

North Kentucky University Implements their Green Initiative with PL3 LED Luminaires and Palette VL Console

When university technical directors are looking for ways to update their existing lighting systems, many have to begin the process by approaching their respective budgetary committees to plead their case as to why the system update is needed. It is not often that discretionary funds are approved. When Northern Kentucky University (NKU) decided to implement a school-wide "Green" initiative, lighting designer Terry Powell leapt at the opportunity, and worked with Adam Hayward at Vincent Lighting Systems to overhaul his lighting rig with twenty-four (24) PL3 Wash luminaires from Philips Selecon and a Palette VL control console from Philips Strand Lighting.

"In the past, my boss and I had been talking about LED technology and all the benefits we would get by using it in the theatre," began Powell. "So when the University established a pool of money that was to be used for sustainability, we jumped at the opportunity to put together a proposal, and contacted our longtime friends at Vincent Lighting Systems to get the project going."

"Vincent Lighting is very proud to have been involved with NKU for a number of years," added Hayward. "We first became involved with this particular project over the summer when we received a phone call from Terry detailing the initiative that was taking place at the University. We started right away to develop a list of potential LED products that could meet all his lighting needs."

Located in the suburb of Highland Heights, seven miles southeast of Cincinnati, NKU has more than 15,000 students, and produces four main stage productions inside the Corbett Theatre where the lighting fixture renovation would take place.

Hayward continued, "With the Corbett Theatre in particular, NKU really wanted to focus on the lighting fixtures and getting them up-to-date with the latest technologies. But the necessity was also that the fixtures chosen had to be completely useful with the new LED fixtures being an equal replacement for the incandescent fixtures currently hanging in the rig. They didn't want to simply buy 'Green' technologies; they wanted to make sure that the fixtures chosen would perform how they expected."

Powell added, "While we were enticed by LED technology for the reduction in consumable supplies and their color-mixing capabilities, the primary attribute we had to have was intensity. We wanted to be able to have one fixture replace 2-3 of our current fixtures, and if we were going to replace the Fresnels, we wanted to replace all the Fresnels."

As Powell and Hayward knew the criteria for the lighting fixtures, they decided it would be best to see how the potential fixtures actually performed inside the Corbett Theatre. In setting up the LED shoot-out, Hayward brought Powell four possible LED Wash fixtures to choose from, including the PL3 Wash luminaire from Philips Selecon.

"During the selection process, I researched several fixtures online and we did a demo with few different LED lights," said Powell. "When I first saw the PL3 Wash, the thing that I liked the most was that it looked and felt like a traditional Fresnel. With some of the other fixtures we looked at, you changed the beam spread by essentially putting diffusion media in the fixture itself, but with the PL3 Wash the zoom is built into the light so that was a big plus for us. But what really sold me on the light was how much brighter it was than its competition and that was what we really needed."



The Selecon PL3 LED Luminaire

The Philips Selecon PL3 has a zoom range from 15 to 55 degrees and outputs over 6000 lumens.

Hayward added, "When we went down to the theatre space to do the shoot-out we brought four different products, and the PL3 Wash was clearly the superior option. I love the ease-of-use with the fixture. With its zoom capabilities, you don't have to use any extra lenses, and with the color-mixing you don't have to use any type of color filters which may cause loss of output. Plus the quality of light is extremely nice, and it makes the PL3 Wash a very appealing yet practical LED solution."

With their choice now made, NKU was able to take possession of 24 PL3 Wash luminaires. While the original proposal only called for 20 fixtures, the affordability of the fixture allowed them to purchase 24 that were loaded into the theatre which was about to open its first production of the new school year.

"We first used the new lights on our production of *Our Town* and the show looked great," said Powell. "The multitude of color choices was outstanding, and while we knew the LED technology would give us more color options, once I was able to see all of them together, it was quite surprising."

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A Scene from "Our Town" Production at Northern Kentucky University Featuring PL3 LED Luminaires

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As the production began, Powell served as the director, but it was a student lighting designer, Chris Carter, who got to take the PL3 luminaires on their initial production run.

"*Our Town* is about the magic of ordinary life in New England at the beginning of the 20th century", explained Carter. "It is quaint and romantic, very picturesque, and the playwright really pushes the lighting elements. The first Act begins just before dawn and ends at night which demanded that careful attention be paid to every time of day as the Act progressed. Act II is the same progression, but with rainy skies, and a wedding chapel. Then in Act III, we move into the afterlife and a nostalgic memory scene. The lighting played a huge role in establishing the scope of the piece while maintaining an atmosphere of charm and simplicity."

As a junior transfer-student from Western Kentucky University, Carter had previously worked with LED technology, but the PL3 Wash fixtures offered a number of new surprises.

Carter continued, "The PL3 Wash fixtures were amazing. In my third or fourth day at NKU, they actually invited me to watch the shoot-out of the different fixtures they were considering for purchase, and when I first saw the PL3, I was impressed by the intensity, but when I saw it mix pure Canary Yellow without any mud, I was sold. When we got the entire package into the theatre and turned them all on together they looked tremendous. The lights were incredibly smooth and vivid. The range of color temperature was perfect; we could match any gel in the conventional plot and push far beyond in other parts of the spectrum."

As the Corbett Theatre is a busy college main stage hosting a number of productions yearly, there was some concern over the time that it might take to integrate the new technology into the space. When it was time to patch and program the PL3 Wash luminaires into the *Our Town* design, Carter and Powell were both hoping for an easy integration, and thanks to the Palette VL control console from Philips Strand Lighting, that's exactly what they got.

"The Palette VL made it very easy to program the LED luminaires," said Carter. "I have used other boards in the past, and while there was some learning curve initially, I found the console to be both powerful and user-friendly. After working with it, I actually prefer its LED color-picking software, which is wonderful. I also love the effects engine and the multiple cue playbacks. Plus, integrating LED fixtures in the console was extremely easy. The power patch feature allowed us to patch 22 PL3 Wash fixtures, and a series of Philips Color Kinetics Color Blaze TRX cyc lights, in only seven minutes."

Powell added, "I love our Palette VL. Working with student designers, the interface and language of the console makes it easy to navigate and program. And when bringing in the new LED fixtures, we didn't have to worry about DMX channel counts because we have four DMX Universe Ports. We put our Color Blaze TRX cyc lights in one universe, the PL3 fixtures in a second universe, the static incandescent fixtures in a third universe, and then we have a few moving lights that we put into the fourth universe."

As the lighting renovation is now complete, the NKU Theatre Department is proud to boast about the new sustainable and energy-efficient lighting fixtures inside the Corbett Theatre that give them a recruiting advantage while keeping them in line with University initiatives. But no matter how great the talking points may be, if the fixtures did not perform as needed in a practical theatre environment, their value would diminish. Fortunately for Powell, this is not the case with the PL3 Wash luminaire.

"The PL3 Wash luminaires are everything that we need them to be," said Powell. "What will surprise other technical directors the most is the intensity. Yes the color-mixing is fantastic and the beam is smooth and flat, but the intensity is amazing. And with their incredibly low maintenance costs and high reliability, they are an ideal LED solution for any theatrical lighting rig."

Carter added, "I also used the fixtures on a musical theatre workshop and again on a show for our Dance department. The PL3 luminaires were beautiful in each application; musical, play, and dance. They played a huge part in giving each production a distinct look and their versatility really shined."

With another satisfied client, Vincent Lighting Systems is excited about the possibilities and applications of the PL3 Wash luminaire. And as a longtime Philips Strand Lighting Authorized Dealer, they are confident that the leadership behind the light will continue to provide them with the quality product and support they need for both to be a complete success.

Hayward concluded, "As a dealer, I can easily see the PL3 Wash fitting into several additional applications such as studio lighting rigs, interior architectural applications, or a house of worship. We have also done demos with the fixture for theme parks as well. But what really gets us excited is the support behind the light. When we went to NKU to help unpack all the PL3 fixtures to make sure all the technology worked out of the box and we had zero issues. We have been a dealer for Strand Lighting for a number of years and when you combine their new products and technologies with their renewed dedication to service and support, we look forward to working with them for many years to come."



The Strand Lighting Palette VL Lighting Control Console