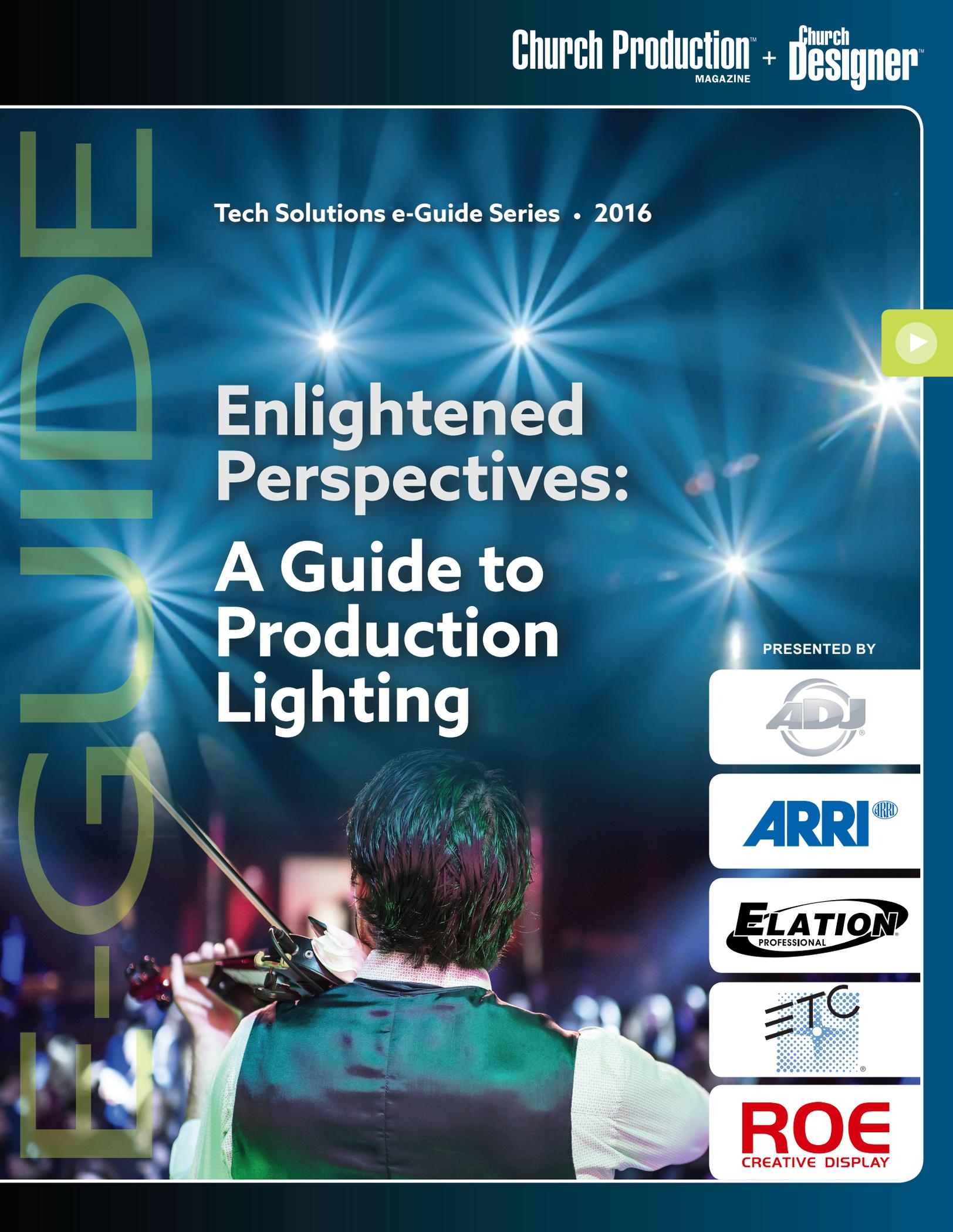
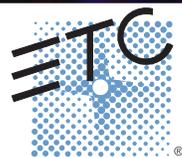


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ENLIGHTENED PERSPECTIVES: A Guide to Production Lighting



Photos courtesy of Trinity Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla.

By Carolyn Heinze

Spend 30 seconds on Google and you'll deduce that when it comes to production lighting, churches have almost limitless options. And while not so long ago much of this technology was reserved for those organizations with the biggest budgets, the price/feature set ratio has considerably improved,

rendering high-performance equipment accessible to smaller houses of worship. But with all these possibilities comes the daunting effort of determining what's right for your church. Where does one start? We suggest by formulating an opinion on what good lighting is to begin with.

PRODUCT • SOLUTION



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“To me, good lighting is not necessarily having the most toys, but appropriately using them.”

Aaron Spencer, Production Director, Trinity Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL

For Aaron Spencer, production director at Trinity Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., good lighting encompasses even tones, no shadows, a balanced look and, most importantly, it must “be very purposeful—not just light for the sake of light,” he says. All of the intelligent lighting, moving fixtures, LEDs, and even hazers can make it tempting to go overboard, he acknowledges, and this is something he believes church techs should be conscious of. “To me, good lighting is not necessarily having the most toys, but appropriately using them. Sometimes, three lights and a little splash of color can be more effective for what you’re doing than all of the

movers and all of the colored lights that you have up at the same time.”

Observation & introspection

A great source for good lighting design inspiration is simply watching what others are doing, but Alex Fuller, lighting director for Saddleback Church’s main campus in Lake Forest, Calif., warns church techs that when doing this, to consider the context. “There are a lot of younger LDs [lighting designers] out there that are seeing these great concerts—both Christian and secular concerts—with lots of flash and strobe and stuff happening, and then they go back to their church and they want to program their lights

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Sunday morning to look just like the concert did Friday night," he illustrates. "Unfortunately, sometimes it's not what's needed. Some people think that moving lights have to move to create light. That's not true. Sometimes less is more." He urges church techs to ask: is this adding to, or distracting from, the experience?

One of the trickiest tasks for church techs is introducing production lighting into a house of worship that is transitioning from traditional to contemporary worship. Spencer points out that this shift presents a significant change in the church's overall culture, and that starting gradually is the best way

to get the congregation accustomed to this new presentation style. "It's a big change for them; you have to keep your congregation in mind as you're doing this because you want them to be on board with what you're doing," he says. "Start simple with a little splash of color here and there—that kind of thing—but don't jump right into movers and strobes and things like that, because that, oftentimes, can create more of a problem with trying to get your congregation on board."

Spencer speaks from experience: in his teens, he ran lights for a traditional church that was starting to incorporate a more contemporary worship style. "The first [contemporary]

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“Some people think that moving lights have to move to create light. That’s not true. Sometimes less is more.”

Alex Fuller, Lighting Director, Saddleback Church, Lake Forest, CA

service we did, we made the mistake of going full bore with colors and all kinds of crazy stuff, and afterwards there was a unanimous uproar for what we did because it was just so far out of the norm,” he recalls, adding that congregants felt like they were in a nightclub, rather than a house of worship. The following week, he and his crewmates took their light show down a number of notches, and then slowly progressed into adding more color, dimming, and effects. “That was much more well-received and the transition happened a lot smoother when we went that way.”

Keeping the congregation in mind is equally important in contemporary churches where people are accustomed to more modern styles of worship, notes Austin Fox-Welter, production coordinator at Northview Church

in Carmel, Ind. For example, one of the rules of thumb he and his team have followed for a while: Don’t shine moving head beams over the house. “It’s just one of those things; you have a variety of ages coming in here,” he says. “It’s really pushed us to do something different and to look at how we’re using effects, and to look at how we’re aiming things, and how we’re using blinders.”

Power plan

Those churches that are ready to incorporate a bit of pizzazz into their productions must first be aware of their facility’s limitations, Spencer counsels. “If you’re in a building that has low ceiling heights, you don’t want to pack it up with a bunch of movers because people are going to feel like these things are traveling right above their heads—it’s going

PRODUCT • SOLUTION



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One of the trickiest tasks for church techs is **introducing production lighting into a house of worship that is transitioning from traditional to contemporary worship.**

to make them uncomfortable,” he says. It’s also really important to have a handle on your facility’s power supply. “The thing I see a lot, actually, is churches will go out and they’ll buy all of these moving lights that take a lot more power than they’re used to—especially the older conventionals. [It] takes a substantial amount of power to get these things working properly, and they will plug

them in and they’re blowing circuits left and right.” While LED units consume less power, the more sophisticated fixtures still require a considerable amount, again, mandating the need to know how much power you will be able to access.

Achieving good lighting involves a healthy dose of technology, but Fox-Welter also points out that it’s about people. While LDs in



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Photo: Cypress Lake United Methodist using ADJ Lighting

the music industry generally tend to operate as lone wolves who call the shots in terms of what the design will look like, houses of worship are often much more collaborative. "In church, you've got creative arts pastors, you've got the people who work with them, and you've got lead staff. You have to realize you're on a team," he says. "I love designing, I love creating, and there's a time for that. But then there's a time to realize that there are other people who were placed on this team that have a lot of good ideas, too." While Spencer says that sometimes church lighting techs can make a meaningful impact with just a few fixtures, he also notes that he's seen instances where there is a lack of lighting for the space that needs to be covered. "They will have a totally blacked

"One rule of thumb, even for congregations accustomed to contemporary worship: Don't shine moving head beams over the house."

Austin Fox-Welter, Production Coordinator,
Northview Church, Carmel, IN

out stage, which is hip and in right now and allows you do a lot with color, but it's a huge space and they've got five lights for their stage wash, and you can barely see [people's] faces, or even if they're standing on the stage," he illustrates. He encourages



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While LED units consume less power, the more sophisticated fixtures still require a considerable amount ... mandating the need to know how much power you will be able to access.

church techs to strike a balance between the amount of lighting they apply and the space they need to fill, and, as always, to be purposeful in the choices they make. “Our mission and our goal as technicians is to help our pastors to get people to come to Christ and to be followers of Christ. You have to seriously look at everything that you do with your lighting planning: is this going to help, or is this going to distract? If it’s

EMBRACE YOUR MISTAKES

Face it: no matter how skilled you are, something, at some point, is going to go wrong. And while we all want to avoid committing errors, sometimes it’s not the goof-up, but the way we react to it that makes the difference between getting through it or letting it take over.

Austin Fox-Welter, production coordinator at Northview Church in Carmel, Ind., recounts a recent event when he was testing out a new lighting console and things didn’t go as planned. “It selected all the blinders and just threw them all on during a super slow song—it was just super!” he jokes. How he reacted to the problem was different, he says, than how he would have reacted 10 years ago when he was just starting out. “When I used to make a mistake I used to get really upset about it and I would basically stop what I’m doing instead of just playing forward. Big mistakes like all lights out, or blinding lights—you’ve just got to embrace it, shut the effect off, and keep moving. I’ve found that it’s all about attitude, and it’s all about the way you react to it.”

By Carolyn Heinze

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“The first [contemporary] service we did, we made the mistake of going full bore with colors and all kinds of crazy stuff, and afterwards there was a unanimous uproar for what we did because it was just so far out of the norm.”

Aaron Spencer, Production Director,
Trinity Baptist Church, Jacksonville, FL.

‘distract,’ then cut it. No matter how cool the effect may be, if it distracts away from the delivery of the message of why we’re there, then we’ve got to cut it. As technicians, we have to be strong enough in our own sense and abilities to be able to say, ‘All right, this is not going to work out for this situation.’ Everything needs to be done with a purpose.”

Carolyn Heinze is a freelance writer/editor.



ON THE MOVE: Tips for Portable Churches

Anyone who has done set-up and teardown in a portable church environment knows that equipment is going to get knocked around, no matter how careful you are. It’s for this reason that Aaron Spencer, production director at Trinity Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., places a high priority on durability in these scenarios—especially when it comes to conventional fixtures.

“The lamps that are in conventional lights are still filament lamps. Sometimes you can bump them too hard and the filament will disconnect, or there will be a small break in it and now the fixture doesn’t work, and maybe it’s one that you absolutely need,” he explains. LED fixtures, on the other hand, tend to be more rugged: “The fact that they’re LEDs means that the knock-around is not going to affect them so much as it would with a filament lamp.” In addition, they don’t consume as much power, “which allows you to do more with less.”

Spencer can’t stress enough that portable churches should seek out fixtures that have a reputation for reliability on the road. “They tend to cost a little more, but at the end of the day, if you’ve got a light [you can rely on]—and when you’re training new volunteers and you’ve got people who don’t necessarily know [about lights]—it [gives you peace of mind] if you know that that fixture can take a hit and still be able to work.”

By Carolyn Heinze



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