

## Styling a Second Empire

### Illuminating the History of Philadelphia for the Philadelphia Festival of the Arts

This spring the City of Philadelphia commissioned the Lighting Practice led by Designer Al Borden to create a Son et Lumiere presentation using the Avenue of the Arts and City Hall as a canvas. Philips provided a grant to support the design of the project and the Entertainment group provided technical support and advice to the design team.

Al Borden tells us about the project, "Styling a Second Empire features animated graphics, vibrant, moving, color-changing lights and various illuminated effects intended to bring to life the many intricate architectural details on the tower and south facade on one of Philadelphia's most iconic buildings: City Hall. With inspiration originating from the story of City Hall's architecture and it's history about the city, this "ballet of light" brought City Hall to life.



While the sculptures represent the history and culture of the city's many ethnic groups, the building's location in the physical center of town, on William Penn's Centre Square, places it in the cultural, political and historical heart of city life. When it was built, it was designed to be the tallest masonry building in the world; a record it held until 1908, yet still is the second tallest of it's type. It characterized Philadelphia's optimism, confidence, and perhaps arrogance, as the USA's industrial production center of the 19th century. To this day, it still is the tallest masonry supported building in the world. Its architectural style, French Second Empire, was the style of choice for many great, important buildings to come. Ultimately, the message the light show is intended to convey is that the building, and it's importance, is still very alive today. We have re-interpreted history but have also celebrated the city, its history and it's strength moving forward. We are Styling a Second Empire of architecture and our Philadelphia spirit!

While designing the show, we were able to set light intensity, color, gobo (pattern), shutter cuts, movement and speed, rotation, zoom and finally focus for every cue. Over the course of the 61 minute show we used thousands of different lighting cues to create the effects, each one set to play at an exact second, or fraction of a second, within the embedded music timecode. The automated computerized system was also required to sync with the existing Avenue of the Arts controller. An additional 500 cues were written just to control the lights across those South Broad Street buildings. Over 250 donated man -hours were devoted to writing the programs, which equates to about one hour of programming for every 15 seconds of the show. Countless hours of work also went into the load-in of all this equipment, designing of the show, coordination with many different building owners, city departments, and other stakeholders to create this unique piece of art.

For the best view the show, which ran three times nightly for a month during the Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts and Lightfair International, one would stand on the median of Broad Street somewhere between Walnut and Locust Streets and be immersed in the color changing effects surrounding them along the Avenue of the Arts. This permanent installation on Philadelphia's most artistic street was used to frame the main event and was reprogrammed to coincide with the original score and orchestrated lighting display on City Hall.



Four Philips Vari-Lite VL3500 Spot moving head fixtures were installed on the roof of City Hall. Each fixture, enclosed in a large weatherproof bubble, is capable of a variety of lighting effects as described in the project description. Also installed on the roof were six high power color-changing Philips Color Kinetics ColorReach Powercore LED floodlights. Using a combination of the moving fixtures and the floodlights allowed us to color the background while playing white moving effects across the tower.

Two Vari-Lite fixtures were also installed on the roof of the Ritz Carlton Hotel directly across from City Hall to create lighting effects on the tower and south facade of the building.

The lighting control system was a Philips Strand Lighting Light Palette VL which was connected to the audio system using SMPTE time code to run all of the lighting for City Hall and run the Philips Color Kinetics luminaires on the rest of the buildings on the Avenue of the Arts. The entire system was interconnected wirelessly due to the extended distances involved between building and luminaires.



Vincent Lighting a leading distributor for the three Philips brands involved in the project - Vari-Lite, Strand Lighting and Color Kinetics provided luminaires, control systems and professional programming for the project. The design and technical team worked closely together through the night to program the show and the systems performed flawlessly over the 4 weeks that the show ran.

Philips was pleased to provide support for this presentation.



City Hall was the strong visual focus of the presentation allowing the design team to use the Philips Color Kinetics Color Reach to provide a deep rich color Palette that was layered with the powerful images that the VARI\*LITE VL3500 spots delivered.

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**Strand Lighting**

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**COLOR KINETICS**