

## Parts of a Survey of the Lighting Design Industry

"No one really knows how many individuals are in the field of lighting." That is a quote from my new book, *Handbook of Lighting Design*, to be published in the fall of 1980. I have excerpted portions of that first chapter to bring you further information about the age range of those in lighting, part-time versus full-time employment in our industry, number of years the average person has been thus involved, and finally, some firm figures about which of many areas people are engaged in and some speculative ones about the total numbers involved. Wherever material is quoted, it is taken from the forthcoming *Handbook*.

### Designers Only

Since all of us do many different things both to earn a living and to practice our art in diverse areas, I have long wondered just how many people were in sales, or professional theatre lighting, or television, or disco, or concert lighting. Haven't you? This survey is an attempt to supply documented factual answers.

"If we include those who design, build and market light sources and luminaires (fixtures), those involved in power production design, distribution and sales (from power companies through to the local electrician), then add those involved in research and the development and utilization of lighting equipment (lighting designers) — it is a big industry.

"An attempt has been made, however, to discover and define a smaller group: the lighting designers." To do this I prepared an Industry Survey during the summer just past.

"2003 Surveys were sent to: 105 lighting design members of U.S.A. #829, NYC; 150 members of U.S.A. #350, Chicago; 150 members of IALD (the International Association of Lighting Designers), NYC; 280 individuals listed in the May, 1979, *Lighting Dimensions*, "Who's in Lighting Directory"; 51 network television lighting directors from ABC, CBS and NBC in NYC (many local station TV lighting directors from ABC, CBS and NBC in

NYC (many local station TV lighting directors were contacted through other sources); 52 lighting designers listed in the '79 *Dance Annual* (names which did not duplicate earlier mailings); 300 selected lighting equipment manufacturers selected from the *Theatre Crafts Directory*, 1979-80; 500 educators selected from A.T.A.'s *Directory of American College Theatre*, 1976, and Robert Smith's *USITT Directory of Graduate Programs in Theatre Design and Technology*, 1978; 150 nonprofit professional theatre companies who are members of TCG (Theatre Communications Group, listed in *Theatre Profiles/3*, 1977, and 235 members of American Society of Lighting Directors,



Los Angeles. Finally, *Lighting Dimensions* ran a courtesy advertisement for the author soliciting names from those we might have overlooked.

"The survey was directed toward *lighting designers*. We did not attempt to reach workers (employees of manufacturers 'on the production line'), power companies and/or distributors, IATSE stagehands, or the large mass of lighting-

Area of Specialization	% of Income Derived From this Source	Estimate of Total No. of Individuals
Sales	11.5%	350
Prof. Theatre	9.8%	300 (throughout the country; not just Broadway)
Author, Publ., Lecturer	7.4%	The author finds this % to be highly suspect
Engineers	6.3%	100
TV	6.3%	100 (incl. local station)
Other	8.4%	Students, etc.
Regional Theatre	5.4%	125
Consulting	5.2%	75 (Part-Time)
Exterior Design	5%	150
Cinematography	4.9%	125
Manufacturing	4.7%	150 (Incl. office staff)
Concert lighting	4.4%	130
Disco lighting	4%	120
Interior lighting design	3.5%	105
Education	3.1%	40 (Full-time in lighting)
Community Theatre	1.4%	45
Outdoor Theatre	1.2%	35
Dinner Theatre	0.6%	15+
Amusement Parks & Lasers	0.5%	15+
Ice Shows	0.4%	12-

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related manufacturers. Nor did we contact certain established groups whose inclusion might have been useful (lists were not available to us): members of IES, (American Society of Cinematographers, SMPTE, nor the large membership of IATSE."

### Survey Breakdown

"603 individuals responded. This represents a 30.1 percent reply. That is how the industry survey was conducted. Here are some results:

### Age

"Less than one percent were under the age of 20 years; 55.9 percent were in the 20-35 year age bracket; 27.1 percent were from the 35-50 year age bracket; a final 16.1 percent were 'over 50 years' of age. Age did not seem to be an important factor when examining the various 'specialty' areas of the industry."

### Part-Time Versus Full-Time Employment

"The major purpose of this question

was to separate those who spent all of their gainfully employed time in lighting/lighting design from those whose activity in this area is only a portion of their total employment picture. Educators are an example. Much lighting design is taught by educators who also teach scenic design, costume design, technical theatre, landscape architectural lighting, etc. Only a fraction of their total teaching time is involved in lighting classes and the lighting of productions. Such can also be said of other specialties: some TV lighting directors double as engineers (audio men, camera or boom operators, etc.).

"Statistically, 40.3 percent replied that lighting/lighting design is their full-time occupation. 59.7 percent considered lighting as only a portion of their efforts. Of these 'part-timers,' 28.8 percent replied that they expended less than one quarter of their time in lighting; 19.7 percent less than half; 8.5 percent utilized three-quarters or under of their time in lighting; the remaining 7.8 percent, less than 100 percent."

Let's look at the statistics from another viewpoint. Checking the total number of individuals in each specialty to determine areas of predominantly full-time employment produces that result: 3/4ths of those

in television were full-time; 2/3rds of those in sales; 1/2 of those in professional theatre, manufacturing and cinematography; 1/5th of those in architectural lighting and consulting. It drops to 1/16th full-timers in regional theatre. The lowest of all is, of course, education where only 1/26th of those responding replied that they spent full-time in lighting. The areas of dance and disco are about evenly divided between part-time and full-time workers. Rather surprisingly, outdoor theatre and opera reported very few part-timers.

### Years in the Industry

Is ours a rather new industry with a relatively short history, an industry of youngsters who move, in their mature years, to other fields? 26 percent of those responding had been in lighting for five years or less; 29 percent for 10 years or less; 25.5 percent for 20 years or less; 15.5 percent for 30 years or less. Finally, 5.5 percent had been employed in lighting for 30 years or more. Some did not answer this question (46 out of 603) but this was not sufficient to influence statistical accuracy. Worthy of note is the fact that nearly 80 percent

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have been in the lighting design industry for only 20 years or less.

There were two specialty areas in which replies tipped heavily toward prolonged periods of employment: television (little apparent mobility or "drop out") and education. There were three specialty areas where most respondents had been active 20 years or less: dance, disco and regional theatre. All other areas exhibited a reasonable play across all "length of service" categories.

"Finally, the author has broken down the 'Industry Survey' for clarification. Remembering that the survey was intentionally sent to those who derive at least some of their income from lighting design:

- 48.5% were working primarily in design;
- 27.7% were involved in mfg., sales, engineering and service;
- 21.3% classify as "Other" (this includes students);
- 3.1% were Educators.

### Who, What and Where?

"A basic objective of the survey was to determine how many individuals were involved in lighting design and in what

specialties. The percentages in the list which follows are statistically accurate as to relative sources of income. The appended 'Total Number of People' column is, quite frankly, nothing but an 'educated guess' by the author, based upon the survey and nearly 40 years of widespread acquaintance with the industry.

"'Professional Theatre' may have been influenced by designers *wishing* to think of themselves as employed here when they could, more aptly, have checked 'Regional Theatre.' The number responding to the survey was so small in the area of 'Author, Publisher, Lecturer' that these figures are questionable. It is again stressed that the figures of relative areas of employment in the percentage column are quite accurate and should serve as a guide to students in their training and professionals in seeking opportunities to design. The column estimating individuals in each area is undocumented."

### A Final Note

Final "galley proofs" will still be subject to revision *after* you read this issue. If you have better information for the "Total Number of Individuals" estimate, please send it to me.

### Shows to See

If you have not yet seen the "musical phenomenon!" *Evita*, do so. It's been out on the road and is currently at the Broadway Theatre in NYC. The work of British lighting designer David Hersey, his efforts rate an "A" with several "+"s." The show is an offbeat opera, a political message musical with a brilliant score by J.C. *Superstar* composers Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber. The book has weaknesses which brought critical disapproval. However, as a grandiose spectacle with brilliant visual treatment — far ahead of its time in meaningful use of lighting — go out of your way to see it.

On the other side of the coin, Mickey Rooney and Ann Miller in a poor's man revival of burlesque, *Sugar Babies* (Mark Hellinger Theatre, NYC), is a smash hit. Yet it repeatedly exhibits some of the most inept, dull lighting on Broadway today from one of this country's truly talented lighting artists, Gil Hemsley. Either it was an off day for Gil, or he encountered a stubborn management. One must, however, judge results by what is on view. This one did not even come close to the lighting standards I recall for real vaudeville/burlesque. □

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