

Continued from October 2010 CTI Newsletter

## Interview With Ken Posner

I consider myself fortunate to have been Ken Posner's production electrician on his first Broadway show (*The Rose Tattoo* at Circle in the Square). I have watched his career grow and prosper over the years and I along with everyone in the entertainment community consider Ken both a skillful designer and one of the nicest people in show business.

I asked Ken to tell us about how he got started and what it's like to be a professional designer today.

**CTI:** Can you recall the first time you were in a theatre that made an impression on you?

**Ken Posner:** Yes, in 1978 I went to see the musical *A Chorus Line*. I knew when I left there that I wanted to work in the theatre and never looked back.

**CTI:** How did you get started in technical theatre?

**Ken Posner:** When I was very young I was exposed to community theatre in Westchester County where I am originally from. It was this experience that led me to where I am today.

**CTI:** Where did you get your training?

**Ken Posner:** I'm still in training, but I began doing Summer Stock Theater in 1982 at the Mill Mountain Playhouse in Roanoke Virginia. I studied design at SUNY Purchase and graduated in 1987 with a B.F.A.

**CTI:** What was your first paying lighting job?

**Ken Posner:** My first paying design job was in 1987. Jeff Davis hired me to assist him on the main stage and design the second stage productions for the Berkshire Theatre Festival in Stockbridge Massachusetts. Summer stock is the foundation for my career and is the first piece of advice I give to anyone interested in pursuing theatre/design as a career.

**CTI:** When did you make the decision to be a professional lighting designer?

**Ken Posner:** I still haven't decided but I began leaning in this direction between my freshman and sophomore year of college. That summer I had an internship at the Williamstown Theatre Festival and was able to work first hand with professional lighting designers.

**CTI:** Who were your role models or influencers in lighting?

**Ken Posner:** There are many but these designers are key: Jeff Davis, Billy Mintzer, Craig Miller, Allen Lee Hughes, Brian MacDevitt, Peter Kaczorowski, Natasha Katz, and Tharon Musser.

**CTI:** What was it like trying to make a living at lighting design in the beginning?

**Ken Posner:** I think it was easier 20 years ago then it is now. I was very fortunate to be able to go back and forth between assisting and designing my own projects until I was able to transition to just design. I believe the journey is the same today, there is just more competition and enormous student loans making it very challenging.

**CTI:** How did you get chosen for your first Broadway show?

**Ken Posner:** Robert Falls, who I had designed several shows for at the Goodman theatre offered me my first Broadway play. *The Rose Tattoo* designed by Santo Loquasto and Cathy Zuber.

**CTI:** Describe the office or studio where you do your design and drafting.

**Ken Posner:** Large windows, two drafting tables, and a laptop computer. Simple and minimal with lots of natural light.

**CTI:** What role do your assistants or associates play?

**Ken Posner:** The role assistants and associates play and the responsibility that they are given depends on many factors. The difference between an assistant and associate is defined primarily by their experience and how long we have worked together. An assistant's skills set for the most part are organizational with less artistic input and responsibility. I usually defer to my associate on this person because the assistant reports to the associate. My associates are very much an extension of me. They all have a great amount of experience and are all very gifted lighting designers in their own right. Excellent social and communication skills are my highest priority. Since associates tend to work between 12 to 16 hours per day while in production mental stamina is also very important.

**CTI:** How many weeks a year are you out of town with shows?

**Ken Posner:** It varies greatly from year to year but on average about sixteen weeks a year.

**CTI:** Do you have any favorite shows that you have worked on either for the production itself, the artistic team, or your own artistic work on the show?

**Ken Posner:** Yes, *Machinal* originally produced by NAKED ANGLES Off-Broadway. The play was directed by Michael Grief and designed by David Gallo. The production was well received and Joseph Papp moved us to the Public Theatre. It was truly "my big break." I was paid the greatest complement of my career after the first preview a gentleman I had never met approached me and said "Nice lights kid." That man was Mr. Papp.

**CTI:** You are one of a very small group of professional designers at the top of the industry. What does it take to get there?

**Ken Posner:** Lighting design is no different than any other field or vocation. It takes a tremendous amount of passion, commitment, personal sacrifice and lots and lots of luck. You need to make your own luck. By that I mean inserting yourself into the environment or community that you want to be a part of. Brush off the rejection and move forward until you reach your goal.

**CTI:** If you had it to do all over again, would you do anything differently?

**Ken Posner:** I realize that I am incredibly fortunate to be where I am today. I don't think I would have done anything differently.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

**Kenneth Posner (Lighting Designer)** Broadway: *THE COAST OF UTOPIA* (Shipwreck; Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle Awards) *WICKED*, *HAIRSPRAY*, *THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER* (TONY, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle Nominations), *MRS. WARRENS PROFESSION*, *A LIFE IN THE THEATRE*, *THE ROYAL FAMILY*, *THE MIRACLE WORKER*, *LEND ME A TENOR*, *9 TO 5*, *GREASE 2007 REVIVAL*, *THE HOMECOMING*, *PIRATE QUEEN*, *LEGALLY BLONDE*, *THE ODD COUPLE*, *GLEN GARRY GLENROSS*, *DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS* (TONY Nomination), *LESTAT*, *LITTLE WOMEN*, *THE FROGS*, *THE OLDEST LIVING CONFEDERATE WIDOW TELLS ALL*, *THE GOAT*, *IMAGINARY FRIENDS*, *THE SMELL OF THE KILL*, *SWING*, *THE MAN WHO HAD ALL THE LUCK*, *UNCLE VANYA*, *SIDE MAN* (Lortel Award), *YOU'RE A GOOD MAN CHARLIE BROWN*, *THE LION IN WINTER*, *LITTLE ME*, *A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE* (Drama Desk Nomination), *THE*



LAST NIGHT OF BALLYHOO, GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER, THE LITTLE FOXES, THE ROSE TATTOO, THE FATHER and THE REHEARSAL.

Off-Broadway: ME, MYSELF AND I, MR. AND MRS. FITCH, TOXIC AVENGER, SAVANNAH DISPUTATION, OUR HOUSE, ENTERTAINING MR. SLOAN, PARLOUR SONG, GOOD BOYS AND TRUE, VALHALLA, THE WILD PARTY (Lortel Award, Drama Desk, and Outer Circle Critics Nominations), THE PLAY ABOUT THE BABY, TICK-TICK-BOOM, THE WAVERLY GALLERY, THAT CHAMPIONSHIP SEASON, PRIDE'S CROSSING (Lortel Award), AS BEE'S IN HONEY DROWN, COWGIRLS, THE FOOD CHAIN, SuBURBIA and numerous productions for Playwrights Horizons, THE PUBLIC, Manhattan Theatre Club, Second Stage, The Vineyard, and Classic Stage Company. Opera credits include designs for the New York City Opera and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. 2003 OBIE for Sustained Excellence in lighting design.