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When Lightning Strikes, Update Your AV System

A Kentucky arts center seizes the chance to upgrade its systems

Located in a former high school (built in 1918) in Lebanon, Kentucky, Classic Arts at Centre Square (KCA) has been presenting an eclectic schedule of events since 2011: plays, musicals, children's theatre, and touring acts, in addition to murder mystery dinners and wine and cheese tastings. It also features a substantial educational component, offering acting, dance, music, and crafts classes. As you can imagine, its lighting and audio systems get a considerable workout from year to year.

Then lightning struck. Literally: As a result of this freak accident, the theatre's 20-year-old Strand rack was damaged, putting the lighting system out of commission for a short period. The urgent need to replace the disabled DMX board drove the theatre's staff to pursue a comprehensive systems upgrade. JCA Media, based in Cecilia, Kentucky, was called in to provide new lighting and sound systems as well as more efficient power control.

Before the lightning strike, KCA relied on a 20-year-old Strand rack and an old-school DMX console for its house and theatrical lighting. While some LED fixtures had been added over the years, the core of the system was nearing the end of its life. The strike incapacitated the front-of-house console and disabled the dimmer rack in a way that there was simply no coming back from, causing unpredictable light flickering and power outages during performances. The former system also lacked the flexibility and control imperative for modern theatrical productions. These

facts made maintaining the production schedule all but impossible, halting rehearsals and making clear an immediate need for a dependable replacement.

The AV transformation that followed was a multi-phased project, with JCA Media also being responsible for an audio system upgrade even before the lightning strike. In May of the previous year, KCA invested in a full Danley Sound Labs loudspeaker rig: two mains, two subs, two front fills, and three balcony fills, all driven by Danley amplification. An Allen &

Heath Avantis Solo console and GX4816 stage rack now provide comprehensive control, complemented by 20 Shure QLXD wireless microphones networked back to the console for battery life and RF level monitoring. Danley subwoofers are discreetly integrated, and Dante connectivity is available in every floor box.

In the lighting upgrade, the existing 225A dimmer rack was replaced with a LynTec RPC 365, providing ample power and room for future expansion with 12 extra circuits. Every can light and pendant was replaced with a house light alternative from The Light Source, offering a complete color spectrum across 58 cans and eight pendants. This upgrade not only dou-



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bled the foot-candle output on the floor but also eliminated 15 older fixtures, significantly improving energy efficiency.

For theatrical lighting, existing moving fixtures were cleaned and re-verified. These were supplemented with 21 CHAUVET Professional Ovation Rêve E-3 fixtures and two CHAUVET Maverick movers with internal shutters for precise light control. The entire lighting system is controlled by a JANDS Vista EX console.

The Light Source full-color fixtures are particularly noteworthy for their ability to maintain high CRI white output despite being RGBW fixtures. The integration of the LynTec panel allows flexible DMX power control with two distinct channels. The first channel manages essential everyday lighting, including house lights and basic stage washes, while the second channel controls the full theatrical lighting rig. The system allows for individual

addressing of every fixture, enabling dynamic effects, such as "rainbow waves," throughout the room.

"LynTec was, of course, the first and only suggestion or recommendation we had as far as power control," says Alex Peake, project manager. "The arts center is now a gorgeous room full of full-color house lighting, warm Lekos, moving heads, you name it! LynTec is now controlling power over the audio system as well, which is used daily in the room. All of the LynTec equipment has been flawless!"

The Art Center's transformation has been favorably received. As soon as the house lights were activated, a significant increase in coverage and consistent color temperature was evident.

Past performances felt as if they were done in a white-knuckle manner; the dreadful anticipation that the previous system would flicker or fail was palpable. That anxiety is now a dis-



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tant memory with the RPC 365 providing reliable, precise power control. The full-color capabilities of the new lighting fixtures illuminate a world of creative possibilities. The ability to individually address each fixture provides a new level of control.

The LynTec system now controls power for the new audio system as well, providing a single, comprehensive solution for the venue's core technical infrastructure. The entire installation process, including audio, theatrical lighting, projection, and house lighting, spanned about six weeks overall. Impressively, the space remained largely usable between phases. The KCA now stands as a testament to how a targeted upgrade, even when prompted by startlingly unforeseen circumstances, can lead to a meaningful transformation.

(JCA Media was founded by Jim Cottrell, who worked as a rock musician (both live and in studios) in the

1960s, then switched over to consulting and installation services. He was a recording engineer and also a touring gospel musician. He started Jim Cottrell Associates in 1975; the business included the recording studio Alpha Recording in addition to video and audio production services. In 1994, Cottrell started JCA Media, which installs sound, video, lighting, projection, and acoustical systems. The company works extensively in Kentucky and the surrounding states; it also has customers in Florida, Indiana, Ohio, Alabama, Virginia, Colorado, and Texas. Recent Kentucky projects include Springdale Community College, in Louisville; White Mills Baptist Church, in White Mills; Beaver Dam Baptist Church, in Beaver Dam; Louisville Collegiate School; and Henry Clay High School, in Lexington.

The new gear has made a significant difference in the venue's opera-

tional life. "Right from the start, their reaction was priceless: 'We can see!'" Peake says. "When I powered on the system, filling the room with clean, white light, the contrast was incredible."

Peake adds, What's humorous is that with the vastly improved house lights, they suddenly saw all the imperfections that the old, darker system concealed, like touch-ups on the back wall that now needed repainting." Most important, he adds, the lighting has a unified quality. "Previously, they dealt with wildly different color temperatures across the space, from outdated fixtures to newer 4,500K LEDs under the balcony, clashing with the rest of the 3,000K room. Now, they have consistent, stunning lighting with total control, and they are absolutely ecstatic, eager to utilize it. Rehearsals are underway with performances right around the corner." 📶

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