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## The Future of Club Lighting

Sep 1, 2007 12:00 PM, By Stephen Lieberman

It's amazing how fast this industry changes. Technology seems to move exponentially forward. Don't blink; you might miss something. Get to the next trade show. What are you using now? How many channels is that new fixture? Can that console wash my car too? Just sent you an email. Did you get it yet? What do you mean? I sent it at least three seconds ago.

Club lighting, club effects, visual stimuli; whatever you want to call it, it is really a very subjective arena. While the budgets might not be comparable to the last Rolling Stones tour, I assure you that experimental design and new technology flourish in these environments. Nightclub lighting is a laboratory for new ideas and a classroom for new faces. I could easily rattle off all of the latest and greatest toys available to us in today's market, but that's not what I think the future of club lighting is about. It's about the creative minds that come up with the new ideas on how to use the equipment, whether it is the latest LED fixture or an old pinspot pulled out of the tech closet. The ultimate intent is to evoke a response from the audience.

The future of club lighting is the people behind it, the designers and the technicians. A fixture, new or old, is only as smart or as cool as the person or people using it. To create something new, you have to constantly ask yourself the question, "What if...?" While you might be able to apply

typical theory that you learned at your fine arts college, for me, it's more about being able to visualize what that club will look like packed with people, music thundering, all under the tent of intense visual effects.

Club lighting is an art mixed with the science of technology. It's an expression of the designer and what he or she feels is appropriate for the space. How would a sculptor or a painter define the future of his or her trade? Would he or she tell you of a new type of paint or clay that has revolutionized the industry? I don't believe that would be the case. Of course, as designers, we are always looking to see what new tools are available to us. However, they certainly don't define what we do or who we are.

It can really be a daunting task trying to stay on top of technology. Being cutting edge is a difficult line to walk. My clients typically ask me if they will have the best system I've ever designed. My answer is almost always the same: "It will be the best system I can design for the space." Something about square pegs and round holes comes to mind; you can't make things fit where they don't. When designing a project, my primary purpose is to create a system that can inspire, provoke, evoke — anything to make you feel something. A lot of that has to do with the individual operating the system. However, without a strong design in place, the board operator wouldn't have the tools to get the job done.

Artistic expression of a creative mind is the embodiment of a light show. This is the future of club lighting; being able to visualize something in your mind and then being able to recreate that vision with lighting. To be able to have complete control over the environment is an awesome power. Knowing exactly what effect you want to create at the touch of a button, to be able to execute your vision in an instant — these are the things that make club lighting great. Nightclubs are not usually programmed in a cue-to-cue format; they are free form with a purpose. For those of you who are unfamiliar, it is like having as many busk pages as possible, similar to a festival setup. There are subtleties that can't be taught and innate qualities that emerge when the appropriate time comes along. The operator does not know what song is going to be played next. Running lights in a club is like being on a roller coaster in the dark. Being able to anticipate the next move, the next beat, the next break; these are traits that have to be in your heart. Having the tools that give us the opportunity to react when the time is right — perhaps that is the future of club lighting. Ultimately, I think everyone's opinion of what defines the future of this trade is unique to his or her own paradigm.

*Steve Lieberman is the president of SJ Lighting Inc. Founded in 2001, SJ Lighting is a full service facility whose focus ranges from design to production, installation, and programming. Recent projects include mur.mur in Atlantic City, Cherry in Las Vegas, and Vanguard in Los Angeles.*

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