

# KPC's Next Phase

By: David Barbour



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## A suburban Seattle performing arts center evolves to meet the future

Located in Kirkland, Washington, a suburb of Seattle, Kirkland Performance Center (KPC) has carved out an important place in the community. Opening in 1998, it has long hosted a wide variety of musical, theatrical, dance, and community events. Among the luminaries who have performed there are Philip Glass, Judith Hill, The Wallflowers, and Rufus Wainwright.

Under executive director Jeff Lockhart, KPC has endured the pandemic lockdown with a robust streaming program; opened KPC Studios, a production and education facility; and overseen many improvements beginning with the installation of a new marquee in 2015. Following a \$4.2-million capital campaign, KPC has embarked on a renovation process designed to bring its technical facilities up to date.

Under the direction of theatre consultant Thomas Cowdery of Batten & Light Studios, LLC, working with Bellevue Lighting + Stage (BLS), the theatre's renovation has begun. The first phase included a full replacement of the theatre's rigging system. BLS served as the general contractor, systems integrator, technical contractor, rigging installer, drape fabricator, and lighting systems integrator.

Based in Seattle, Washington, BLS is a full-service systems integrator and custom drapery manufacturer serving the performing arts, worship, broadcast, education, and civic markets. The company specializes in the design, fabrication, installation, and commissioning of theatrical rigging, stage machinery, lighting systems, audio and video infrastructure, broadcast environments, acoustical solutions, and custom soft goods. Known for its expertise in complex renovations and retrofit projects, BLS works closely with owners, consultants, and design teams to modernize venues while preserving operational flexibility and long-term sustainability. Recent work includes Symetra Studio, Greek Orthodox Church, high schools, and major projects for cultural, educational, and faith-based organizations across the Pacific Northwest.

The core upgrade replaced the landmark venue's aging counterweight rigging system with a modern motorized system featuring 37 motorized ETC Prodigy hoists, marking this the first such installation in the Seattle region. According to Kevin Nash, owner and principal designer of BLS, "This was not simply a product installation but a significant systems



BLS oversaw the installation of the first Harlequin Liberty Switch stage system, designed for venues that regularly host both dance and theatrical performances.

integration effort that required coordination of structural, operational, and venue-specific requirements.”

Prodigy EXO motorized hoists automate the overhead stage rigging for lighting, scenery, drapes, and related theatrical equipment. The compact hoists support flexible installation in upright, underhung, or vertical positions, allowing line sets to be placed densely while bringing equipment down to working level for safer, easier installation and maintenance. They come with a programmable QuickTouch control panel, offering an LCD readout of hoist name and

function, loading profile, operational status, preset position, and current load.

“The Prodigy EXO allowed for wide adaptability. The flexibility streamlined the design process and allowed BLS to have the freedom to use the same hoist in many different configurations,” says Jerry Kraft, western regional sales manager of ETC.

The renovation also included custom steel fabrication, stage infrastructure upgrades, replacement of all soft goods, lighting systems integration, controls integration, and overall




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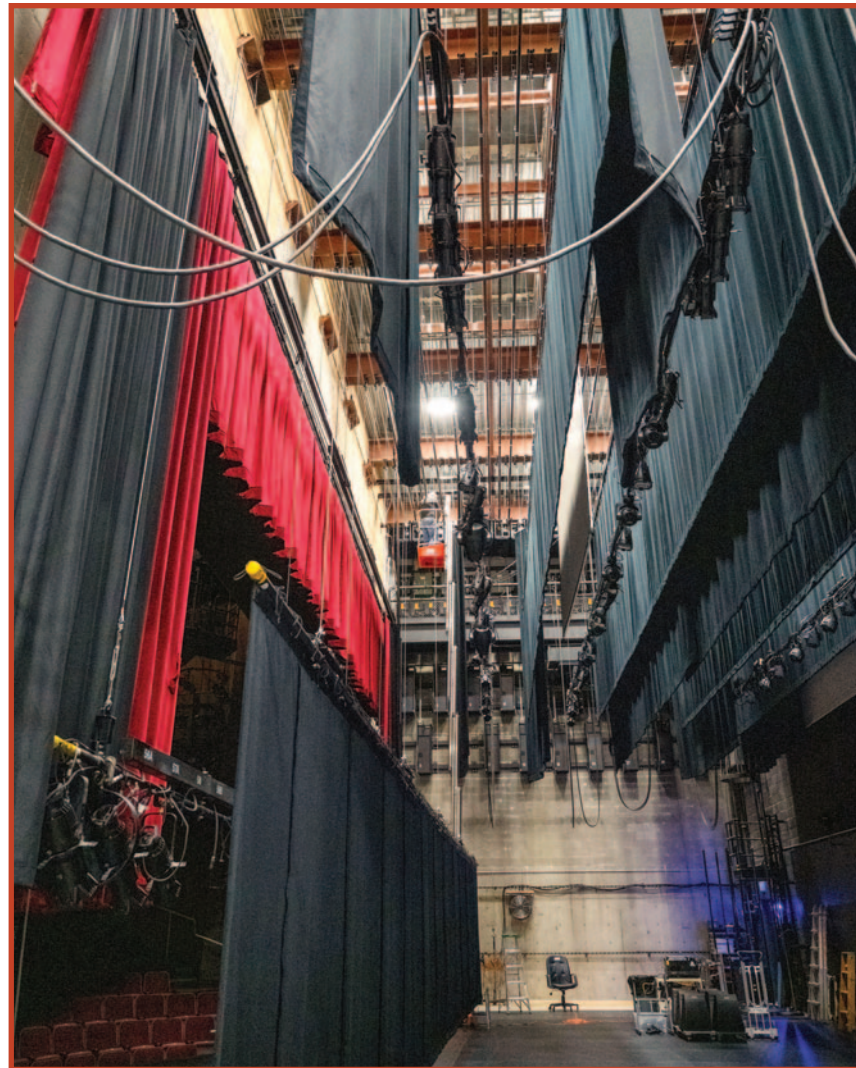
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project coordination. The local ETC representative, Pacific Lighting Systems, provided crucial product expertise.

On the lighting side, the theatre has swapped out its aging Strand Lighting CD80 dimmers for an ETC IQ intelligent breaker system. Cowdery notes that the Strand gear, which may define the word “legacy,” was still functioning, although it was high time for it to be replaced. The house lighting is controlled by an ETC Paradigm system. .

Cowdery also says that the control for the house lighting system “was located outside. You had to go out of the building, through a separate entrance to a separate room, and reach the house lighting dimmers. We ended up moving them downstairs to a separate hallway; now they can reach them from the stage.”

He adds that, in the next phase of the renovation, “We’re hoping to tie into an ETC lighting system for the back of house and the offices, so when anyone comes in, they’ll

have the six control buttons needed to turn the lights on wherever they want to go.”

The Paradigm system is meant to accommodate events that don’t require full production needs, Cowdery says. “Sometimes they don’t need a full union crew, in which case they’re looking at having a head carpenter or master electrician handle things. The way it is set up, they can save money by minimizing the crew size. With just a couple of buttons on the Paradigm system, it’s pretty much ready to go.” The new control console is an ETC Apex, he adds. “They were able to save a significant amount of money by going with a console that did not require an external monitor, while still getting the control they needed for the moving lights and the other fixtures we added to the system.”

The lighting rig includes High End Systems LoneStars, a mid-sized, budget-friendly fixture that offers a full set of features geared toward theatrical use. The rig’s all-LED conven-

tional aspect consists of ETC Lustrs. Cowdery notes that he worked with the lighting designer Michael Klaers on specifying the units. “He’s very good at understanding the needs of small regional theatres,” the consultant notes. Indeed, the designer’s credits include productions at a variety of leading regional theatres.

Additionally, BLS oversaw the installation of the first Harlequin Liberty Switch stage system in North America. It’s a professional multipurpose stage floor system that transforms from a rigid theatrical floor to a sprung dance floor at the touch of a button. Consisting of a base unit housing the control and drive mechanisms, topped with Harlequin Liberty LatchLoc sprung floor panels, it is designed for venues that regularly host both dance and theatrical performances; as such, it would seem to be ideal for a venue like KPC. The product is one of the first of its kind in the US; it was also recently installed at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts in Colorado. “The floor adds to the diversity of what the theatre can present, without adding to its storage facilities,” Cowdery says. Nash adds that the installation of this new product “required substantial coordination and integration expertise.”

Also, Cowdery says, “The stage floor was trapped, but not once in the working memory of the theatre had they ever taken the traps out. There was a bunch of posts down there for orchestra seating. We put new steel in, which

allowed us to eliminate those posts. Now they have a full orchestra pit under the stage. We’re also changing out the pit covers so it will be easier to get in and out.”

Looking at the next phase, Cowdery says plans include new seating and carpeting, moving the auditorium’s sound booth, improvements to the lobby (including new lighting and terrazzo flooring), and new lighting in the adjacent office spaces. Also, he says, “The city is getting ready to redo the sidewalks outside the theatre, so we’re hoping to inlay some LED into the concrete.” The plan is to use LED lighting “to guide people to the box office and to provide a way of showing whether tickets are available for a performance: Green lines if there are tickets, yellow lines if they’re running out, and red lines if there’s nothing left.”

“Performing arts venues are some of the most important community spaces we have,” Nash says. “They bring people together, inspire creativity, and create shared experiences that strengthen local culture. At Kirkland Performance Center, our goal was not simply to modernize technology, but to help create a venue that can continue serving the community for decades to come. Through close collaboration with KPC, Batten & Light Studios, and our industry partners, we delivered a flexible and innovative technical infrastructure that empowers artists while creating a better experience for audiences and staff alike.”



## Harlequin Liberty Switch®

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Photo Credit: Aaron Sternke / KPC Studios