

LIGHTING DESIGNER OR MASTER ELECTRICIAN?

A lighting designer's primary responsibility is to ensure that a show's lighting fulfills the director's production concept.

A good LD will strive to maintain cohesion with other design aspects of a production, including sound, choreography, and perhaps most importantly, scenery and costumes. He or she begins this process during the design stage by drafting a light plot and creating an instrument schedule. Another important tool provided to the ME is the channel hookup (also known as a magic sheet). A channel hookup is a simple rundown of every channel the LD plans to use. It will detail every aspect of that channel, including its purpose, area of focus, physical location, gel color or template need, and what type of instrument is to be used.

All of the paperwork allows the master electrician and the lighting crew lead time to assemble and prepare the lighting system before the lighting designer is actually working on site in the theatre. This will help the ME plan in advance for any necessary renting or purchasing of equipment.

The lighting designer will also make decisions regarding the colors to be used, and what type of instrumentation to employ during the design phase. This is generally dictated to some degree by the budget and lighting inventory of the theatre they are designing for. Like their counterparts in the areas of sound, scenery, and costuming, LDs will spend a vast amount of time researching and studying the script or piece for which they are designing.

Once the crew has hung, circuited, and patched the show, the LD will begin working in the theatre, utilizing the crew during the focus and troubleshooting phase of the process. After the plot has been focused and all equipment is patched and operating correctly, the LD will write cues for the show. Some LDs arrive with cues already written, which they will then modify as necessary during the tech process.

The master electrician is a theatre's charge electrician. The ME is responsible for maintaining and operating the theatre's lighting equipment, managing the lighting budget, and hiring the necessary crews to complete the tasks of hanging, focusing, running, and striking individual productions. Between productions, the ME will ensure that the electric department and its equipment is organized and in proper working condition, guaranteeing that spare parts and replacement lamps are in stock. The ME must also be sure that all of the proper gel (or color) is available, and any other materials specified by the designer, such as pattern templates (also known as gobos), irises, and sidearms. If necessary, the ME will oversee any rigging that may need to be accomplished in order to successfully carry out the design.

During the planning stages and tech process, the ME is the LD's right hand, responsible for putting the paperwork of the designer into action. Supplied with a light plot, instrument schedule, and channel hookup, the ME compiles all of the necessary

equipment and makes a plan for how to organize the work that will need to be done. (Many MEs will create informative flash cards known as hang cards so that electricians will have the information they need to complete their assigned tasks without having to return periodically to the usually centrally located light plot.) The ME is also responsible for deciding how much time and labor will be needed for a given project in order to ensure that the work is done on schedule.

Generally, the LD will arrive for focus and preliminary notes once the electric crew has fully hung, patched, programmed any equipment requiring it, and checked the entire system for problems. During focus, the ME will head up the crew, assisting the designer by making sure the proper lights are on at any given time.

Once the show has been focused, the ME will assist the LD in programming cues. If the ME is not also to be the light board operator, he or she will at least be on hand throughout the tech process in order to fix unexpected issues and change things that the LD has decided to adjust in order to accommodate the design more fully, such as the focus of an instrument.

Obviously, the work of an ME is never done.