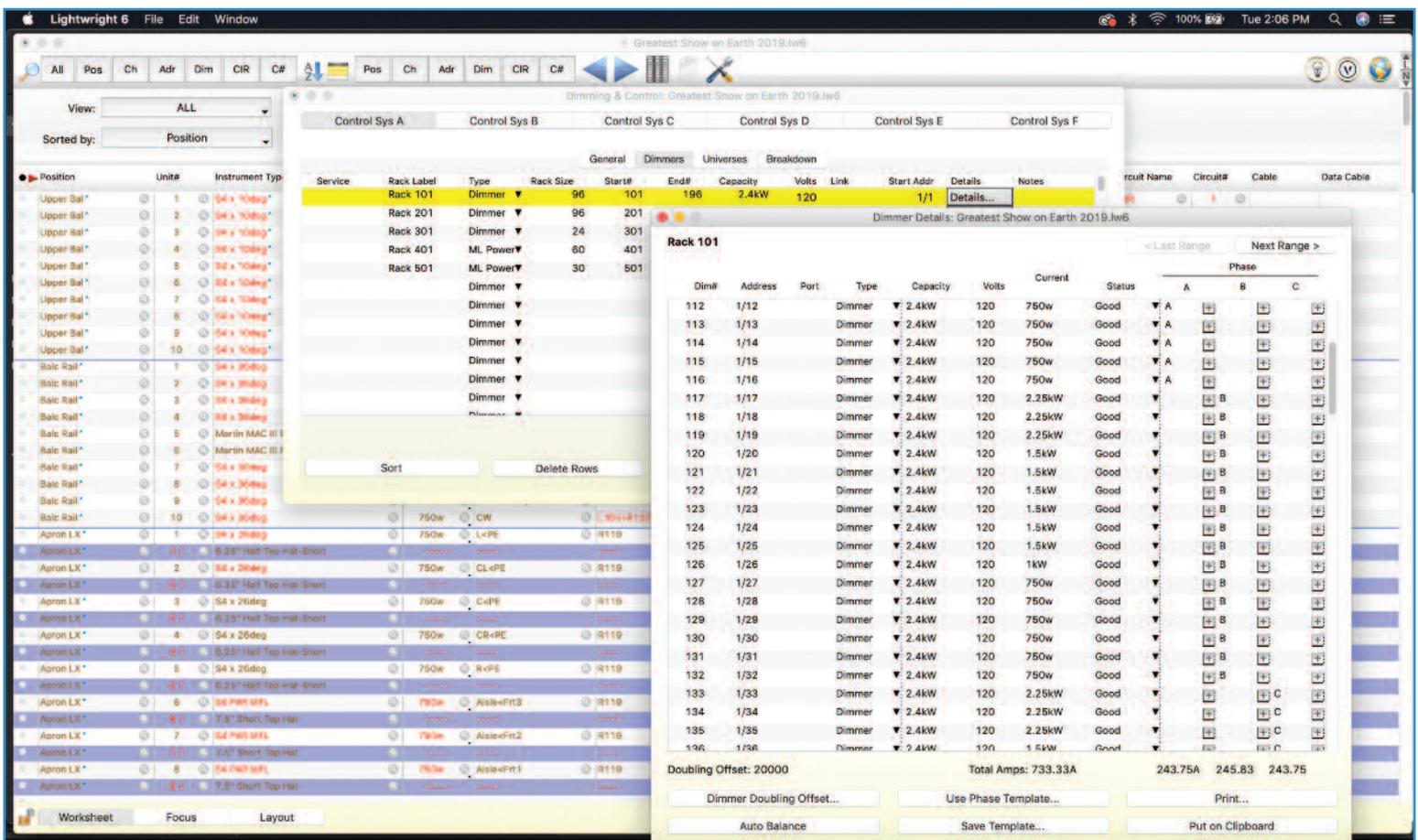
welcomed. As an electrician, I certainly can appreciate that, but the one feature that I thought would save the most time was the ability to print labels.

In the old days, you would have to export your data to a spreadsheet and format it so that it would print correctly on a sheet of your preferred labels. I can't tell you how much time I have wasted in the past, not to mention sheets of labels, trying to get them to print properly using this technique. It always took a lot of trial and error (mostly error) to get the text aligned properly with the labels. If the label-printing feature in LW worked in the real world, I thought, I knew it would come in really handy. And it does.

Label printing allows you to lay out

and configure labels exactly as you like them, using live data from your worksheet. Any information you want to include on the labels can appear, as long as it's in the database. You can then save the layout you create as a template and use it in subsequent shows. According to John, the label-printing feature was a popular request, since some electricians print up to about 60,000 labels every year. This feature alone is worth the price of admission, which is \$690 for the full version or \$360 for an upgrade from LW5, whether it's the Mac or Windows version. There is also institutional pricing and student pricing from \$135.

Lately, I don't get to work on a lot of bigger shows where I can use LW, so,



Lightwright 6 features new tools for electricians, and they can save valuable time in show prep. Lightwright 6 is available from City Theatrical.

when I do, I always have to reacclimate myself with it and relearn it. The good news is that it's very intuitive, and the syntax is familiar if you know common applications like Word. Cut and paste, for example, is the very well-known Command C and Command V. If you have show experience, you can most likely figure out most everything in the program. I have seldom had to break out the reference manual, but when I do, it's extensive and helpful. And by "extensive," I mean it's 255 pages long. It's almost a full lighting course in itself.

For those of you who are in more of a hurry (show me a designer or electrician who is not in a hurry and I'll show you one who is between gigs), there is a shorter tutorial that's only 80 pages long. John will politely ask that you work through the tutorial when you first start using Lightwright, and that's a good idea. There are also many video tutorials on YouTube and if you have a specific question that you can't find in the documentation, there is also a Facebook page (Lightwright 6 Users). Although the FB page is not officially supported by John, he often answers the questions; however, he doesn't log onto FB every day.

Lightwright is, basically, a database that's been customized for stage lighting, and it has a lot of features designed to save time. You can, for example, automatically set the starting address for a group of fixtures using the "plus editing" feature instead of manually typing in each individual address. You simply select a range of fixtures in the worksheet, put in the starting universe/DMX address, add a plus sign, and Lightwright fills in all of the data. The data can come from Vectorworks Spotlight or any Eos console, so it already knows a lot about what you're doing or what you're trying to do. When I accidentally overlapped some DMX starting addresses, it warned me by underlining them with a squiggly red line in the DMX address map utility. And when I tried to assign the wrong DMX footprint to a group of fixtures, it wouldn't let me, because it

knew the fixtures needed 48 control channels, not 8.

There are many improvements in LW6, both small and large, many of which will help electricians keep track of cabling, loads, and power distribution. There are, for example, new columns for cable, control cable, breakouts, and new user-defined columns. The column that was formerly called "watts" is now "load," and it can now handle watts or amps. That change was made to accommodate loads with low power factor, especially LEDs and automated lights, since the wattage doesn't accurately reflect the current draw if the power factor is not unity (1). And, in the end, what's important is that we know how many amps are drawn by each load, each circuit, and each system, because that's how we circuit shows.

The auto-balancing feature is helpful, but it's not as automatic as you might think. Yes, it does automatically balance your loads across a dimmer rack or power distribution rack, and it even allows you to include spare circuits, which is a good practice. But it's tricky if you want to make sure you are not splitting Socapex outputs across your electrics. Still, it's a great starting point that might need a little tweaking.

Recently, I got a call from a friend who needed an electrician for a gig. Time was short, and the plot was fairly big, and he asked if I was available. I took the gig not quite understanding just how short time was and how big a project it would be. I knew it would be a challenge, but it provided the perfect opportunity to brush up on LW6. Saving time on any gig is always welcome, but on this one in particular, LW6 was invaluable. It saved an immeasurable amount of time, thus this article. Forgive me if it's a bit effusive, but I think that highly of it. But be forewarned that it might take a day or so to get your license activated, so plan accordingly. 