

## Conference Review

by Charles Salkield

This year's conference returned to Rugby School where we were well looked after. The school's Macready Theatre provided an ideal venue for our workshops and the sponsors' displays.

The first session was presented by Jason Larcombe of White Light. The lights were dimmed but there was no chance of cat-napping as Jason involved us all. With a torch-light shining on the screen we were asked to describe what we saw and say what the flickering patch of light made us think of. Jason went on to show us photos of sunsets, mountains and lakes, as well as paintings by old masters. Where did our eyes track? Where was the light coming from? How did it make us feel? How would we achieve that effect on stage?



A single lantern then lit a subject from different directions – front and back, side and diagonal, up and down. What did we feel? Why did we feel that? Where were the shadows? How was it different for those sitting on the left compared to those sitting on the right? A really thought-provoking workshop.

In the afternoon Jamie Gosney of Stage Electrics, took us through the fundamentals of sound, sound systems and system design. Starting with the physics of sound, Jamie explained the different types of microphone and their various uses. A frequency chart for musical instruments was shown ([www.independentrecording.net/irn/resources/freqchart/main\\_display.htm](http://www.independentrecording.net/irn/resources/freqchart/main_display.htm)) and Jamie explained how EQ could reduce or emphasize a particular range within an instrument's spectrum, making sure that each instrument was distinct in an ensemble.

The problem of feedback was discussed. We were introduced to the "Simple Feedback Trainer" (<http://sft.sourceforge.net>). This trainer/game teaches you to quickly identify frequencies - useful for when you 'ring-out' a sound system. After a quick summary of the changes in wireless mic frequencies and their licensing, we were finally given a brief glimpse of AFMG's Ease Focus 2 acoustic modelling software, a really useful tool when choosing loudspeakers for a theatre and deciding their locations. (<http://focus.afmg.eu/>)

The final workshop of the day was led by Andy Hayles of Charcoalblue Theatre Consultants, who led the recent rebuild of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford (which most of us had visited for a private tour prior to the main conference).

Andy explained the role of theatre consultants, illustrating their work with examples from recent projects including completed school projects at St. Edwards, Oxford, and Repton School, as well as the work in progress at The Leys in Cambridge.



To give us a feel for what it is like to be on a thrust stage, our seats were rearranged to provide the sides of a thrust, and as the workshop continued we took it in turns to strut the stage.

Andy ended the workshop with a Theatre Quiz, asking us to identify theatres from photos, sketches and plans. There were historic theatres and modern theatres, classic theatres and innovative theatres; Andy shared nuggets of information about each, a bit of history, strong points and shortcomings.

Between the workshops we took the opportunity to speak to the workshop leaders, to share tech tales and meet the conference's other sponsors. Overall it was a very enjoyable conference!

– Charles Salkield  
Retired, ex-Hampton School

*Some photos from the conference can be accessed via our website.*