



PROFESSIONAL PROFILE:

Name: **Tim Deiling**
Profession: **Lighting Designer**
Experience: **10+ Years**
Location: **London, England**
Website: **www.timdeiling.com**
Recent Shows: ***SiX* (West End, International), *Knights Of The Rose* (West End), *American Idiot* (West End/UK Tour), *Oliver!* (Mercury Theatre), *Our House* (Tour)**

Tim Deiling is an American-born Lighting Designer educated and based out of the United Kingdom. Named “Young Lighting Designer of the Year” by the Association of Lighting Designers in 2008, Tim has since designed lighting for 200+ professional theatrical productions on the West End, tours, films, and beyond, and his work has been recognised by The New York Times.

THE INTERVIEW:

City Theatrical (CTI): How did you get started as a lighting designer?

Tim Deiling (TD): I grew up in Hershey, Pennsylvania. Every Sunday, my family’s reward for surviving church was going to Hershey Park. We’d all get to pick one thing to do. For me, I was interested in seeing the park shows. This was my first glimpse at what theatre could be. As kids I’d turn our garage into a stage, the garage door into some “automated” scenery, my dad’s painting lights into some basic theatrical lighting.

When I was 15 and doing community theatre I googled “lighting designer” to see if it was a real job that people did. A few weeks later I ended up in Ken

Billington’s office. He was nice enough to take my call and show me around his studio. Turns out you CAN do lighting design as a job. From that point on I wanted to be a lighting designer.

I studied lighting design in London at [The Royal Central School for Speech and Drama](#). I was attracted to the undergraduate education there because it was really self-guided (almost like a Masters in the US). You can set out to achieve the skills you want to learn; set yourself term projects, spend time shadowing people in the Industry, etc. Not to mention the drinking age in London is only 18!

I kept pestering Ken and was fortunate enough to work with him when he came to the West End to light *The Drowsy*

Chaperone, *High School Musical*, and more. Since then I’ve done maybe 14 or 15 productions of *Chicago* and others for him. In a few years I was able to go from shadowing him to relighting shows for him. I definitely learned a lot from Ken as well as his many associates. Alongside all that I was lighting off-off-West-End shows at places like The Union Theatre working with other young directors and designers.

CTI: What would you say was your big break as a lighting designer?

TD: At 25 a director I’d done a few shows with hired me to light a small production of *American Idiot* in the West End. That show has since done two West End runs, two UK tours, and New Zealand. I was very lucky. While being an Associate to Ken and other designers like Jon Clark,



SIX The Musical West End

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Tim Lutkin, and Natasha Chivers, I kept designing my own work. Like *Knights of the Rose*, which was a particularly interesting show. It was a total flop yet annoyingly some of my favourite lighting!! The show was definitely problematic, but I learned that the true joy in theatre making comes from your collaborators. Despite the one-star reviews it was still the most exciting time I've had in a theatre. Flop or Hit, Fringe or West End, I hope my future is full of meaningful and exciting collaborations like that one.

And now with *Six The Musical*... When I joined the team, we were playing in a purple cow-shaped tent with 500 seats. Aptly named the "Udder Belly." It was sold out at the Edinburgh Fringe all August, with a simple set and a small in-house lighting rig. Then it came straight to London and we got to add a whole lot more lights.

CTI: What's it like working on SiX compared to other productions?

TD: *SiX* was written by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, who wrote it as a graduating piece for their theatre class at Cambridge. The Musical Director Joe also went to Cambridge, the same year, so there's always been a great family vibe on this show. The rest of us got involved after some producers picked up the show and after some workshops in London. This

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new team and I started with two weeks of an out of town tryout prior to a second run at the Edinburgh fringe. We knew at this point the show was heading to the West End so this out of town was our chance to get ready for that. We only had 10 hours of tech time for all 1200 Lighting Cues. Totally crazy! But eventually after a few previews it was a fabulous opportunity to get the tone and comedy of the show ironed out and finessed. Then all the lighting and most of the set went back to storage while we did the the Edinburgh Fringe (the purple cow tent). We got all the gear back a month later to move the show into the Arts Theatre in the West End. Having sneakily done that out of town tryout prior to all this we were able to hit London straight from the fringe (all the photos and B-roll done) and the show seems to have magically grown overnight!

The piece is essentially a pop concert within a pop concert on stage, featuring

the six wives of Henry VIII as a girl band. History is remixed and presented from the girls' perspective. It's a chance for them to reclaim their stories, through beautiful pop music. Each "queen" tells her own side of the story through a singing competition. Surprise surprise: male historians might have been bias in how these Queens were represented. With a simple set, we needed each queen and her number to have its own identity. In collaboration with the costume designer, each queen has her own color pallet in costume and light.

The set is a gold bandstand with curved metals frames behind it, covered in pixel LEDs. With it, each queen has her own shape on the back wall made from LEDs, and the stage takes on the identity of each queen. It's now her Royal Court. To create this, we needed about 55,000 DMX parameters throughout the show. Geeky fact: According to ETC, we are the second largest show running on an EOS, second only to *Moulin Rouge* on Broadway.

We're looking forward to an even bigger and better production of *SiX* on Broadway, but also careful not to go too big and overpower the story. We're so flattered that the show has already taken off in the USA like it has; at times being the second most downloaded musical soundtrack next to *Hamilton*. I've always



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loved watching big arena pop concerts and have had the absolute best time try my hand at it in our own special theatrical way.

CTI: What’s your typical day like?

TD: There are two workday modes – preproduction, and in production. Mornings I get up, force myself to get out, get emails done at the coffee shop. (I can’t really focus at home.)

With eight productions of *SiX* this year, it’s almost become a full-time job for me. Paul Toben has been my U.S. Associate and right-hand man. Helping us stage Chicago, Boston, two shows on Norwegian Cruise Lines, and soon in Canada and St. Paul, Minnesota. Interestingly, his role has been an Associate/Programmer, doing both jobs. When setting up a new company, we’ll also have a second programmer to just deal with and clean up all the set electrics. A big and welcome change from the beginning when I pre-plotted all 1200 cues offline in my bedroom!

The cruise ships were especially interesting. (*SiX* is contracted for 3 ships.) Uniquely for a show this size we fit up and tech’d while the ship was at sea. (Normally it would be done in dry-dock.) So, we had to share the space with the other production show (*Jersey Boys*) and other events like Bingo! Building a show at sea is one of the most challenging

and logistical things I’ve ever done. Fun though to walk out on a lunch break and be somewhere different every day: tropical island or Alaskan Glacier! You instantly know how good a show is if you put it in front of non-theatre goers, like on a cruise ship. If it’s not funny, they won’t laugh, or they’ll just leave (the shows are free). And with *SiX*, a lot of people said things like, “I never knew theatre could be that.” It was exciting. I like to think of it as “well paid outreach!” (Interesting “Ship Show Fact”, we had two sets of heels for each queen for safety purposes, depending on condition of the seas.)

I also want to recognise Jamie Platt, my U.K. Associate, who has worked hard to make several permanent productions of *SiX* come to life in the UK and at sea.

CTI: Who/what is the greatest influence on your lighting aesthetic?

TD: It has to be Ken Billington. I’ve spent a lot of time watching him work and soaked up his vocabulary of storytelling. Beyond that though, so much of a design is down to what you can actually accomplish — how you work. You can have the greatest idea in the world, but if you can’t organise yourself and action it there’s not much point. I learned from Ken how to work fast, how to prioritise, and how to manage a creative team.

Some designers have a spectacular singular aesthetic that works really well

and you can always spot one of their shows out in the crowd. Often to stunning results. The danger here however is the show needs to suit them and not the other way around. I try my best to serve the piece and not myself. I have the most respect for designers with range who can deliver a lush opera one day, a big musical the next, and trendy play after. Sometimes ego and ambition need to take a back seat to the practical needs of the play. And yet... the punters still need value for money. Personally, I don’t have much interest in realism in theatre. For me good theatre is expressionistic, it’s high contrast, a heightened reality to convey a point. My lighting tries always to reflect that where appropriate.

CTI: How did you start designing for films?

TD: As a university student, I worked for the [National Theatre](#), where I had access to a storeroom of unused lights. I met a young director at a pub, who was friends with actors like Sadie Frost. We just made a bunch of short films for fun! I would borrow theatre lights from the National Theatre and we’d have the most amazing time with no money making theatrical looking films. This director’s big influence was Tim Burton. I had so much fun lighting for the camera and

was able to do a lot of things with color. Unlike theater, where you worry about a thousand different points of view, with film, you only have to worry about one: the camera. Cameras nowadays are amazing - we can add 2% brightness to a light and it would make the shot look completely different.

I was then fortunate enough to work on *Film Stars Don't Die In Liverpool* starring Jamie Bell and Annett Bening. A major film, my job was to light all the theatre scenes in the film as a "theatre lighting consultant". I got to collaborate between the Director and DOP. It was a truly amazing experience and something I'd

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love to do more. I always think musical movies could benefit from a theatre lighting designer pushing that lighting language we are used to seeing on stage. More obvious shifts between reality and the poetic within the musical numbers.

CTI: What is a particularly interesting project you've worked on?

TD: *American Idiot* was such a special project for me. A mile marker in my career but also a dream show to light. I remember being 15 when the album came out and daydreaming how it could be a theatrical event. I had never tackled a rock musical like it and I knew I wanted the same energy as the rock gigs I loved as a kid. Confused how to manage all those lighting cues, I actually re-wrote the score. I remade the score with all the measures and vocals but none of the notes – that's where I put all my doodles

about what I wanted the lighting to do. It looked like the scribble of a mad man... but got the job done! I learned better ways later on, but definitely a formative project in my life. Also, who doesn't LOVE Green Day!?

CTI: Who are your typical collaborators?

TD: Mainly the director, the scenic designer. Also producers, production managers, and general managers. Having an ambitious idea is only half the job, you've gotta sell it, build it, and pay for it. It's funny how 75% of this job has very little to do with lighting. I'm learning

its budgets and scheduling. Don't tell 18-year old me!

With *SiX*, I collaborated a lot with the costume designer, Gabriella Slade. The show here on the West End has 10 shows a week while each cast member can only perform in eight. Thus, we use alternates. The directors want the alternates to have a distinct look, so we use 'alternate' lighting and wardrobe colors that will work for those three tracks. The fans love it, they'll come multiple times to see the alternates in different roles. Also, on *SiX*, Emma Bailey (Set Designer) has let me cram lighting in almost every crack of scenery possible. I'm grateful for her trust in me.

CTI: What are some of the challenges of technology you face in our world of high tech lighting?

TD: Color. It's amazing and terrifying that every light changes color now. My generation of LD's biggest challenge is going to be how do we catalog it and measure it? Having worked as an associate and relighting shows for other people, you inherit a bunch of color palettes, you have to match new gear to existing color palettes. How do you keep the integrity of the color? How do you hold on to it? What do you call it? Lighting designers who have been doing it for a long time often have massive color libraries and a staff to manage them. Smaller designers like me do not, so this process requires hours before each tech to mix and match colors across the rig.

When you buy paint, there's a method of cataloging color. In lighting, we used to have Gel colors but less so now. I believe as a lighting community we need to commit to a catalogue of color and a way to define/replicate that across different fixtures. At the moment, everyone mixes their own subjective version. There's a lot of room for more efficiency.

CTI: What do you see for the future of lighting?

TD: Like most industries, I believe automation is our future. Fixtures will get smarter, be easier to troubleshoot, and more intuitive to program. "Hey Siri, go to cue 1."

For more information on Tim Deiling, visit: www.timdeiling.com