

TELLING A STORY WITH LIGHT

Kevin Cawley lights the Isaac Theatre Royal in Christchurch, New Zealand

This project was a unique and rare opportunity for me. I had lit productions in the ITR in the past, and now I could use those same theatrical talents on the façade of the building. In the earthquakes the façade was damaged, but not destroyed. Thanks to Neil Cox and his team and their tireless work we have our theatre back to the same as it was before. It's stunning – you would think it's a refurbishment, not an entire rebuild.

Concept

The use of light and shadow on this type of historical architecture was most important but not original. The key to this design was to use a theatrical production process, detailed focusing, then plotting or setting different scenes for every occasion and that was original. Several lighting acts will show this wonderful piece of historical architecture in its beauty, splendor and glory.

Inspiration

We took inspiration from the theatrical production process, detailing what we do in the theatre. We tell a story to convey emotion and create moments of theatrical wonderment. This is what we needed the façade to do in all the acts. The theatre needed to speak for itself.

1. Look at my splendour.
2. Look at what I do.
3. Be entertained and enjoy yourself.

Solution

Act 1. Scene 1. This is when nothing is happening in the theatre. We created a stunning and excellent mix of warm colours carefully crafted to accentuate the masonry of the façade.

Act 1. Scene 2. Under the veranda. Just a subtle 5k to light the walkway with 4k of uplight on four columns for contrast.

Act 2. Scene 1. This is when a production is in rehearsal. There is a hint on the facade of what is to come in the following weeks. The light plotting for this depends on the theme and nature of the production.

Act 2. Scene 2. Under the veranda. The foyer is illuminated and we now add 4k of downlights to the mix to increase the intensity (things are about to happen)...

Act 1 Scene 1



Act 2 Scene 1



Act 3 Scene 1



Act 3. Scene 1. It's opening night so the façade is now performing to its maximum, again depending on the theme and nature of the production. (There may be colour and movement if appropriate.)

Act 3. Scene 2. Under the veranda. Along with all the 4k and 5k we added four large custom-built chandeliers and festoons (proclaiming "this is it").

To achieve this design we used Philips Color Kinetics LED fittings, which are extremely energy efficient, and to programme the effects

we spent many hours in a programming suite. The entire system is computer controlled and all fittings are individually addressed to give us total control. When you have total control you can achieve total visual comfort. There was a shortfall with the budget so funds had to be raised. All parties took this into consideration.

Summary

All of my lighting designs are only as good as the people operating them.

I was so fortunate to have one of the best lighting programmers I have ever worked with, Matt Mard. Matt, like me, comes from the

theatre so it is such a pleasure to hand this over to him, as he understands how great lighting design speaks to people. This is another ray of hope for the Christchurch community after five years of rebuilding to have our Isaac Theatre Royal back. 🌟