

ETC upgrade at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre in Durban

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The Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal has upgraded its ageing Tungsten Fresnels to ETC Source Four LED engines and has invested in Fresnel Adapters to provide soft beam lighting

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suitable for any stage configuration. The new fixtures were used for the first time in the production of *Bodies of Water*; a soulful contemporary dance work by FLATFOOT Dance Company.

“The theatre had some Tungsten Source Fours that they wanted to upgrade,” explains Michael Taylor-Broderick from DWR Distribution’s Durban branch. “After an internal discussion with my colleague, Kevin Stannett, we suggested a solution that would give them the best bang for their buck.”

ETC’s smart retrofitting options include adapters that make their LED engines multi-purpose, allowing lens tubes to be swapped out to suit different needs. The theatre acquired several LED engines and Fresnel adapters, enabling them to use the same fixtures either as LED profiles or Fresnels depending on the production. The Source Four LED Fresnel Adapter attaches to the front end of a Source Four LED Engine, transforming it into a high-quality wash light.

Theatre Director Jackie Cunniffe — who admits to being more familiar with audio applications — leaned on her production managers/in-house lighting designers Wesley Maherry and Tina le Roux for guidance. “In a venue like the Sneddon, where productions range from student work to professional theatre, we need to offer a wide range of lighting possibilities,” Jackie explains. “The intuitive nature of ETC’s control and lighting systems helps us do just that, opening up a new world of creative possibilities for designers working in the space. Alongside the long-term reliability and local support available in Durban through DWR Distribution, the ColorSource range was the ideal choice.”

The Sneddon is committed to exposing students to industry-standard equipment and practices. Jackie notes that, in line with UKZN’s mission of ‘Inspiring Greatness’, students stepping onto the Sneddon stage now engage directly with the kind of technology and production values that will define their future careers.

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The LED upgrade also brings clear technical advantages. With a lower power draw, the new fixtures reduce overall electrical load — a major plus when relying on generators during load-shedding or unexpected outages. “With a growing portion of the rig now LED — including the ColorSource Fresnels and the ‘V’ Engine units — we’re maintaining a more energy-efficient footprint without compromising on quality or creative potential,” says Jackie.

It is worth noting that in-house lighting designer Wesley Maherry is a dedicated ETC user, and after exploring other options reverted back to ETC because of how it supplements existing equipment at the theatre whilst

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meeting international standards. Fortunately, DWR's access to ETC meant they could meet his exact specifications.



For *Bodies of Water*, Wesley was both venue production manager and lighting designer, and was enthusiastic about incorporating the new gear. "The 5-Colour 'V' Engine has been a game-changer for us at the Sneddon, especially in terms of adaptability — being able to swap between Fresnel, Profile, or Cyc adapters depending on what the production requires," he says. "For *Bodies of Water*, I used the ColorSource 'V' Engine with all three adapters to create varied effects throughout the piece. I could explore subtle shifts and variations from a single engine — which was essential, as the emotional tone of the choreography was closely tied to the lighting. The engine's ability to transition smoothly between rich aquatic blues and

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delicate sea-foam tints, along with nuanced white tones, gave me a powerful palette to evoke the feeling of being submerged or floating — all while maintaining excellent colour integrity on costumes and skin.



The colour mixing is seamless, and the output blends beautifully with the rest of the generic rig. I could wash the white floor with diffused light to achieve that 'underwater glow' without harsh edges. Its smooth dimming supported the fluid, ever-changing vocabulary of the dancers' movement."

Creating a visual world that felt both fluid and emotionally layered — a suspended, underwater atmosphere that complemented large-scale wave projections on the back cyclorama — was at the heart of the lighting design.

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“These fixtures allowed me to sculpt both the dancers and the space purely through light, crafting moods that reflected the choreography’s themes of resilience, survival, and surrender”, Wesley adds. The ColorSource units gave me excellent colour flexibility, and when combined with static gobos and our generic sidelight fixtures, I could create textured patterns and rippling effects — all without the need for moving lights.”



Sneddon colleague and Naledi Award-winning lighting designer, Tina le Roux, notes that the fixtures have significantly expanded her creative scope, especially for large-scale musicals and pantomimes. What stands

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out for her is how well the new fixtures integrate with the existing rig, which remains largely generic incandescent fixtures. “Whether I’m blending the new LED fixtures with our generics or using them to layer light across different angles, the ColorSource range has given me creative freedom. Instead of working around old limitations, I can now shape the stage in new and exciting ways.”

Photos by Val Adamson