



ED

TECHNOLOGY

BY CHARLES R. KAISER

All By Myself

Maintaining A 400-Seat Venue Alone Requires A True "Jack Of All Trades"



Charles R Kaiser

A recent production of *Fiddler on the Roof* at the Newmarket Theatre (shown left).

The Newmarket Theatre is a 400-seat venue owned by the York District School Board and operated by the Town of Newmarket, Ontario, Canada under a joint shared agreement. The theatre exists primarily as a rental venue for the local arts community, but we have been steadily increasing the amount of our own programming over time. While the Newmarket Theatre is only a 400-seat theatre located in a town of 71,000, we are proud of our facility and the quality of its productions. Our equipment inventory and the quality of our operation compare favorably with many larger venues. While the Newmarket Theatre will never be on the cutting edge of technology, we are able to meet the needs of the majority of the acts that utilize our venue without having to resort to large rental packages. We are able to play host to such well-known Canadian artists as The Nylons, Tommy Hunter, John McDermott, and Rita McNeil and, at the same time, provide a very well-equipped venue for a wide range of events including tribute bands, local talent showcases, local theatre companies, and dance schools.

Our paid theatre staff is quite small. It consists of a theatre manager, a box office

manager/volunteer coordinator, three part-time box office staff, and me. My official title in the town's human resources hierarchy is "theatre technician/assistant administrator." I really act as the venue's de facto technical director. I handle all of the equipment operation and maintenance issues as well as budget development and new equipment selection. When technical labor is required, we are often lucky enough to get some keen high school students who are willing to work for a small honorarium or even as volunteers to make up their 40

hours of community work required for graduation. It is also helpful that many of our regular user groups have members who are very capable stagehands.

As the only resident technician in this venue, my major responsibilities with any production are ensuring that it is set up safely, that any rigging is safe and secure, and that the users know how to operate the equipment. For such a small venue, we have a very substantial equipment list, and the skill level of our users runs the gamut from professional technicians to people who have

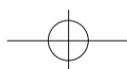
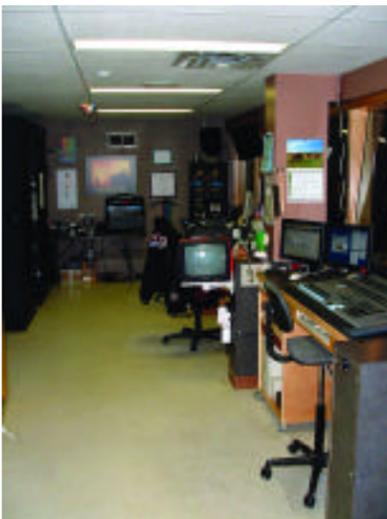
never set foot on a catwalk. This means that in some situations, my job is quite easy, while in others it can be quite difficult. For example, for some groups I may just have to supervise and troubleshoot, while for others I have to set up sound reinforcement, design the lighting, and operate both lighting and sound.

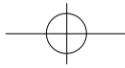
I now specialize in something that I call "the eight hour musical." This occurs when a user has booked the theatre for a 12-hour day on their first day with a performance scheduled for a matinee the next day. Often this first performance takes place as a 10 am school show. The first four hours are spent getting any set, rigging, and audio set up and working, and the next eight hours are used to compose and program the lighting cues and try to cram in some form of rehearsal. In many cases, I don't see a complete run-through of a show until the first public performance.

In the case of the show that is in my venue as I am writing this article (*The Wizard of Oz*), I only have to run the audio. Although it's not a heavy sound show, with only eight wireless lavs, 22 sound cues, and general stage microphones in use, it is the most technically ambitious show that the producing company has ever presented. It incorporates projections, pyrotechnics, onstage special effects projections, and a full-sized orchestra.

While ensuring that audio for the show

Lighting, control, and sound facilities at the 400-seat Newmarket Theatre





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was set in the course of the almost luxurious three days before opening night, I also had to program all of the intelligent lighting cues with the group's lighting designer, figure out how to fit a large video projector in the control booth, locate a DVD player that did not generate any OSD text along with the required projection, hang a scrim, assist with the electrics hang, and also respond to requests for house equipment and other issues (including vetting two riders for upcoming shows).

Oh, did I fail to mention that we don't have a proper orchestra pit? So what to do with the 33-piece orchestra for the show? They are located above the control room at the back of the auditorium. This requires the orchestra to be miked so that they can be heard by the singers on stage, a video feed so that the conductor can see the stage, and an audio monitor so that he can hear the singers. Luckily, the acoustic delay between the stage and the orchestra is only about 48 milliseconds. Not quite unnoticeable, but it does not seem to present too much of a problem for the singers and musicians.

As the sole technician in this space, over the six years that I have worked here I have been steadily upgrading the theatre's equipment. Many of the upgrades allow for easier single-handed operation. These upgrades include MIDI control of mute settings on our sound console via our lighting console. We are also able to control a sound effects computer on this same MIDI network. For sound effects and music playback, we are now using a Windows 2000 OS-based computer with a Creative

SoundBlaster Audigy2 soundcard and two SoundBlaster PCI soundcards. This computer runs Mike Daniel's Sound Cue System Professional 8.2.2 software (www.soundcuesystem.com). The computer can also be used for controlling our Crown IQ System SMX-6 as well as running our copy of SmartLive 5 from SIA, and Yamaha's Studio Manager software for editing custom profiles on our Yamaha SPX 2000 multi-effect processors.

For shows requiring more interaction with the faders on the sound console, the lighting console can be remote triggered

from the mix position, or the entire lighting control station can be moved so that it is adjacent to the sound equipment.

We may be small, but with over 200 event days a year, we are a very busy venue. Our season so far has included concerts or shows by famed Canadian pianist John Arpin, well-known Canadian children's entertainers Judy and David, former Men At Work front man Colin Hay, Canadian singer/songwriter Jim Witter, the Irish Rovers, the internationally renowned Famous People Players, and The Stampeders. In 2005, we look forward to

hosting Michael Burgess and Canadian east coast group the Barra MacNeils. I am proud of the standards that we maintain in this venue. ED

Charles R Kaiser has an MFA in lighting design and technical direction from Virginia Tech. Charles came to the Newmarket Theatre six years ago after working for former theatre giant Livent Inc. You can contact him at ckaiser@newmarket.ca



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