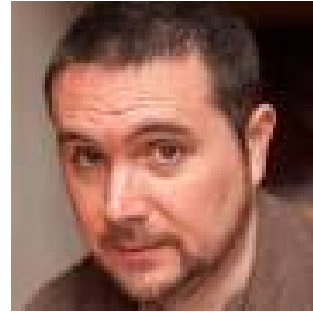


Interview With Andrew Voller, Author Of Moving Light Assistant™



Andrew Voller

Andrew Voller, author of Moving Light Assistant™ is a London based Lighting Designer for all forms of stage lighting including, theatre, musicals, and events. In this interview Andrew explains what inspired MLA, more about the program, and how it can benefit lighting users everywhere.

CTI: What inspired you to create Moving Lighting Assistant?

Andrew Voller: Moving Light Assistant kind of evolved out of my interest in computer programming. Originally I started work on a moving light test application for techs to use as a tool to test and exercise moving lights. I had written the first versions in C++ for macOS only. I decided I wanted to make the application cross platform (macOS and Windows OS) so I started to learn about cross platform development. One of my first test applications ended up being a way to import cue list data from the Hog2. I remember an awkward process of importing the cue list data into Excel for documenting Bombay Dreams on Broadway in 2005. Once I had this working, it made sense to be able to document the data I had imported, and this was the starting point for Moving Light Assistant. The physical rig documentation became a logical development, as I noticed how the configuration documents I generated for my own designs were time consuming and repetitive.

CTI: What was your motivation for releasing Moving Light Assistant?

Andrew Voller: Many programmers and associates created their own moving light tracking/documentation using Filemaker Pro. A couple of moving light programming documentation applications existed in the market, but these too were based on Filemaker. I thought a dedicated document based application would make sense. A single document containing all the documentation data makes more sense. Also with the application being a 'real' application, the features could be built into the application without the need to run separate applications to communicate with cameras and consoles. Having an accurate record of the look and programming of a production are important to ensure the crew have a reference to refer to when looking after a production. Also on touring productions, the documentation is invaluable to ensure the production looks as it should in each venue.

CTI: What kind of user do you imagine will benefit from Moving Light Assistant?

Andrew Voller: I think that different areas of the application can be used by different users in the production process. The rig data side of the application can be used by the production electrician for the preparation of the rig. I hope that lighting designers will find the easy to use wheel loads section to visually decide on the gobo and color loads of the moving lights. The programmer can analyse the console data to clean up the programming. I guess the main use for MLA is to document the console programming such as the cues and presets. The programmer and the associate usually do the console data documentation. Photographing each cue (automatically) and photographing and annotating the console presets provide a reference for maintaining the look, of the show or for reproducing the show. Once the documentation is complete, the production's electricians have a reference to refer to while maintaining the show.

CTI: Do you plan to release later versions of Moving Light Assistant?

Andrew Voller: Moving Light Assistant is constantly in development. I have started on the next major version, version 2.0. I also have version 1.3.1 in development which is primarily for bug fixes and existing feature enhancements.

CTI: Is Moving Light Assistant 2.1 able to import Lightwright® 6 and the newest Vectorworks version?

Andrew Voller: Yes, MLA can import and export data for both Lightwright and Vectorworks.

CTI: What programming languages and frameworks were used to develop Moving Light Assistant?

Andrew Voller: Moving Light Assistant is written in a development environment called Xojo. It is an object orientated programming language. The great bonus of Xojo is that from one code base, it can build a macOS and Windows OS version of the application with only minor modifications. Xojo is well supported by plugin developers which allows faster development by adding application functionality, saving time writing code and development. During MLA development, I discovered that John Mckernon uses the same development environment for Lightwright.

CTI: Did you go through a vigorous testing period to make sure Moving Light Assistant worked with all the different consoles?

Andrew Voller: I have spent quite a lot of time testing both the data import and communication with the different consoles. Writing the data import code is the most time consuming. I convert the data into a common format internally. This enables the data to be displayed in a more consistent way within the application regardless of the console type. Each console has it's own way of exporting and formatting the data. The currently supported consoles export their data as either a CSV (Comma Separated Values) file, or a series of XML files.

CTI: Would Moving Light Assistant be useful to other lighting industries besides theater, such as architectural and television?

Andrew Voller: MLA is often used in concert touring and television. Some users use it for purely the rig documentation aspect to prepare paperwork. Occasionally it gets used for programming documentation for tours. A recent concert tour using MLA for programming documentation is the Ed Sheeran Divide World Tour.