

Renowned Liz Berry presents a Lighting Workshop in South Africa

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Liz Berry with DWR's Gareth Chambers, Nick Britz and Duncan Riley

With an estimated twenty visits to the country, International Lighting Designer, Liz Berry, is no stranger to South Africa. In fact, she says that when she stepped off the plane recently, it felt like coming home! While her adventures have included trips to Namibia, Botswana, and forming a good friendship with the team at Gearhouse SA and many other South Africans over the years, this stopover was different as Liz presented a Lighting Workshop at DWR Distribution, aimed at upcoming lighting designers and operators in Johannesburg from 25 to 27 March.

Having a mother who taught French and a father who was a lecturer, it would seem this Berry did not fall far from the bush. She has presented lighting design courses at Rose Bruford College, London's esteemed International Drama School of Theatre and Performance as a result of being a world-renowned LD.

"I met Liz years ago and it has always been a juxtaposition knowing that this unpretentious person is also one of the most talented designers in the world," commented Duncan Riley of

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DWR. “We thought this would be a very special occasion for young industry players to be inspired by her. It’s not every day that someone has the opportunity to meet and spend time with a creative person like Liz.”

Nick Britz who heads up training at DWR says the course was very interactive, delegates were given tips and tricks of the trade and Liz was excellent at ensuring everyone was involved as she shared her knowledge over the three day session. “Liz created different scenarios, as an example, splitting the class up into groups and getting them to come up with their own show. This included where the lights would be set up and creating the show design,” said Nick. “She gave advice on each design. I have never seen anything like it and I thought it was a stunning course.”

Commented Liz Berry, “When Duncan asked me if I was interested in coming to South Africa to take some workshops, there was no thought, it was an instant ‘yes’. I’ve been to Joburg many times and every time I come I find people who are passionate, talented and hard working, with big hearts and smart minds,” said Liz.

“I think it’s easy if you live at the bottom of Africa to gaze out at the bright lights of Europe or across to America and convince yourself that the shows in those distant places must be so much better than at home; but it’s not true. South African designers produce world-class lighting, and have exceptionally competent technicians that support them under some extremely challenging conditions.

I want my students to understand this, and have the confidence to stand proud on the global stage, knowing that they are up there with the best, even if they happen to be a long way away.

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Liz Berry with her training group in South Africa

“Running this series of workshops was an incredible experience for me, and I was learning too. I was particularly interested to learn how sophisticated the equipment set-ups are in the churches, and how well resourced they are. I will try to visit one next time I’m back.”

Liz has experienced a vibrant career. “She was with Vari*Lite in the late 80s, early 90s as one of the touring VL operators and technicians, and importantly the first female in that role, I believe,” commented Lee Baldock, editor of *Lighting & Sound International*. “She blazed a trail for women in the biz. We’ve been lucky enough to have her as one of our product judges in the PLASA Awards for Innovation several times – and she was as generous with her expertise and as thoughtful then as you find her today. She’s welcome back any time.”

Leaving Vari*Lite after two years, Liz’s career led her to become the lighting and creative director for performers such as Bryan Ferry, Robbie Williams, Roxy Music and Madness.

An article from *Lighting & Sound International* 2003 described her as one of the most gifted LDs on the international tour scene; at the time she was a forerunner in using video as a lighting tool. She is also known for her signature lighting plots for the popular television game show, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*.

Always interested in innovative technology, today Liz is with Hologramica, a company that produces astounding 3D holographic projection for stage, television and live events.

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She is a bit of a dreamer, talking about shows and people, a Landrover expedition gone wrong and star gazing in far off African destinations. Liz orders a chocolate Sundae with nuts and you catch a glimpse of her childlike streak, the essence that has enabled her to be lovely and imaginative, qualities of an artist.

“DWR are all about the people, and this is an especially important message for a small part of our global industry in a relatively remote part of the world,” ended Liz. “I wanted the networking to be a huge part of the experience for all the delegates, because you can grow faster if everyone can learn from other people. I hope everyone made new friends and contacts, and now have more people they can call on for help or a second opinion. I send my best wishes and heartfelt thanks to all in the group who made the visit such a pleasure, and I hope everyone found it enjoyable and worthwhile.”