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Blond Training Moments

Blond Productions, based in Midrand, Johannesburg, one of South Africa's leading rental companies specialising in the television and film sector, like everyone right now is grappling to survive under a national lockdown in which productions and businesses have shut down completely due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

Blond's owner and MD Christiaan Ballot has retained all his full-time staff and wants to look after everyone as best as possible, which is challenging given the scenario, involving some nimble and creative thinking to try and make "the best" out of a grave situation.

Something that immediately sprung to the minds of Christiaan and Blond's head of show lighting Ryan Lombard was to utilise the enforced 'down' time to engage the staff in various technical training.

"While we all wish this was over, it has presented the perfect opportunity to do all those things we never get time for around the office," Christiaan declared.

Ryan added, "Training and education on the kit are always on our 'To Do' list and although it's also always high on the agenda ... as a busy company, availability for both me and the crew is a big obstacle as we are almost always out on site somewhere working on active productions".

So, Blond has turned the lockdown into a time asset with everyone stuck at home and only connected via the internet.

Ryan is presenting the lighting sessions.

The primary focus so far has been on lighting equipment and console education, and they train on a grandMA 2 with the two full-time lighting department staff - Donavon Blomerus, and Lucky Lewele - each taking a grandMA OnPC home for the duration.

Blond purchased some new Robe ESPRITE LED profiles - with the transferable engine - in January, which went straight onto lighting the South African and Ghanaian editions of Family Feud in Johannesburg.

However, they are so new that not all the crew in lighting operations has yet had the opportunity to work with them or even see them out.

"This is an awesome chance to learn all about these new fixtures and find their true potential, even though it's via a virtual platform," enthused Christiaan, who believes that every lighting technician should know each fixture "inside out" before taking them on a show.

Ryan has put together a teaching agenda that starts with the key topic of 'Lighting Profile Creation'.

"Knowing how to build a custom fixture in the library is a skill people often don't acquire because the personality is either in your lighting library or there's someone in the company creating and distributing them so the knowledge stays with that one person."

Once created, another mission is to ensure that all understand how to use the 'custom' fixture as there are numerous pros / cons to knowing how to make / edit fixture profiles on the fly.

As Robe is Blond's main moving light brand - with around 250 in rental stock - they take DMX protocol data from the Robe manuals and recreate the fixtures from scratch.

By looking at miniPointes, CycFX 4s and ESPRITES, etc., they can compare the assorted ways in which looks and effects are accomplished ... which ties in with the next section, 'Lighting Design'.

In addition to getting familiar with ESPRITES and how they are a great creative tool, they are learning about general lighting design.

"Knowing the proper capabilities and functions of the lights is essential!" explains Ryan. "For example, being aware of the fact that a Robe MiniPointe has two prism wheels, and by keeping one static and rotating the second ... we can create cool effects that open up a world of creative options - things like that are important".

He also highlights how to position and angle fixtures in different production scenarios - from a TV show environment to a corporate event.

Deeper topics include 'Lighting Tricks and Setup', where Ryan uses his vast fund of experience to illustrate techniques that speed up programming, enhance the creation of elaborate effects and demystifying the configuration of certain equipment when connecting to the console.

The 'programming' section deals with the basics of "establishing a standard workflow and operational methodology".

The logic behind all of this is that if they are all trained to use a system that is implemented company-wide at Blond, if one person has to leave a production, any of them can be competent and confident to walk in, take over and be familiar with the layouts and workflows.

"It's proving a good and satisfying method of learning directly from one other and sharing tricks and experiences picked up along the way ... and who knows what else we will add as the cabin fever sets in!" he concludes.



