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Royal Opera House upgrades to ETC Unison Paradigm

UK - When the Royal Opera House installed Unison architectural lighting control for the stage and side stage areas as part of the original 1999 refurbishment, it was recognised that lighting control systems will be eventually replaced as new and better products are developed. When senior lighting manager Nick Ware and his team members decided it was due for replacement, they looked first at the updated version of the product: Unison Paradigm.

Lighting systems Manager Paul Hornsby explains, "The system has remained on 24 hours a day, seven days a week for the last 11 years, and has served us well. But it was time to consider replacing it.

"We talked to colleagues at other venues across the country, doing extensive research into the systems they were using and discussing whether a different system might serve our needs better, but always came back to ETC's updated architectural product, Unison Paradigm - one which uses the same wiring and with a similar style of programming.

"We knew the replacement had to be in 2011, as with the Olympics this year, we may not get another opportunity for at least two years. The system controls all of the venue's house lights, as well as backstage lighting for the main house, yet we only had a two week break where the house was dark; there was no option for any part of it to not be in operation when people came back from their summer break. Steve Chappell from Stage Electrics was really helpful in getting everything fitted and working in the two week dark period.

"Overall, we were thrilled with the way everything was installed in such a short space of time. We ended up with four ETC Unison Paradigm architectural control processors and 51 outstation panels (consisting of between one and 15 button panels) throughout the building, along with an LCD control panel in the lighting control room, which does everything we need. It provides us with forward flexibility, and we've been able to make use of some of the added functionality which Paradigm has given us, such as softkeys to get instant lighting looks."

Stage Electrics' business development manager Mark Burnett adds, "Because there was only a two week dark period, we were given just seven days to install and commission the new system before the stage was to be put back in use, ready for the new season.

"The new system was commissioned and live on Thursday 25 August; we did some further testing, programming and tweaks on Friday 26. Our in-house manufacturing team custom-built a stage manager's panel - complete with LCD touch screen surrounded by 44 push buttons for direct control of a wide range of lighting states.

"Freelance lighting systems engineer Michael Scott was drafted in by the Opera House to work alongside us and internally project manage the upgrade. He was the house lighting systems manager when the original Unison system was installed, so his knowledge of the existing system was of great assistance to Stage Electrics' technical project manager Martin Woodage and his team, including programming and commissioning engineer Steve Chappell."

As part of the extensive refurbishment of the Grade 1 listed Royal Opera House in Covent Garden in the late 1990s, much of the complex was demolished, including several adjacent buildings, in order to make room for a major increase in size - well over 50% of the complex is new. The stagehouse itself was enlarged to make the triple-height fly tower some 37m above the stage.

(Jim Evans)

www.etcconnect.com

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Controlling the Royal Opera House's stage lighting (photo: Digital Deluxe)



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