

Jim Ingalls

Lighting designer James F. Ingalls (Adjunct Professor of Lighting Design) has worked extensively on Broadway, in London and at many regional theaters including the Lincoln Center, Playwrights Horizons, Goodman, La Jolla, Steppenwolf. His credits also include various ballet companies and both national and international opera.

JIM INGALLS Design credits include: The Importance of Being Earnest, Slavs!, The Good Person of Setzuan, Ajax (La Jolla Playhouse); The Cider House Rules, The Persians, Jelly's Last Jam (Mark Taper Forum); Tale of a Soldier (LA Philharmonic); Nixon in China and Pélleas et Méllisande (LA Music Center Opera). Ingalls is the recipient of several Drama-Logue Awards, the Obie for sustained excellence in lighting design, and a National Theatre Artist Residency Grant.

LIGHTING DESIGNER JAMES F. INGALLS TALKS ABOUT HIS WORK

Actually, when I look back on my career path, it's this amazingly straight line, although at the time I didn't know any of it was premeditated. As a kid, I started doing little puppet shows in the garage, which led to work in the high school drama club as a technician. (When I was in second grade I played "The Milkman" in the school play, which pretty much ended my theatrical career as an actor...) So I went right from high school theater to college theater, always interested in backstage stuff, in lighting and in stage management. After college, I went to the Yale School of Drama in the technical program as a stage manager, and I took lighting courses as well. I worked as a stage manager after that, first at Yale Rep for three years and then with the Twyla Tharp Dance Company for two years. At that time, the stage manager for the Dance Company was

also the person in charge of re-creating the lighting on the road, so it was a perfect bridge job from stage management to freelance lighting design. I realize now that one of the useful qualities that I developed while I was a stage manager was listening and responding to the rehearsal process. As a designer, you can just sit in the technical rehearsal with a headset on, and it's all these numbers that then become a technical look. The thing that stage management taught me was to keep the other ear open to the room while I'm designing, to the director and actors and other designers. And to be responsive. I make myself part of the whole process, as opposed to being just a specialty craft. In other words, that lighting is part of a larger collaboration that is related to the whole process, as opposed to just turning on the lights.

I have debates with other lighting designers who say "Oh, I don't know how to light the scene unless I know for certain that the chair is 4 feet 3 inches from the table." I'll say, "But you know that the first thing the director is going to do is move the chair." I have learned to relish each step of the process, to be improvisational, so that when I'm in tech, I'll often do something that is totally responsive to what the actor is doing or the director is doing. I think that is my favorite thing, where we've just had something totally spontaneous happen, something that we wouldn't have ever thought about or planned. I often describe the process of lighting as a way of sculpting. And not only sculpting space with light, but also sculpting a block of raw material about the play; taking the shreds of information from the play and the shreds of information from the production, (the set design, the costume design, etc) and putting all of those elements together and then considering that the block, chipping away at it to get the answer. I always approach my designs from the outside in. When I think about a production like *The Violet Hour*, what I liked about that process is that we avoided the temptation to hit the

design right on the head. I mean, the play is called the Violet Hour, there's even a speech to the light! I just responded to the way light filled the room and the period and the architecture, not in a way that was completely dead on, where there was a lot of violet around. One worries in those moments during rehearsal or in tech when you're watching and you hear the words of that speech, and you think, "Am I doing enough? Should it be more violet?" Actually, secretly, there was actually quite a lot of violet or shades of violet around, in the light plot, but not so that you would notice it — but so that it would characterize the under painting of all of the light with various forms of lavender and blue, that palette. Ultimately, I just feel really lucky to do the work that I do, with the people with whom I collaborate. Being a lighting designer is the best job I can imagine.