

# Photography and Light: My Journey of Discovery.

**Text: Kevan Shaw**

During my career as a concert lighting designer I came across many problems attempting to balance different colours and intensities in lighting scenes. I found myself trying to understand the relationships between the apparent brightness of different lights on the stage which could not be reconciled by either the wattage of the lamps or transmission factors of the colour media used.

At the same time I was seeking some way of recording the work I was doing, partly as a portfolio and also as a more permanent record of my work in what is the most transitory of media. I was always disappointed by the results from professional photographers, apart from the difficulty in persuading them to shoot full stage rather than tight framed head and body shots, the range of colour and brightness recorded in the photographs was far from the visual reality of the lighting compositions.

It was clear that I would have to gain my own understanding of what was going on and therefore embarked on a voyage of discovery into Photography aided by my then partner, Bridget Derc. We learned rapidly that none of the available film stock was suited to the highly saturated colours used in Concert lighting particularly at the relatively low available light levels. We experimented quite widely and discovered the best compromise was Ektachrome 160T push processed 2 stops and stuck with this formula and the same processing lab for the duration of the partnership, some of the results can be seen elsewhere on the website.

Naturally this process required my attention at the lighting board while Bridget wielded the camera. My only chance to use the camera came on other subjects and I found inspiration in the work of many photographers who used monochrome so I decided to acquire a darkroom and learn the arts of processing and printing.

The work of Ansel Adams particularly inspired me and I was extremely interested in the philosophical approach to the technological aspects developed by Adams, Minor White and the rest of the f64 group. Although I was restricted to working in 35mm format I followed the theory of the zone system and established my own limited version. Being unable to alter the particular processing for each negative I worked again with a particular fixed range of materials to produce a consistent quality of negative using exposure to fit the contrast range I wanted to reproduce. The materials I settled on were Kodak Tri-x exposed at 200 ASA

This approach required an intense level of observation and measurement of the lighting conditions which became second nature and immediately crossed over into my lighting design work.

Through this process I established for myself basic contrast ranges allowing me to clearly predict the result of particular lighting compositions, this was in fact a zone system applied in reverse. This was a real turning point in my design process, much of my previous work had relied on a palette and combinations of colour used at full intensity, now I understood the compositional power of differing intensities of light I found my designs assuming another dimension, quite literally in compositions that allowed different spaces on the stage to move forwards and backwards and up and down.

These discoveries ran parallel with increasing involvement in video productions where I was able to work with a common language to the cameraman unlike the vast majority of my contemporaries.

In 1984 I produced a design for Ultravox almost entirely with white light, using direction, intensity as compositional variables rather than colour, in a way this marked the culmination of development in my concert lighting designs bringing the knowledge gained from photography fully to bear on the problems.

This and the gaining of a Licentiate of the Royal Photographic Society marked the point where I felt equipped to take on new challenges in Lighting Design.

Kevan Shaw, February 2001

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