



VARI-LITE © Strand

HOUSTON'S NEW THEATER JEWEL, THE GORDY, EQUIPS WITH STAGE LIGHTING FROM VARI-LITE & STRAND

Houston, TX, USA – The Gordy, the latest and brightest hub for the performing arts in the city of Houston, chose to equip its three stunning new theater spaces with stage lighting technology from Vari-Lite and Strand.

The Gordy is the new \$35m home of Stages, one of Houston's best-known performing arts producers. After being based just along the road on Allen Parkway for more than 30 years, the opportunity arose in 2014 for Stages to purchase a nearby site on Rosine Street, a former warehouse archive belonging to the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. A major fundraising program was set in motion and plans were formed to create a new jewel in Houston's performing arts scene.

Renowned architects Gensler joined forces with international theatre consultancy Charcoalblue to design the building that would become The Gordy. In 2017, as plans progressed, a \$5m donation from local philanthropists Russell and Glenda Gordy – one of the largest individual donations in support of the performing arts in Houston's history – gave the new center its name. This was followed in 2019 by a \$2.5m gift from Lester & Sue Smith. With the momentum generated by such support from local civic leaders and donors, The Gordy took shape as one of the finest new theater complexes in North America.

The Gordy boasts three stages in all – the thrust of the 252-seat Sterling Stage, the arena format of the 220-seat Lester and Sue Smith Stage, and a flexible black box style space, the 134-seat Rochelle and Max Levit Stage. "Together, they provide a varied and dynamic setting for live theater experiences of all kinds, from world premiere plays to jukebox musicals and everything

in between," says Joel Burkholder, The Gordy's Production Manager and Technical Director.

He adds, "We produce intimate theater. The furthest seat from the stage, across all three spaces, is just 18ft."

As Technical Director, Burkholder was closely involved in the decisions surrounding the priorities for the technical infrastructure and equipment. "For the lighting, flexibility was key, alongside quality of light output, a deep color range and smooth dimming resolution," he says. "Because the spaces are so intimate, a performance area from one lighting position can come in many shapes and sizes. A slight elevation of playing space creates a big change in coverage when the lighting positions range from 12ft to 36ft from a focus area."

Low power consumption was of course a priority, and the building lighting is LED throughout. However, when it came to the stage lighting fixtures, the high priority placed on light quality and dimming resolution resulted in the specification of tungsten sources. A versatile selection of over 200 of Strand's SPX fixtures serve as the main workhorse ellipsoids in the rig.

"We knew going in that we wanted a robust system of conventional fixtures for area lighting on the stage," says Burkholder. "And between the budget and the need for quality, these were our best option. We love the innovative features of the SPX fixtures, such as the locking shutters, the resolution of lens tube placement, the consistent field of light across multiple fixtures, and the fine-tuning of the focusing."



However, there was room for some LED-source ellipsoidal fixtures: the rig includes 36 of Strand's PLPROFILE4 MKII LED. "These are typically used for tonal fills and template washes," says Burkholder. "We have also used them often with an I-Cue moving mirror, and DMX-controlled iris for movement specials."

Elsewhere, LED fixtures from the Vari-Lite catalogue provide color and movement. "We have 55 of the VL800 PROPAR," says Burkholder. "Its motorized zoom was the big selling point for us. The wide range of zooming, and the deep color it provides work perfectly for our down-light and back-light system. They also get used all over the place for specials - in fact, we use the zoom function far more than we had imagined we would."

The team have also enjoyed the versatility and punch of the SL STRIP 10 IPs. "The SL STRIPs are perfect for our applications," says Burkholder. "We use the Strips all over, for typical cycs, to putting them inside a lightbox, and even as audience blinders. We love them! The acute use of pixels and the punch these provide were exactly what we were looking for. The IP65 rating was a nice plus, too, as we are never concerned that fog or haze might damage them."

The compact size and portability of the PROPARGs is another advantage, because although each theater space has a dedicated inventory, the sharing of resources between spaces is commonplace. "We filmed a movie that had a set in four locations around the building, and the compact size of the PROPARGs was perfect for the temporary nature of film sets."

"We're very happy with the lighting," says Burkholder, "especially during the pandemic, when we had to shift programming to

create digital experiences for our patrons - everything looked great on camera!"

LESCO Lighting Technology helped The Gordy's team with demonstrations of fixture types and fine-tuning of the lighting specification, and all the fixtures were purchased through Techland Houston. Although some technical support was provided by Jim Elliot at Techland, the Stages team - as capable as you'd expect such an experienced producing house team to be - carried out the initial install themselves.

The result is a beautiful venue which serves not only as a focus for the community's theater-goers, but as a center for education and community outreach. It's a facility that will entertain, inspire and train for generations to come. ■

PRODUCTS FEATURED:

SPX ELLIPSOIDAL
PLPROFILE4 MKII
SLSTRIP 10 IP
VL800 PROPAR

PHOTO CREDITS: © Amitava Sarkar and © The Gordy

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR: Joel Burkholder

LIGHTING APPLICATION: THEATRE