

We talk to Glenn Duncan a top SA lighting programmer

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Modest and a gentleman always, we were very grateful to be able to chat to Glenn Duncan and ask him a few questions about touring both locally and abroad, and about his experiences as a lighting operator.

What show are you currently working on and can you name some of your recent international productions?

I have just finished the UK tour of Show Boat for Cape Town Opera. I was in the UK and Ireland for five weeks with the show and my next production will be War Horse.

How did you get into theatre?

I did drama at school but I studied an unrelated degree, BA in English Literature. While I was a student a friend of mind was in a production at the Sound Stage, Midrand. They needed a follow spot operator for the evenings and I ended up working there for twelve years. It's hard to explain, the work was fun, the people were great and I always found it a rewarding thing to do.

When did you decide to start touring?

After being at the sound Stage for a long time and seeing the shows go away and seeing the world, I started getting a little jealous. When the opportunity came up for a show going to Cape Town, I said, "Yes please."

What made you gravitate towards the niche market of programming?

From followspotting I gradually worked my way up to operating a console. Being a small venue, I had a hand in quite a few departments. By the time I started touring I had found my way around a lighting console and people started calling on me as a programmer.

How do you manage to keep up with technology?

If there is a tradeshow or launch and I can be there, I will. I try to keep up with training courses, and the Internet is a wonderful thing. All the information is there if you take the time to look.

Did you enjoy touring the shows?

It's great seeing parts of the world you'd never otherwise go to, meeting new people and seeing how people work in other countries. Even in the UK it's interesting that each venue works slightly differently. You do feel more welcome in some venues than others, but you go a long way towards making friends by being happy to work the way they do.

What's the best thing that has ever happened on tour?

That's a tough one. It's all been pretty special. The best thing is when you have a tough move in, work yourself to death, get the show up by the skin of your teeth and it all happens, it all works and you have a standing ovation at the end. It's not exclusive to touring, but for me that's the reward.

What was the most difficult?

The most difficult is when there is not enough support, whether locally or abroad. Yes, we can manage on our own but it's great to have a bit of power, understanding and help behind you. It's definitely difficult being in a foreign country and not speaking the language but we all like a challenge... I do.

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When you are away, what do you miss most about home?

On a shorter tour - it was five weeks with Show Boat - I manage fine and I'm not too desperate to get home. With Phantom of the Opera we did four months in Seoul, South Korea. That was a bit too long and there were things happening at home that I couldn't be there for. It's also difficult when you get back and the industry is coping without you. You need to go around reminding people that you're around, otherwise the work stops coming your way.