

# REALLY, REALLY SMALL SCALE

## Kelli Zezulka on her four-lantern lighting design

**A**t the ALD seminar at PLASA Leeds, with Nick Moran, Johanna Town, Elliot Griggs and Katherine Graham, we discussed lighting for small-scale productions. When I mentioned that my current show, *The Maids*, produced by Hedgepig Theatre in York, used only four lights, Jo suggested I write about it for *Focus*.

*The Maids* is the fourth show I've designed for Hedgepig. The show was directed by Andy Curry, with sound design by Alexander King and costumes designed by Julia Smith. The play follows two sisters, Solange and Claire, as

they plot the murder of their mistress. Their fantasies involve very theatrical role play, in which each sister takes turns playing the role of Madame.

In the past, when I've designed for Hedgepig, I've also operated the lighting (and occasionally the sound too), but due to the scheduling of *The Maids* tour, I wasn't able to commit to all of the dates. Andy and I had spoken about the meta-theatricality of the play and also of his desire to have the cast operate some of the lights from onstage, as there are several lines in the text in which the sisters mention the lights (*"Let me alone. Turn out the light"* and *"Put the light on! Quick! It's too great a moment!"*). We then hit upon the idea of having all of the lights operable on stage by the cast, thus negating the need for a lighting operator during the performance. So the lighting design was dictated partially out of necessity, but we were lucky because this

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design premise also helped to heighten the theatricality of the sisters' ritual.

The lights we ended up using included two birdies, one either side of the stage at floor level, hidden in large boxes with vases on top. In rehearsals, we had used anglepoise lamps, but after some debate, I decided using theatre lamps would fit better with the overall aesthetic. There was a standard table lamp on the dressing table downstage centre, and we cut holes in the lampshade to give the light some shape. The last light was a bare bulb with half a lampshade, continuing the set and costume design theme of "shabby chic".

There was one last "sneaky" light that we used: a lantern is carried on stage in the final scene, and, not being allowed to use live flame, we used two LED push lights with a bit of orange gel over them, concealed in a large glass jar. We'd used these jars before as candlelights in *Playhouse Creatures* by April de Angelis, to great effect.

Because the show was touring to rural venues, there was always enough "ambient" light in the auditorium to allow the audience to find their seats and the cast to exit the stage safely. However, when we went to Seven Arts in Leeds, where a full blackout is achievable, we cheated a little bit and had a general cover





of six Patt 743s on at 10% throughout the show. This was primarily for health and safety reasons, as the cast members found it nearly impossible to find their way off stage into complete darkness.

I always learn something new about lighting on Hedgepig shows because I have the freedom to try out new things. One of the reasons I love designing for Hedgepig is that there is always very little budget, which forces me to make creative decisions I might

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not otherwise have made. Had I been able to operate on tour, or had we had the money for a “proper” lighting rig, the show would have looked very different and, I think, the lighting would have been much less effective. Nearly every review mentioned the lighting; in my case at least, it seems that the fewer the lanterns, the more press coverage!

*The Maids  
Hedgepig Theatre  
Lighting designer: Kelli Zezulka  
Photos by John Saunders*

