



PROFESSIONAL PROFILE:

Name: **June Abernathy**
Profession: **Front Light Supervisor; Author**
Experience: **30 years**
Union Affiliation: **IATSE Local 321 Tampa Equity Stage Manager**
Home Town: **Tampa, Florida**
Current Project: **The Lion King US Tour**
Touring Experience: **The Lion King, Beauty and the Beast, Les Misérables, Grease**

June Abernathy has been a professional Spotlight Operator for 30 years. A graduate of Florida State University, she has worked in the theatre in many capacities - primarily as a Stagehand, as a Stage Manager, and as a writer. Still, the career that supports all the others has been the Spotlight. She has run spotlights for many different shows in many different venues, from rock concerts to theatre, opera, dance, and more.

THE INTERVIEW:

CTI: How did you get started in professional lighting?

JA: I was a Stage Manager through high school and college, and started out as a Stage Management Intern in Sarasota, Florida upon graduation. A colleague soon introduced me to running a spotlight for a show in Sarasota. I liked the job, and it exposed me to work on concerts and road shows that came through the area. I joined the tour of *Les Mis* in 1998 and that started my path of running spotlights for national tours.

CTI: What are you working on now?

JA: I'm currently working on the US touring production of *The Lion King*,

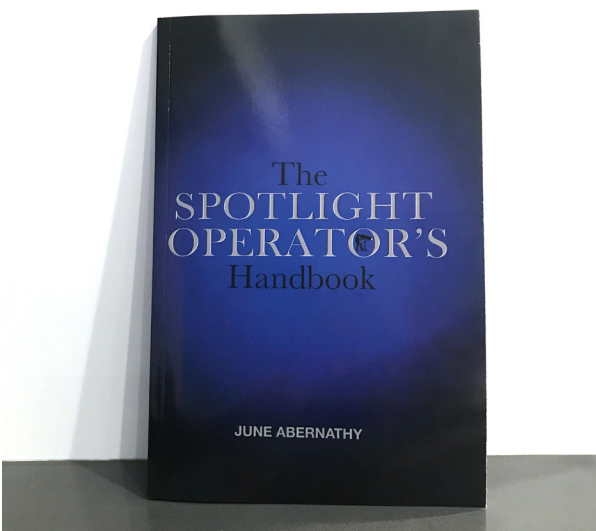
on our way to Toronto, Canada until August 2019. I enjoy working on this show a lot, it's fascinating. There are so many elements – puppets, masks, percussion, flutes, projection. It's a very collaborative environment, we learn from the experiences of global tours of the show, and share our own insights. The show brings so many different components together.

CTI: What's the typical day in the life of a Spotlight Operator or Supervisor like?

JA: Often an afternoon rehearsal during the day, which would entail turning on show power, and moving scenery and lighting towers. Show times vary, depending on the venue's normal schedule and the day of the week. Typically the evening curtain

is at 7:30 or 8:00 p.m. We typically have evening shows Tuesday through Sunday and also matinees on the weekends. We come in an hour and a half before curtain to do our preshow checks. We check the whole lighting rig for anything that may have burned out or dropped focus. I run cues for one spotlight during the show, and I also call cues for the other three spotlights that are run by local crew members that I train into the show in every city. Usually I'm coordinating my calls with the lighting cues.

Being a Spotlight Operator requires a lot of multi-tasking. Lots of input through a headset. It's running the spotlight but also looking at everyone else's spotlight. We cross train within the electrics department so we can help each other, whether that's calling



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spots, running the light board, or running a deck track. I enjoy stepping into other positions to have a new perspective on the show.

CTI: What inspired you to write [The Spotlight Operator's Handbook](#)?

JA: I wrote this handbook as a resource for people who want to get better at their job as a Follow Spot Operator or Stagehand. I also welcome theatre professionals to use it along with theatre training programs.

I run a spotlight eight times a week, and have been doing it for decades. This is something most Stagehands don't do every day. Many of us aren't formally trained on a spotlight, and I realized there were gaps in training. I want this book to be a practical set of tips and tricks from someone who's been doing it every day for a long time. Terminology is important.

CTI: How did you get started on this book?

JA: It started as a list of things that every Follow Spot Operator should know. First a list of glossary terms, either particular to spotlight or theatre, then a list of mechanical parts of the fixture – what to look for, and how to adjust them.

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For instance, if a new Spotlight Operator hears, “Your ballerina’s coming in stage right,” he or she should know which way to look and which processes to follow after reading this book.

CTI: Who is your ideal reader?

JA: This handbook is for those who are new to this career, perhaps recent graduates, as well as more experienced Stagehands and theatre professionals who might be hoping to pick up a few new skills.

High school teachers and college theater professors can use this book to make working with spotlights a more important part of their school curriculum. It's very commonly an entry level position in the professional world, so it would be great for graduates to be familiar with spots.

CTI: What was the most challenging part about this project?

JA: Finding the time. I wrote little bits and pieces whenever I could find time, whether it was in airports between cities, or before show time. I turned lists into chapters, then pulled chapters together into a cohesive unit, the published handbook.

CTI: Would you recommend the job to newcomers to the industry?

JA: Yes. If you're a Stagehand, operating a spotlight is something you should know how to do, and it certainly adds a wide variety of skills to your arsenal. I've found people who are good on the spotlight often have more options than those who are not.

CTI: What's one take home message you'd like your reader to get from reading this book?

JA: There's more to the spotlight than you think, but you can learn it.



Spencer Plachy (Scar) in The Lion King US Tour. ©Disney. Photo by Deen van Meer.



Purchase The Spotlight Operator's Handbook by June Abernathy on [Amazon](#) at: <https://amzn.to/2NhuQWV>

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