

Justin Maldonado

For my culmination I was the Associate Lighting Designer for the Trillogy concert in the Voorhees theater on December 6th, 2019. As Associate Lighting Designer I was in charge of drafting up the plot, instrument schedule, channel hookup, and programming. The Head Lighting Designer, Allison Ramnarine, was in charge of actually designing the look of the show since, because I'm partially colorblind, she's a lot better with colors than I am. She also made the magic sheet and initial cue list for each song. To put it simply, she was the creative force and I was the technical one. We had talked previously about working together for our culminations along with Steve Ortiz and Alisha Farrouq, but that idea got scrapped and we weren't sure what it was we were going to do. Fortunately, an opportunity presented itself.

I think it was around early October, or maybe even earlier, that Allison and I were approached by Melissa Kucevic, the concert's Production Manager, and Nick Mallios, the sound designer and the band's guitarist, to be the lighting designers for their show. Of course we agreed and got started on our proposals. Once they were approved in early November, we got to work. With the show being in December, we figured we had plenty of time on our hands. That is until we had our first production meeting with the faculty. Not only were the holidays rapidly approaching, but the week that we had planned on using the theater, the space was already reserved for something else. Not to mention the fact that the haunted hotel took longer than we had hoped to come down. So time was not on our side, but we made the most of what we had. Many of the lights that were used in the haunted hotel, specifically the lights in the catwalks, we were able to repurpose and refocus for ourselves. I spent many hours in between and after classes sitting in the light lab staring at a computer screen, trying to figure out how we could do a lot with a little. Of course I wasn't alone the whole time. My wonderful technical advisor, John Robinson, gave me tons of advice that would play a huge part in the decisions that I eventually made. I also would bring Allison to the lab with me so we could discuss how it was that we were going to pull this off.

Fast forward, thanksgiving break came and went, and it was time for the fun part. I had finished our paperwork (plot, instrument schedule, channel hookup) before the break and we hung and focused all the lights, so now all we had to do was take what was on paper and make it real. Lucky for us, Trillogy is a cover band, so all the songs they were performing already existed. Allison put a Spotify playlist together of all the songs the band was performing and as we sat in the booth and programmed, we were able to listen to each song and figure out what exactly the lights were gonna do and when. We spent so much time in the theater, in fact, that we actually got kicked out one night because the building was closing. The building closes at 10pm. We also faced a slight technical issue during programming where the far stage left MAC 301 stopped working. JR had a look at it and told us the light had to be pulled, leaving us with 3 MAC 301s instead of the original 4. This was a relatively small problem but it did throw off the symmetry of the stage so that made me sad but it went unnoticed at the end of the day.

So the day of the show comes, December 6th, and Allison was starting to freak out because we were so focused on making each individual song look good, we still hadn't finished all of them. So that day we were rushing to get it all done and about two hours before showtime, we finished. The band rehearsed a few songs, we had a break, and 30 minutes before showtime, we had one last look at all of the lights. Then, at 7 o'clock, headsets on, and we started the show. It must have been my nerves getting the best of me, but during the show I made a mistake. Each song had its own set of looks programmed into individual sequences on the grandMA.

Unfortunately if you don't tell the grandMA to turn off a sequence before moving to the next one, both sequences will run at the same time. This was my mistake. I had done it time and time again while looking through the lights for each song, but the day of the show I messed up and had to fix it on the fly in the middle of a song. Luckily I was able to fix the problem calmly and swiftly. Actually it went something like Allison saying "oh my God what happened" and me saying "I got it don't worry". So we get through the show, and Allison and I breathed a sigh of relief as it felt like the weight of the world was lifted off our shoulders.

As for culmination class, it was a breeze. We were the only ones in the class that had done our physical projects the semester before, so all we had to do was get our paperwork in order, set up our portfolios, present and write our reflections. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, classes had to start being held over Zoom. This wasn't that bad, at least I didn't have to worry about the trains making me late for class, but I did face another challenge; lack of motivation. Being stuck in the house for all these months has really taken a toll on me mentally as well as physically in the form of my backwards sleep schedule. Still, I somehow managed to log in to class on time (and saying that is really weird but these are weird times). I was nervous about presenting though, which might seem silly since culmination presentations this year were over Zoom calls, but that plus my background in performing still doesn't make me immune to stage fright. As nervous as I was though, I got through it and I think I did a pretty good job.

I can definitely say the whole process was a learning experience. After all, this was mine and Allison's first real experience designing lights for a show. Looking back, there were things that could've been done better but, unlike my vision, hindsight is 20/20. At the end of the day, I'm still happy with the work that we did. Allison and I make a great team and I think it's safe for me to say that I would much rather have a career as a programmer than a designer.