



Greening Up Our Theaters

Downtown L.A.'s Center Theater Group awards a young lighting designer and production artist for his abilities and passion to create better, cleaner theaters.

By Annie Suh

Green living is no longer confined to a small group of tree-hugger types. Everyone is looking for the right way to be conscious about our environment.

Even the theater community is attempting to take action, whether it's finding an alternative to toxic substances in makeup and shoe polish, recycling and reusing props, or finding energy-efficient lighting for special effects.

To prove the importance of a future sustainable theater, Center Theater Group bestowed its Fall 2007 Richard E. Sherwood Award on ecologically conscious designer/producer, Ian Garrett.

The award honors the memory of the late Sherwood, former president of

Above: Using recyclables, Ian Garrett's set design of *Antigone* at Hamman Hall was constructed by sharing resources with an opera house and other companies. Environmentally friendly paint was used to make old pieces look new, and everything newly constructed was created from reused lumber stock and recyclable foam sheets. Photo: Mark Ramont

LACMA and president and chairman of CTG's board of directors. His passion for supporting talented and innovative new artists lives on with the grant that accompanies the award.

Every year, award-winners receive \$10,000, half of which must be used in a working relationship between the artist and CTG. Winners must be exceptionally talented, have produced at least one work in Los Angeles and be dedicated to improving the future of their artistic fields. Though he hasn't been able to design a complete show that fully incorporates sustainability due to the complexity of completely re-evaluating how a theater



Reducing wattage. Garrett's lighting design for *The Madwoman of Chaillot* at the Commerce Street Artist Warehouse. Instead of bringing in any type of generator, the lighting was designed with the idea that it had to run off one outlet. This meant the entire show used a maximum of 1800w, which sounds like a lot in a household setting, but in theater, it means two or three lights. Photo: Ian Garrett



Permanent Collection lighting design at the Kirk Douglas Theater/CTG by Ian Garrett. Photo: Craig Schwartz

is lit, Garrett has been trying to find and utilize the most efficient ways within the existing systems. He bemoans the tendency to "over design" at times, so he makes it a personal goal to filter out what's not being used.

Theatrical lighting instruments gorge themselves on huge amounts of energy compared with their household counterparts. Creating flashing bright lights and color-changing luminescence that add thrills to a show, makes the giant lighting systems vital. This is the dilemma for Garrett.

At 25, Garrett takes his passion for the environment to CalArts where he is pursuing a master's degree in production and lighting design and where he will co-lead a course in the spring entitled "Sustainable Theater." His interest in show business began at Rice University where a short stint at the school's box office introduced him to the world of theater. "It was sort of a natural leap for me in being challenged to design something impermanent and getting it built," he says, referring to his background in architecture.

Born, raised and still residing in the San Fernando Valley, Garrett's circle of professional colleagues would describe him as "ambitious, imaginative and easy-to-work-with."

Garrett likes the path he's currently taking, but he would like to implement more and more design ideas. "I'd like to be working with people on not just existing systems and seeing how they can be better, but really trying to create new ways of doing theater production—because it's not just an issue of making theater greener but making it so that it's going to survive." 🌱