

CASE STUDY



PERFORMING ARTS



OPPORTUNITY

To deliver a wide range of immersive lighting designs for a recent in-the-round adaptation of *Ragtime*, the Arden Theatre Company required cutting-edge lighting fixtures.



SOLUTION

Lighting Designer Thom Weaver utilized class-leading Martin by HARMAN lighting fixtures to overcome the challenges of presenting a Broadway show in the round at a small black box theater.



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RAGTIME, PHILADELPHIA

For the Arden Theatre Company's recent adaptation of *Ragtime*, Lighting Designer Thom Weaver utilized Martin MAC Allure Wash PC and Encore Performance lighting fixtures to overcome the challenges of presenting a Broadway show in the round at a small black box theater.

Based on the 1975 novel of the same name, *Ragtime* examines the 'melting pot' of America at the beginning of the 20th century through the disparate viewpoints of an African-American ragtime musician, a wealthy white family and a family of Latvian Jewish immigrants. For their recent adaptation of the Tony Award-winning musical, which ran from mid-September to late October 2019, Philadelphia's Arden Theatre Company chose to present *Ragtime* 'in the round', with the audience surrounding the stage on all sides. Performed at the F. Otto Haas Stage, a 360-seat black box theater in the company's headquarters, the production was stripped down to just 16 cast members and a handful of props and set pieces.

Given the sheer amount of different locations and plotlines in *Ragtime*—including New York City and New Rochelle, New York; a factory in Lawrence, Massachusetts; a ship on the Atlantic Ocean and a dream sequence—delivering an in-the-round performance in such a small theater presented unique challenges. According to Lighting Designer Thom Weaver, lighting played a key role in defining each location, directing the audience's focus and making sure viewers didn't get lost in the musical's many scene changes.

"Because we're lighting with the audience on all sides, there's very much a question of focus and where the audience is supposed to look at any given moment in a musical that moves this fast," says Weaver. "The biggest challenge in this room in particular is to always keep the audience focused not only on who's singing or who's performing in that given moment, what story is being told, but also to keep them focused on where they are and what's happening at that particular moment in the musical."





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Faced with the challenge of packing maximum depth and emotion into the stripped-down production, Weaver outfitted the lighting rig with Martin MAC Allure Wash PC and Encore Performance fixtures. The powerful and versatile Encore Performance was an ideal fit for primary lighting duties like beams, spots and effects, but to give each location and scene a distinctive mood and look, Weaver needed a cutting-edge wash light in his arsenal as well. After seeing a demonstration of the new Allure Wash PC, the first P3-enabled color mixing wash, Weaver knew he had found the perfect tool for the job.

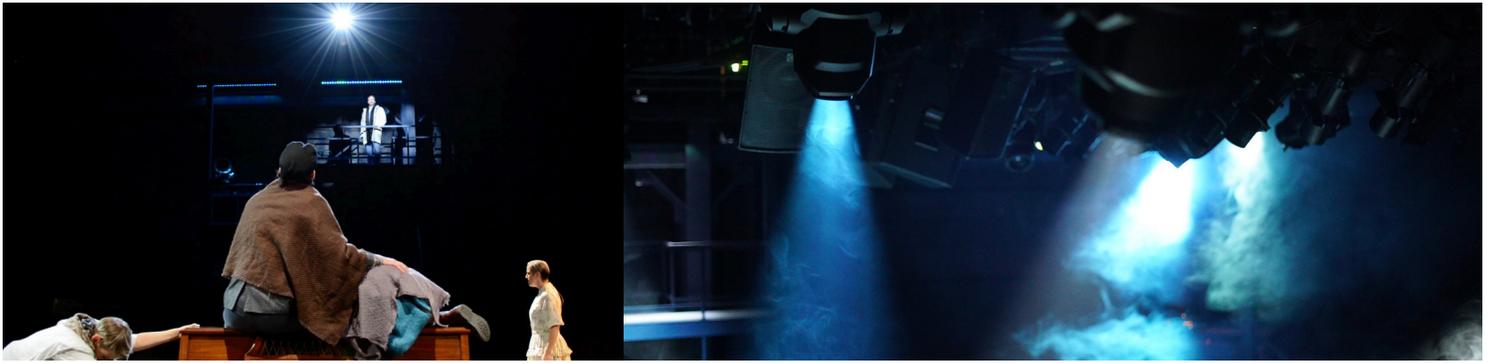
“I was already using about 10 Encore Performance lights in the show, so I wanted a wash fixture that could complement that, and I was already kind of in the market for one,” Weaver recalls. “That was about the time that I went to a Martin showcase in New York, and there were some of the Wash PC fixtures being shown there. I was instantly excited by it because the Wash PC in particular has a lot of the focus and a lot of the precision of a performance unit, but gives the soft edge of a wash unit. I took a video of the demonstration and excitedly brought it to the director of this production of *Ragtime*, and I said, ‘I think this is really what we need for this show.’”

In addition to using the MAC Allure Wash PC for traditional wash lighting, Weaver took advantage of the fixture’s P3 control and video mapping capabilities to incorporate realistic textures into his lighting design. For example, for a scene involving a massive fire at a textile factory, Weaver sent a video of real fire to the lighting rig via P3, which manipulated the individual pixels in each light to create a complex, hyper-realistic effect never before possible with a wash light.

“One of the things that lighting designers have been struggling towards for years now, since the inception of the gobo rotator, is creating movement in light that had verisimilitude and a cinematic quality to it, whether it’s flashbulbs or fire or any one of those kinds of effects,” says Weaver. “We’ve had a lot of kind of clunky ways to make that happen over the years, and the Allure Wash PC and the P3 system have, for the first time, given us the ability to use media, video and photographs as a kind of translucent filter for the light. We’ve never really had that before, and it creates a whole new layer, a whole new dimension to what you can do with just a normal light.”

“It’s a whole new way of thinking about color and the way you can integrate the color of different medias into the light as well,” Weaver adds. “It’s also an incredibly exciting way to collaborate with video designers in theater. The ability to pull imagery from the video design and feed it into the lights so the whole world feels a little bit more integrated—it’s a unique opportunity. It’s not something we’ve really had to work with before. I think as lighting designers, we think cinematically, so the ability to incorporate that is a cool thing.”





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While the advanced features of the MAC Allure Wash PC and Encore Performance fixtures were critical for pulling off the lighting design for *Ragtime*, some of Weaver's favorite aspects of using Martin lights are their simple reliability and quiet operation.

“The reliability is kind of second to none,” Weaver concludes. “I rarely ever have a problem with a Martin light. I've been using Martin gear for quite a while now, and they're always my favorite manufacturer to work with because I can just count on everything not only working, but the engineering is top-notch. One of the benefits of Martin, especially in some of the newer moving light technology, is that it's quiet. And I can't tell you how valuable that is in a theater setting. In a rock and roll arena, it doesn't matter so much. But in a small room like this, it's critical.”

PRODUCTS USED

MARTIN MAC ALLURE WASH PC LIGHTING FIXTURE

MARTIN MAC ENCORE PERFORMANCE LIGHTING FIXTURE



CONTACT

For PR Inquiries:

David Glaubke

Director, Public Relations

HARMAN Professional Solutions

david.glaubke@harman.com

+1 (818) 895-3464 Office

+1 (818) 470-7322 Mobile

To Speak With Someone About
HARMAN Products and Solutions,
visit pro.harman.com/contacts

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