

School students receive training on lighting control



Barry Strydom (Theatre Manager) and Jarrad Parenzee (sound) from The Edge Theatre, St Mary's School. Strydom is also a theatre consultant for his company, Cue Lighting and Sound.

Performing Art Technology is offered as an extra-mural activity at St Mary's School in Johannesburg giving students the opportunity to study lighting, stage management, sound, filming, editing and set construction. Girls between grade 8 to 12 train on various control desks including Avolites Titan 1, Philips Strand 200 Plus, ETC and, more recently, on MA2 on PC because of the 3D functionality.

The course has been available at the school for the past 12 years, but really took off in 2010 with the opening of the schools Performing Arts Centre that includes The Edge Theatre. The Edge is a 500 seat professionally equipped theatre designed by Dennis Hutchinson. This space provides students with the opportunity to work in a real theatre environment.

Barry Strydom, Theatre Manager at St Marys, presents the training and also runs his own company, Cue Lighting & Sound, as a theatre consultant.

"There are about 40 girls on the programme at St Mary's," explained Strydom. "The feedback is very positive and when we have outside visitors, they always comment on the knowledge of the students."



Battle of the Bands 2013

The girls also regularly get exposed to other industry professionals who come and present workshops. One of the previous workshop leaders to visit the school was Nicci Spalding who currently is the Technical Director for both the Grahamstown National Arts Festival and the Edinburgh International Festival and is also an old girl of St Mary's!

While training takes place in a 24-seater computer centre, the school has three venues comprising of a small experimental theatre, where shows are run on a Philips Strand 200 Plus, mostly operated as an analogue desk. The main school hall has an Avolites Titan 1, and the main theatre currently runs on an ETC Element Desk.



"The computer centre runs mainly on MA2 for PC as each machine is equipped with an additional screen to run MA 3D. This allows the girls to work and experiment with a wide variety of fixtures and set ups," said Strydom. "The creativity and imagination they develop is then implemented in the various venues around the school for events ranging from Battle of the Bands to Fashion shows and school. An Inter Schools lighting design competition is also planned for later this year and this will be MA2 on PC and MA 3D based."



Inter Fear, a festival dance /physical theatre production at the Grahamstown Festival lit by Barry Strydom.

Strydom was introduced to the grandMA technology last year when he used the product as a lighting designer for the Common Wealth Pageant SA, hosted at the Lyric Theatre in JHB.



Strydom first discovered MA at the Commonwealth Pageant SA Final hosted at the Lyric Theatre, Gold Reef City.

His introduction to theatre started in the mid 90s where he studied drama at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein. He worked on everything there was to offer at the university from lighting to sets and never missed the opportunity to design and run shows at the Grahamstown Festival.

"I ended up in schools teaching drama," he said. He continued to work on productions as lighting designer and stage manager for dance and theatrical performances.



Flicker by Athena Mazerakis

When a lighting supplier offered Strydom a sales position in 2012, he declined the offer but it dawned on him that he had a unique service to offer, one that combined the arts with schools. He had hands on experience in the industry, an excellent understanding of equipment, years of hands-on experience of school performances and the desire to share his knowledge with young people.

Within the last year, Strydom has redone and repaired a number of spaces in Johannesburg including repairs at St Theresa's, upgrades at Auckland Park Prep, upgrades at St Mary's, creating a new theatre space at St John's and all equipment in the new performing arts centre at St Peter's.

Everyone has something that makes what they do worthwhile. For Strydom it's that moment when the students have completed their training and they stop looking down at the desk when programming and, instead, look up and enjoy what they are creating.