



# VARI\*LTE

## VARI-LITE VL5LED WASH BRINGS RICH RETRO STYLE TO MOUNTVIEW'S PRODUCTION OF *CARRIE: THE MUSICAL*

When Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts decided to bring a bold new actor-musician interpretation to the Royal Shakespeare Company's musical adaptation of the Stephen King classic *Carrie: The Musical*, it was Mountview's former head of lighting training, Louisa Smurthwaite, who worked with the students to create the visceral, yet retro lighting design. Keen to introduce fixtures that bought an era-reflecting feel to the classic story, yet still introduce the students to the latest lighting technology, Smurthwaite specified Vari-Lite VL5LED WASH fixtures.

With a lighting design brief from show director Rich Fitch that specified '*Stranger Things* meets 80's horror gameshow,' the scenic design, created by Sophia Pardon, was a torn-up school, ravaged by the powers of Carrie. "The set design exposed the wings and back wall of the venue," says Smurthwaite. "With lighting, this gave a deeper perspective to the playing space and allowed us to manipulate the atmospherics. What I like about the Vari-Lite VL5LED WASH is the impact of the LED feature around the rim of the lens and the 1980s classic fixture aesthetic. It's bold, it says, 'I'm here,' which is not the usual approach for a theatrical production."

*Carrie: The Musical*, with its moments of horror, demanded numerous, contrasting atmospheric looks. This meant Smurthwaite required a lush creative palette offering vivid colors, soft pastels plus good whites. "The VL5 combines the high output I needed with a color palette that satisfied my design objectives for every scene."

Of course, the scope of the lighting designer is much broader when designing at a drama school that offers a dedicated lighting degree and masters. Smurthwaite's role encompassed a great deal more than the obvious tasks of an LD, such as delivering the design concept, producing plot and cue synopsis, programming, and the entire tech process to opening night. "My role is to engage with the students in a way that encourages critical thinking of process and self-examination and reflection of creative drivers and motives," she explains. "I took time to discuss the design, not only with the lighting students, but with stage management, scenic art students, and directing students. All gave valuable feedback that had an impact on the design. We agreed that we wanted the lighting to have a retro feel but without compromising on the effects, atmospherics and dramatic impact modern lighting can bring."

To satisfy that objective Smurthwaite ensures that she maintains good relationships with lighting technologists and manufacturers. "While Mountview has a great stock of technical equipment, as the productions continue to raise the bar in terms of production and design, there is always technology that students want to use that isn't on the shelves," she says.

Smurthwaite was introduced to the VL5LED WASH by Grant Bales-Smith, Regional Sales Leader, EMEA & APAC, Vari-Lite for Signify, and Darren Howard, Technical Support, Vari-Lite for Signify. "I was struck by the VL5's obvious nod back to 80's design, which made it stand out to me as an attention-grabbing fixture for *Carrie: The Musical*," explains Smurthwaite.





"It's critical for me that the students get used to new lighting fixtures that will ultimately be popular in the professional world. The VL5 fits that bill. Students must be able to confidently explore and embrace new tech and that isn't always achievable on drama school show budgets. That means that the support from companies such as Vari-Lite and other entertainment technology manufacturers is invaluable."

Bales-Smith concludes, "Vari-Lite has established a strong reputation for supporting lighting designers and teaching establishments by loaning them our latest technology. We appreciate how important it is for future designers to get real world experience using our products and gain clear understanding of the latest technology. For that reason, we were delighted to see Louisa and her students create such a stunning lighting design for their production of *Carrie: The Musical* by incorporating VL5LED WASH fixtures." ■

PRODUCTS FEATURED:  
VL5LED WASH

PHOTO CREDITS: © MOUNTVIEW ACADEMY OF  
THEATRE ARTS

LIGHTING DESIGNER: LOUISA SMURTHWAITE

LIGHTING APPLICATION: OTHER

