## PROFESSIONAL PROFILE:

Name: **Andrew Voller**
Profession: **Lighting Design & Programming; Founder, Moving Light Assistant™**
Experience: **32+ Years**
Location: **London, England**
Websites: **www.avld.com**
**www.movinglightassistant.com**
Recent Shows: ***Jesus Christ Superstar* in Concert (Vienna); *Mamma Mia!* (West End)**

*Andrew Voller is a UK-based lighting designer with over 32 years of industry experience. Andrew has also worked as a moving light programmer for many theatrical productions as well as large scale television events and productions. Andrew is also the creator and developer of Moving Light Assistant which is an application designed to document moving light rigs used on productions today.*

**THE INTERVIEW:**

***City Theatrical (CTI): How did you get started in the world of professional lighting?***

Andrew Voller (AV): My interest in lighting started in school. I started at my local theater, then did a youth training course. I studied Theatre Electrics at Paddington College, then worked on the musical *Time*, which was one of the first shows to use VARI-LITE® lighting fixtures. I was fascinated by VARI-LITE fixtures while I was there, and got to know one of the engineers that worked for the company. I applied for a Service Technician job and worked on and off for VARI-LITE until 2001. I became a training manager, and started programming theatre shows. It was there I first met Hugh Vanstone, among other lighting design greats – Chris Ellis, Rick Fisher, Howard Harrison, and Andy Bridge. I always had an interest in lighting design, so programming alongside those designers really inspired me.

I got my break as a lighting designer in Vienna with *Hair*. From there, my lighting design career has continued in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and has taken me all over the world – the USA, Japan, and beyond. With programming, I come out for special occasions, including Olympic opening and closing ceremonies, three Eurovision Song Contests, and more. And Moving Light Assistant™ certainly keeps me busy.

***CTI: What's the typical day in the life of Andrew Voller, professional lighting designer, like?***

AV: I get up very early and work on Moving Light Assistant first thing. If I'm not out on a show, I'm at home, so I'll get some coding done. I work on it every day. Then it's catching up on what I need to do for shows I have at that moment. When I have upcoming productions, I'll start reading scripts to get a feeling for the show before even thinking about lights.

When a show is in production, it's a different world – it's hard to think about anything else, let alone do much else. You just don't have the head space for it.



*Rock of Ages* in Amstetten, Austria (Gerhard Sengstschmid)

> **"It's inspiring to see light in nature; through the trees, and the natural colours of light in the sky."**

When I'm home, the days are more relaxed. I try to go cycling in the woods regularly to clear my head. It's inspiring to see light in nature; through the trees, and the natural colours of it in the sky.

**CTI: Who/what are your greatest Influences on your lighting aesthetic?**

AV: If I were to pick the two designers who inspired me most, it would be Rick Fisher and Hugh Vanstone. They are very different designers with different methods. Rick is more unconventional, using very interesting angles, like foot lights, and sometimes a slightly unconventional colour palette, like greens. Working alongside him was great to see how he works in this way. And Hugh really knows how to work with other members of the team well. He's an amazing collaborator and a real joy to work with.

I've always enjoyed what I do because I have two roles – lighting designer for theatrical shows, and programmer for large events. As an LD, sometimes you have to be a politician; liaise with



*Hinterm Horizont* in Berlin and Hamburg, Germany (Brinkhoff/Moegenburg)

directors, work with and steer a team. When you're a programmer, you get to have a lot of fun, and be creative in a sense without the responsibility.

With a large scale project like the Olympics, the LD is like a project manager as there's limited time for them to get involved in the minutia of the lighting. While they design the rig, and sketch out what they want by scene, a lot of the creative details are left up to the programmers. That's where being a programmer is fun. You get to work creatively as a lighting designer in a way, creating something that works with the moment for the live and television audiences.

**CTI: What is the most interesting project you've worked on?**

> **"That's where being a programmer is fun. You get to work creatively as a lighting designer in a way, creating something that works with the moment for the live and television audiences."**

AV: Working on the 2007 *Hans Klok* tour, which started in the Netherlands and went over to Las Vegas, was a really interesting process. There were so many technical aspects to the lighting because you're lighting magic. You light what you want the audience to see, vs. not to see. The lighting for a magic show is probably more technical than lighting a conventional theatre show. With magic tricks, there's not a lot going on until the moment of reveal, as a result, the lighting must have interest and a dynamic to it. For instance, I had lights on cyber hoists that allowed us to create different lighting positions for each illusion. It's about creating lighting systems to move lighting to very specific places.

**CTI: How would you describe your design aesthetic?**

AV: It changes based on the project. When I'm working on a magic show, where there's little if any scenery, being able to move the lights to different positions really helps enhance the show. When I work on shows with a lot of video scenery, lighting becomes a little more about illumination. In a musical, however, you rarely allow the light to be a performer.

**CITY THEATRICAL**
NEW YORK · LONDON

VARI-LITE VL6 Launch (Phil Dent)
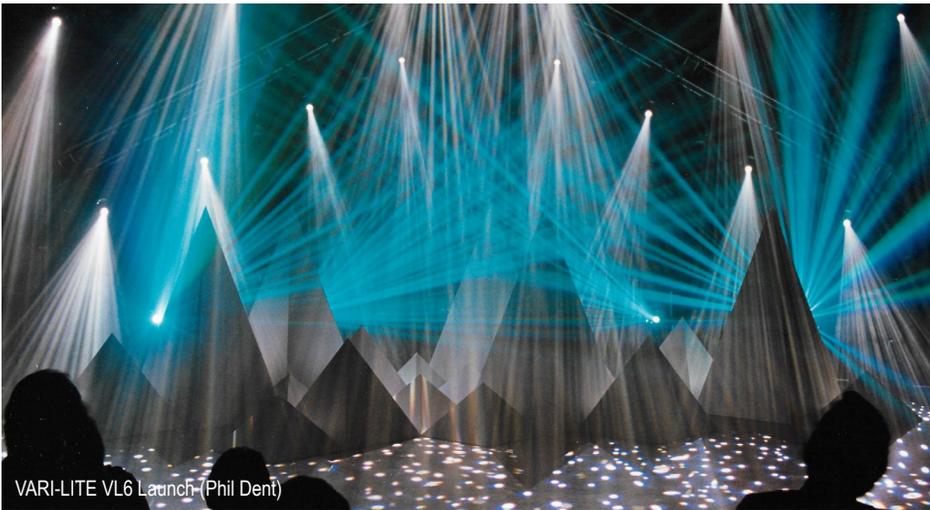
In general, I would say all my designs are pretty moving light heavy. I always think about the gobos I want to use. Perhaps this is from being a lighting programmer – I'm very familiar with many types of moving lights and what each one can bring to a production.

**CTI: Do you think your background as a programmer has affected your lighting design aesthetic?**

AV: I think it lets me communicate in a very specific way. In my head I know specifically what I want the lights to do. As a designer, I suppose I don't give programmers too much free reign.

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

AV: I think colour control is one aspect. Most of us "grew up" with three colours, i.e. CMY. With ETC Source 4 Luster Plus, for example, we're dealing with seven colours. When there's a lime or purple or something else in a colour, it makes working with consoles more difficult. I've found it has taken awhile for consoles to catch up.

People are embracing LED now, and I believe there needs to be a mental shift when thinking about colour and LED lighting. For me, the problem is getting the right colour palette. There's plenty of cheap LED out there. With LEDs that are just RGB, you're never going to get a good white out of it. That's why you see RGBA, etc.

At this point, I think you can get a quality of light out of LED now that is similar to incandescent. I've done a few shows that were all LED moving lights. I was happy with the results. You do find you're playing with the colour quite a bit. It might feel slightly green, or slightly pink, especially in context for different scenes. It's about refinement. I think the technology is definitely getting there.

**CTI: What inspired you to develop Moving Light Assistant software?**

AV: I've always kind of done software. It's always interested me. I wrote some small applications for VARI-LITE when I worked there. Back in 2007, I was starting to work on software for testing DMX lights, similar to the DMXcat now. I had written a very basic version for Mac only, using the

same environment John McKernon uses for Lightwright software, which was one of the few cross-platform developments at the time.

When we were doing *Bombay Dreams* on Broadway, we had to do moving lighting tracking in Excel. It was clumsy; we had to export from the console, and manipulate it in Excel to get what you wanted. I started playing around with importing console data, and it started growing from there. It kept growing, and then in 2012 Moving Light Assistant™ was finally released. It's been an interesting journey, and largely led by the people who use it.

I've had to use Moving Light Assistant software myself. I worked on two shows in last two months that I documented myself, and it's always good to do, because it makes me wonder why it doesn't do certain things, and to realise the bottlenecks.

**CTI: What do you see for the future of Moving Light Assistant?**

AV: We're very fortunate because Moving Light Assistant seems to now be an industry standard for

**CITY THEATRICAL**
NEW YORK · LONDON

doing presets and cues. We've seen it used successfully for many Broadway shows and tours, it has really become an industry standard on how to document shows that go on to touring, or archive information, or so crews have a reference to refer to and maintain shows.

For future usage, my plan is to integrate it more with the console. In the end, it's about staying on the console, and having the computer follow along with what you're doing. We're working on the communication and synchronization between the two. It's about integration to make life easier for people, so you're not doubling work.

*CTI: Do you think you could design without programming, or program without design?*

AV: Doing both satisfies two parts of my psyche in a way.

You can clearly be one without the other. But you must understand programming as a lighting designer, to design well. Designers now are really savvy about how they use moving lights.

To be a good programmer, you must have a really good eye and know how to work with colour and angle. Having a design background helps you be a better programmer. Many of the great programmers out there do – you don't have to tell us how to focus a light. That would be painful for designers. If I had to choose, though, it would be design. It's about emotion. As a designer, you have to feel the emotion as well. You get the satisfaction when you see the audience feel something. You get rewarded when you are part

of that. When you feel it, you know it's right.

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

AV: There's a big push for LED. I think we're going to see more and more improvement, in terms of the quality of the light, and the brightness.

We're also seeing much more video. I've done shows where lighting is about lighting live people, at times with only video scenery. In that case, you have to make content rather than making huge physical sets. As sets become video-based, it's a different way of designing, because the only light you'll see is it falling upon somebody. Perhaps in the future LDs could have influence on how lighting is portrayed in 3D worlds. Who knows? I suppose we'll find out.

> "It's about integration to make life easier for people, so you're not doubling work."
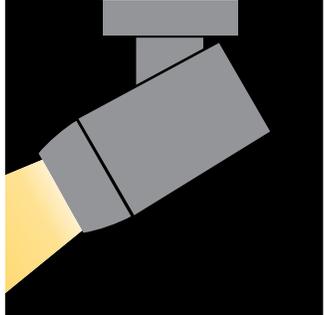


**MOVING LIGHT ASSISTANT**
moving light documentation software

*For more information on Andrew Voller, visit: www.avld.com*
*For more information on Moving Light Assistant, visit: www.movinglightassistant.com*

**CITY THEATRICAL**
NEW YORK · LONDON