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Member Spotlight: Michael Maag

Q&A with Michael Maag: Resident Lighting Designer at Oregon Shakespeare Festival

How did you begin your career in lighting design?

In high school theatre I was not cast my sophomore year in the production of *Dracula*, so someone said "Why don't you do some special effects?" and that was the moment where I had an epiphany. I was running an old auto transformer board and pulling bi-levers around and I realized at that moment that when I was moving levers, I really wasn't controlling the light as much as I was controlling the emotion of the audience. I decided at that moment that was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.



What led you to Oregon Shakespeare Festival?

Its reputation as a place that was producing excellent theatre. A place that had artistic integrity about the work that it was doing and just the quality of the work. Before I came, I was having a discussion with someone about the possibility of someday being good enough to spend maybe the last 10 years of my career at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and hopefully I would be good enough to do that someday. Sure enough, six weeks later the person I was talking to got an offer to come down and a few months later I got an offer to come down so it worked out really well.

How do you take directors ideas and turn them into a reality?

That is the job really. You're an interpreter of artistic desire and our job is to find a way to manifest those dreams and ideas on stage. You have to be good at understanding the actual artistic intent and you have to understand where the artists are going with the piece and how you can best support it with your technology. When I started doing theatrical lighting you could pretty much get by with just having a crescent wrench and a screw driver. Now you need to be a computer network expert, understand embedded electronics, and have a solid

basis in other kinds of electronics. You just can't get by with the simple stuff to be good at it. I continue learning and growing and riffing off of the ideas of people around me and trying to manifest the best possible work by exploring what's new and what's available.

So would you say you draw inspiration by networking with your peers?

Absolutely. We're constantly trying to find a way to bring to fruition these ideas so we're constantly learning and growing together. We're inspiring each other.

Who are some positive influences that you draw from?

Some of the best lighting designers come through the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and I have the extreme pleasure to be able to work with them. A lot of them are a really positive influence on me. I've had the pleasure to work with so many really talented people and feel blessed to be in the same room with those folks.

Tell me about your experience as a USITT Gateway mentor.

I think the biggest takeaway from that experience was that in this business that we're in, especially technical theatre, we tend to attract and retain misfits. That also means that we have a strong community and a strong family and supporting each other as we go through whatever our own individual challenges are is ultimately the most important thing. There's so much excitement and energy from the young people we worked with in the Gateway Program and there's no reason that any of them should be denied the opportunity to excel just because of whatever their disadvantage was. Whether it was socio-economic, race, disability. None of that stuff should be a limit to our ability to succeed in this business. As a disabled person who is able to be successful in the business, I learned that the barriers are not really there. The barriers are only there if you allow them to be.

What are some of your favorite productions that you've designed?

There are so many of them. We've done such amazing stuff. I've really been involved in a lot of great productions at Oregon Shakespeare Festival. We did *Equivocation* which ended up touring and we brought it to the Arena in D.C. I assisted Chris Ackralan on that and designed the projections for it. It was an amazing production. I think working at a Shakespeare Festival doing a play about Shakespeare's company might have been a little bit of inside baseball, but was also really pleasing.

How does USITT play a role in your career and personal life?

I think because USITT is organized around education, not only is it a professional organization in which we set standards and try to maintain the best but it really is geared towards the educational environment. There's a constant training ground and mentorship ground so it's all about learning and growing and becoming better at our craft. For myself it's a resource for that, not only for my continued learning and growth but also now that I'm getting a little bit older my opportunity to return what I've received from so many amazing mentors over the years. I'm able to pass on the knowledge that was passed on to me. That's what USITT is about, that constant flow of stagecraft.

Suggest a USITT Member for the Spotlight!

If you know of USITT members whose work should be in the Spotlight, please feel free to suggest them. Contact Lynne Dundas at lynne@usitt.org.

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Board of Directors Winners Announced

Jimmie Byrd *USITT Secretary & Nominations Chair*

As chair of the Nominations Committee I am pleased to share the results of the most recent election.

Congratulations to Dan Culhane. Dan will become President-elect on July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018. He will then serve as President until June 30, 2021. He will then serve as Immediate past-president until June 30, 2022.

Best wishes to Paul Brunner on his election to the office of Secretary, July 1, 2017. As Secretary Paul will also serve as the chair of the Nominations and Bylaws committees.



Dan Culhane

Carolyn Satter was successful in her bid for a second term as VP-Commissions as was Jack Feivou as VP-Conferences. Congratulations to both.

The following were elected to serve as Directors Class of 2017-2020;

Karen Maness, Rafael Jaen, Shane Kelly, Deb Sherrer and Shan Ayers and Elynmarie Kazle.

On behalf of the Institute I extend our congratulations and our sincere thanks for their willingness to serve out Institute and guide its continued growth.

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Nominations are open for USITT Board of Directors

Jimmie Byrd *USITT Secretary & Nominations chair*

Nominations for the Board class of 2018 are now open with the process closing on February 22, 2017. This is to allow the Committee members time to review the submissions prior to meetings at the Conference.

The Nominations committee is charged with finding up to two nominees for the following positions; six Directors, two nominees for VP-Special Exhibits and two nominees for VP-Members, Sections and Chapters.

To start the nominations process, click [here](#). Members may ask another member to nominate them or they may self-nominate. All nominees must submit a letter of recommendation, a description of their service to the Institute, and their CV.

The Job Descriptions for these offices are available in the "USITT Policies and Procedures Compendium" (PPC) [here](#). The Nominations and Elections process is described in the PPC as well.

Interested members can contact the office with questions or myself at jimmiebyrd@gmail.com.

The Institute relies on committed volunteers to lead it into the future.

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News & Notices

Elite Training opens for Registration

Applications open Feb. 1 for Elite Training classes.

Three days of Elite Training in the areas of automation, rigging, sound, projection, and stage management will be provided at the Cirque du Soleil training center in Las Vegas May 18-20.



USITT and sponsors Cirque du Soleil, Meyer Sound, CM Entertainment Technology, Theatrical Concepts Inc., Silver State Wire Rope & Rigging Inc., Tait Stage Technologies, and Nicopress make this training available to USITT Student and Early Career Members and professionals in their early career stage.

To increase its benefits and to keep elite training hands on and intense, each class is limited to eight participants.

Though you may apply as a non-member, USITT membership will be required if you are accepted into the program.

Please view links below for a more in depth look at specific training areas.

- [Automation](#)
- [Rigging](#)
- [Sound](#)
- [Projection](#)
- [Stage Management](#)

[For FAQ on Elite Training, click here.](#)

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eSET Basic Terms & Safety Test

Thanks to your feedback, we are pleased to bring you a new and improved eSET Basic Terms & Safety Test.

Show the world you are ready to work. Test your readiness to speak with employers. Stand out from your peers. Show your mastery of the basic skills by taking the eSET Basic Terms & Safety Test.

It's FREE, and you can take the eSET Test from anywhere, right from your iPhone or Android.

If you took the Basic Skills test before and didn't pass, we encourage you to take it again.

[Register for the online exam here »](#)

Get ready, eSET, succeed!

The re-design of the Basic Terms & Safety Test was led by Beth Martel, WRL Design, and Darren Levin, Middle Tennessee State University.

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News & Notices

Jay O. Glerum Rigging Masterclass Dates Announced

USITT Advanced Rigging Masterclasses Coming to Hartford Stage

USITT's Glerum Masterclasses will be returning in summer of 2017. The Masterclasses honor the memory of one of our industry's great advocates for safety and training, Jay O. Glerum.

Taught annually beginning in 2016, these masterclasses have two tracks of learning, advanced and entry level.

The entry level track, taking place in Atlanta June 13-14 is geared towards students and educators and includes both counterweight and automated rigging safety and operations. Registration opens March 1.

Both entry level and advanced tracks will be offered August 14-15 at Hartford Stage in Hartford, CT. The advanced class will be taught for ETCP renewal credit and includes training on the latest innovations in rigging as well as advanced safety such as life rescue and other topics. Registration opens March 1.

[For more details, click here »](#)

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Jay O. Glerum



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USITT 2017 Keynote Showstoppers

As excitement builds for the Annual Conference & Stage Expo in St. Louis, we are proud to announce our 2017 Keynote speaker: veteran actor, singer Ken Page.

The celebrated St. Louis native is best known for his voice work in Tim Burton's cult classic, "The Nightmare Before Christmas" as "Oogie Boogie," and for his roles on stage and film in the original Broadway stage production of *Cats*, *the Musical*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, *Guys and Dolls*, and *The Wiz*.

In his keynote address on March 8 at 9:30 a.m., Ken will share his experience as a performer working with the design and technical teams and the inspiration he draws from them. His talk, entitled "Shoeboxes and Christmas Lights" is a reference to a play stage Ken had as a child – a time when he first discovered the technical side of the theatre and performing arts.



"The idea of what is beautiful and pleasing to the eye is how it all began for me," Ken said. "I was bewitched by the swirl of light and color and the magic of a moving set piece by no visible means. These were but a few of the technical magicians wonders that awakened my young mind to the world of the 'actual' theatre arts."

On March 9 at 9:30 a.m., Props Master Jay Duckworth will take the stage to kick-off early career honors at the Conference.

Duckworth boasts over 20 years' experience in LORT and Off-Broadway theatre, fast paced summer stocks, independent films, TV, music videos, and over 50 off Broadway shows. Lin-Manuel Miranda refers to Duckworth as "A props shaman!" The self-proclaimed Proptologist, of The Props Department will share wisdom

of making a career in fake blood and edible letters. The finale of this celebration will be the ceremonial opening of the Stage Expo.



[Don't forget to register for USITT 2017!](#)

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USITT Presents

If you're looking to take your skills to the next level, or just getting started and seeking an in-depth look at new technologies, USITT Presents has a training offering for you.

USITT Presents sessions are made available through a collaboration between USITT and its organizational members to provide product- and technique-specific training for USITT members and their colleagues.

These sessions come at the lowest prices available for professional training in the industry. Prices range from \$30 to \$120 per session per day depending on membership level. Hundreds of dollars in savings make these sessions affordable for students as well as professionals.

Sessions take place March 6-8 in St. Louis leading up to the Annual Conference & Stage Expo. Click on the links below for session details and registration information.

Sessions Include:

- [CM-ET Road Technician Certification](#)
- [ETC EOS Family Console Essentials](#)
- [Studio Gear Hog4 Console Course](#)
- [Shure Advanced Wireless Seminar](#)

To register for USITT presents, [click here](#) or on a link of your interest above.

To register for USITT 2017, [click here »](#)

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ETCP at USITT 2017

The Feb. 14 deadline is quickly approaching to register for ETCP examinations at USITT 2017!

All four ETCP examinations on Saturday, March 11 in St. Louis will take place in one session. Interested applicants must submit their application, along with supporting materials and fee, to the ETCP office located at 630 9th Ave, Suite 609, New York, New York, 10036.

As an added bonus, USITT members and employees receive a \$100 discount on examinations.

In addition to the exams, USITT is offering multiple sessions in technical production, electric, and engineering where ETCP renewal credits can be earned. [Learn more, here.](#)

San Diego State University Scholarship

San Diego State University is trying to raise \$60,000 for a scholarship in honor of their lighting design student Chad Shelton who was recently killed. He had just graduated in May and had begun his internship in September at PRG LV.

\$60,000 would allow SDSU to create an endowed scholarship that would enable about \$1,000 to be given to a lighting student every year in perpetuity.

To donate, visit <http://ttf.sdsu.edu/>.

SILV 2017

Stagecraft Institute is looking for the next class of students who can handle a week or two or eight(!) in Las Vegas, who will benefit from meeting, networking with, and learning from leading professionals in their intensive hands-on training in live entertainment technology. SILV is currently accepting student nominations for SILV 2017. In-person interviews will be conducted at the USITT convention in St. Louis (March 9-11) in Booth #1327 and, for those unable to attend, by phone beginning March 1. To nominate a student, please email Jane Childs at jane@stagecraftinstitute.com.

DTHG Weltenbauer Youngsters Award

Following the successful debut of the Weltenbauer Award, a new event will be taking place at Stage|Set|Scenery 2017: The Weltenbauer Youngsters Awards. One hundred and fifty years ago the opera *Roméo et Juliette* was first performed by Charles Gounod on 27 April 1867. It is with this event in mind that an assignment will be given to the contestants of the Weltenbauer Youngsters Awards 2017.

Trainees, students (ranging from schools to vocational and higher education) from any country specializing in the theatre, films and event technology are invited to submit their designs and works on the subject of *Romeo and Juliet*. These may be individual or team works focusing on stage design, the theatre stage, costumes, decoration, set design, make-up, lighting concepts, videos or audio installations. Candidates must submit their entries in digital form at www.wir-sind-weltenbauer.de no later than Feb. 28, 2017.

Stage|Set|Scenery is offering reduced-rate tickets for students of all ages. Teachers and lecturers who register their student groups in advance will be granted free admission.

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International OISTAT Technical Invention Prize

The TIP, initiated by OISTAT Technology commission, is awarded to the technicians working in theatre or any part of the entertainment industry who make gadgets, devices or basically simple and smart solutions. Those clever ideas that are mostly realized by inexpensive means and materials.



From the accepted entries, The top three entries will be recognized at the TIP award ceremony at World Stage Design 2017 and the winner of the 2017 Technical Invention Prize will receive \$1,000 cash prize. Deadline is March 30, 2017. For more information, click [here](#).

To receive the latest news from OISTAT, sign up for their newsletter, [here](#).

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Industry Member News

To stay updated on member news and new products, be sure to check our [Conference newsletter](#) for the latest announcements.

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News From **Mark Shanda**, *USITT President*

The Humbling Tape

Mark Shanda *USITT President*

As an undergraduate student, I was encouraged by my faculty to pursue scenic design. In our only course covering theatre design, I pencil drafted sample flats, drew a ground plan for Neil Simon's *The Prisoner of Second Avenue*, and built a ½" scale model of my scenic design for Peter Shaffer's *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. My teacher was so impressed with my model that I was instructed to enter it into a design competition sponsored by a large mid-western university. So, I drafted a ground plan of what I had designed, took color photographs of the model, packed up my entry, and shipped it off, expecting nothing but recognition of my greatness.

The competition was "blind judged" in that only an entry number was the identifier on each submission. The judges examined the materials in some room on the sponsor's campus while a cassette tape recorder captured their thoughts. The resultant recording was then sent back to each entrant to provide feedback, and as I assumed the most appropriately awarded prize money.

When the padded envelope appeared in my dorm mailbox, I was more than excited. But when I opened it, there was no letter, nor any prize money, just the cassette labeled "ENTRANT NUMBER 1". Thoroughly convinced the prize money must be coming later, I popped in the cassette, cranked the volume, and expected to hear nothing but praise.

The tape began...Entrant Number 1 – *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*...(long pause) and then the first reviewer spoke: "While I have no idea who this student is, nor where they are studying, they are certainly no scenic designer." Reviewer number two: "They obviously know very little about this play and I cannot image whoever taught them to draft!" Things went downhill from there until the last reviewer said, "Well although they are not worthy of any recognition as an artist, they did take a risk."

To say I was crushed was an understatement. How is it possible that I was such a big man on my own campus, a design and technology superstar...and yet these industry professionals declared I was wasting my time? In point of fact they were right. It was not a very good scenic design. I had no research skills, had not conducted any script analysis, and produced scenic elements with only 90° corners and 4'x8' units.

For years, I held onto what I eventually called my "humbling tape," listening to it

whenever I was feeling a bit too proud of myself. I never did become a scenic designer, but I have had a fairly successful career in theatrical production since that devastating blow. How you respond to criticism and disappointment can be a real hallmark of your work effort in this industry. Choose to learn and channel your energy into an even stronger commitment to your passion. In hindsight, I have had more successes than failures in my career, but my humbling tape reminds me that I still always have room to grow!

We'd like to hear your comments on this story.

Please e-mail Mark at Shanda.1@osu.edu.



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Spotlight on Giving

"I give to USITT because it is in my DNA. I have been a member, and have attended conferences since I was an undergraduate student. In terms of the knowledge it has provided me and the lifelong friendships and professional contacts I have developed, it has given me so much that I feel compelled to give back both monetarily and through service opportunities. By giving I support those initiatives that are important to me and make USITT the invaluable organization it is for those in the production and design industry."



- **Martha Marking, costume designer**

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News From **David Grindle**, *USITT Executive Director*
The Art of Live Performance
David Grindle *Executive Director*

There's a long list of productions I wish I had had the chance to see in the past year. Yes, *Hamilton*, but so many more are out there too.



Two in particular have my mind because of the influence of the design on the production. One I mentioned a few months ago, the Seattle Opera production of *Hansel and Gretel*. The other is the New York Theatre Workshop production of *Othello*. These are two vastly differently productions. One, a huge production in grand scale. The other, intimate and close up. Each featured incredible casting and master works of their genre. But the designs, those were what made me really want to see those shows.

In Seattle, the designer took things and made them larger than life. At the same time, caring to enlarge every detail down to the smallest rip of paper. In New York, everything was stripped down. The room, including the surroundings of the audience, were in plain plywood. Lighting was not a large theatrical plot, as in Seattle. Rather, the lighting designer had to work with available light sources, LED lamps, and other things.

Both of these brought me back to the words of our keynote address at the conference in Salt Lake City. Tupac Martir reminded all of us that the technology we use is the tool to paint the picture for the audience. This is true in every form of design. What we use creates the space, informs the show, and makes the art. The end result changes not only the audience, but the performers and the creative staff and team. We remind ourselves that the story we are telling is the focus.

As I sit here typing this surrounded by electronics and gadgets that make my daily life function, there is a certain irony here that I'm longing to be transported to another place through theatre. But that irony is why each person in our industry continues to work. The idea of sitting in a venue with others, getting absorbed in to the story, and discovering something, be it life changing or simple joy and happiness in a moment, that idea is what keeps our art going. Even in a world where we are focused on screens and immediate response, the art that is created in live performance is what moves us.

As much as any other good techno-nerd, I love nothing more than looking at the

equipment in a space. In fact, my family has come to expect me to focus on what lighting or scenic items are available for closer inspection. I want to see the tools. I want to know what brushes, both literal and figurative, are being used to make the art. However, once the story begins, I want to see the art and not be distracted by the how.

That brings me back to those two shows. Telling a story can be done on any scale. When the artists commit to using their tools like masters we are all transformed. And for that I owe a huge thanks to everyone that has ever been that artist. Thank you for transporting us to another place, for engaging our minds in new ideas, and for showing us that there are far more artists represented in each performance than just the ones you can see.

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