



Rendering of *Flying Over Sunset* - OPENING
Book by James Lapine, Music by Tom Kitt, and Lyrics by Michael Korie
Directed by James Lapine | Produced by Lincoln Center Theater
Set by Beowulf Boritt | Lighting by Bradley King

BACKGROUND

LED tape is a unique lighting product in today's entertainment world. Many disciplines of design interact with it - especially lighting and set designers. City Theatrical asked Tony Award winning lighting and scenic designers, **Bradley King** and **Beowulf Boritt**, about their work together on Broadway's *Flying Over Sunset* to compare their perspectives on the show, LED tape and how they use it, what they see for the future of this LED technology, and their outlook on the future of the theater industry as a whole.

Q&A:

City Theatrical (CTI): What is *Flying Over Sunset* about? What was it like to work on it?

Beowulf Boritt: It is hard to say what *Flying Over Sunset* is, and I think [the writer and director] James Lapine would agree to this. Basically, it is a character study. Three people take LSD together one night, and we get to spend an evening with them. The fact that they took LSD becomes irrelevant at the end. It is all about the characters.

Unfortunately, the show shut down the night

of our first preview in March 2020. We had three invited dress audiences, so only a handful of people were able to see it.

Bradley King: I agree, for many people the show is a complete unknown. It was the first realized production of this show ever. And there are not too many cold opens on Broadway.

CTI: What makes *Flying Over Sunset* different from other musicals?

King: It's an odd musical that's different than anything you've seen before. It is important to point out that there's such a rich history to

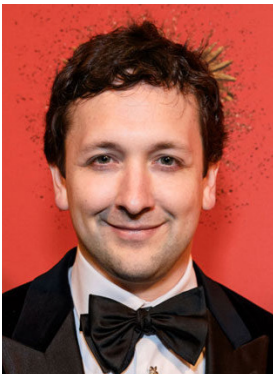
LSD use pre-1960s. People think LSD and hippies, but before that, it was recommended by doctors as an antidepressant, essentially.

We stayed very far away from any tie dye imagery, and tried to bring a far more nuanced chromatic interpretation to the experience of taking LSD.

Boritt: It's set in the Eisenhower era. It's before LSD was part of any counterculture.

CTI: Beowulf, what was your vision for the set design for *Flying Over Sunset*?

Boritt: This was my fourth Broadway show



BRADLEY KING
LIGHTING DESIGNER
Bradley King is a multiple award-winning lighting designer for theater, opera, and live performance. On Broadway, his designs for both Hometown and Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812 earned Tony, Drama Desk, and Outer Critics Circle awards, as well as a Live Design Achievement of the Year. In addition to his theatrical work, Bradley has experience in corporate events and themed entertainment, including immersive experiences for Microsoft, Samsung, Target, and galas and festivals.



BEOWULF BORITT
SET DESIGNER
Beowulf Boritt designed the Tony Award winning set for James Lapine's Act One, and was also recognized with the Live Design Award for Innovation in Scenic Design, a Broadway Beacon Award, an Audelco Award, a Barrymore award, and a St. Louis Theater Circle Award for his designs. His work has been seen in Europe, Asia, and Australia. He has twice designed the scenery for The Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. He recently appeared in a commercial for Microsoft.

with James Lapine; we have a 15-year relationship. I had the script for a couple of years, and didn't know where it would happen. One year ago, we found out it would be at the [Vivian Beaumont Theater](#) at Lincoln Center, and were able to pull it together in nine months.

When I pitched a first idea for the set, to give James something to react to, he said it was too conventional. We thought about what the ideal set would be, and James suggested "a brain on LSD". The set design is my abstracted version of that idea.

The set is a big open drum, with a 60-foot diameter. It is a big circular column of space on stage; a round open space that you can put anything into. It is designed as an abstract space that twists and morphs in ways you don't expect it to. As the characters begin to experiment with LSD, the set does unexpected things, in conjunction with lighting and video.

King: Yes, in this show, things you see aren't necessary what you're seeing. The set is this container that is full of surprises in delicious ways.

Boritt: The Beaumont is massively different than other theaters in New York in that it allows you to deal with space in a different way. In other theaters, you have to fight the lack of space. At the Beaumont, you can open it up to its biggest size, and it is immensely

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large and yet also intimate.

There are moments in this show when the set expands, which include some very dramatic video, lighting and special effects, vs. the more intimate scenes, with two or three people, that show individual reactions to things at a human scale. The theater allows us to be so big that people appear like ants.

King: Beowulf does these amazing renderings that have very strong lighting ideas in them. Things change and morph over time, but it's a great place to start a conversation on lighting.

CTI: Bradley, what was your vision for the lighting design for *Flying Over Sunset*?

King: It's important to talk about it in the abstract before light is hitting things. For this show, the sense of saturation and color was dialed up 25%. We had refined color control

over everything in the room. Almost like you can do with a photo in Photoshop, we dialed up the saturation and vibrancy of the light. LED tape is one of many things that we used to do that. The combination of looking at renderings and modeling lead us to the path of equipment choices.

Boritt: One of my favorite things about the lighting from this show, was when Bradley said the lighting grid ought to mirror the set below it. He have four curved trusses above the stage, and it really makes for an incredibly powerful and beautiful ceiling of light.

CTI: What was the most memorable part of designing the show?

King: No matter how many shows I do, it's always a deep inhale... to figure out what the hell you wrought. And if it's going to work. James had me sit down with him and take him on a tour through every idea in the light plot,



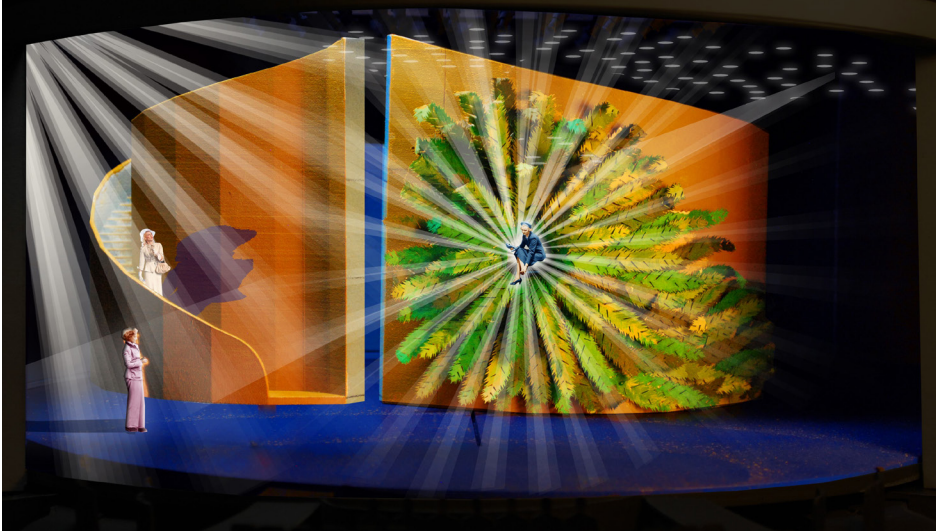
Rendering of *Flying Over Sunset* - CLARE'S GARDEN

“[The set] is designed as an abstract space that twists and morphs in ways you don't expect it to.”

- Beowulf Boritt

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Rendering of *Flying Over Sunset* - HEAVEN



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- Bradley King

which isn’t something I’ve done since I was in college. From Day 1, James would point to pieces of the rig, and ask, ‘What if we use this for this moment?’ For this show, it’s not a black box of magic I’m pulling out of – it’s a shared tool kit. It is liberating.

Boritt: For me, it was unique and interesting that James has a background in photography. It makes his approach to theater very different. It’s likely why James asked Bradley to look at the rig in a way most directors wouldn’t - he wants to know what all the elements are, not just those present to him.

With his experience in photography and graphic design, I find I don’t have to worry about practicality as much with James. He’s really interested in finding designs that he finds exciting, even if it isn’t practical.

CTI: When was the last time you worked together? When did you meet?

King: Do you remember the first show we worked together on? I was 2nd Assistant on *LoveMusik*, at [Manhattan Theatre Club](#). I was locked to the tech table.

Boritt: That was my third Broadway show.

King: That was a long time ago! Almost 15 years. That was one of the last shows I did before I went back to grad school at NYU.

Boritt: I remember meeting you on *Surf* in Vegas. I think you put the network together.

King: I somehow ended up on the video team on that show. I remember troubleshooting

the video network, and I made a guess as to whose computer it was, based on the computer name ‘Hrunting’ (Beowulf’s sword in the Old English epic). Then we worked together at the Roundabout on *Bernhardt/Hamlet*. That was already two years ago.

Boritt: I was thrilled and stunned with what you were doing for *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812*. For me, who the lighting designer is, is so important. It’s not a position I have the power to choose, but I often have veto power, because it so radically affects what I do, as my renderings usually have lots of light in them.

For me, sets are sculpture that are revealed by light. They are so utterly controlled by what the lighting designer is doing. It’s important to work with an LD you can talk to and understand. It elevates both of our work. We’re able to play off each other. The best part about theatre collaboration is that everyone’s work will look better than it would on their own.

CTI: How did you use LED tape in the design for *Flying Over Sunset*?

King: A number of walls (that aren’t necessarily walls) have LED tape embedded. We tried a number of tricks, and let some of them go. It helped make the space more transformative, in interesting ways.

Boritt: LED tape helped make the space subtly change; a subtle effect. It helps the whole room breathe in an extraordinary way.

CTI: How do the set and lighting

designers divide the design and technical responsibilities for LED set lighting?

King: Along with our respective Associate Designers for *Flying Over Sunset*, Alexis Distler (scenic) and Nick Solyom (lighting), we had so many conversations on how the LED elements were going to work. From there, there were no major surprises about things and how they would work.

Boritt: We knew what we needed to light up... all for as many things lighting up as we can afford. The more bells and whistles make the experience richer for the audience. As a set designer, part of the trick is leaving enough space for the lighting equipment. I think we got it all sorted out without too many crashes.

King: After all the LED installations on the set, we suddenly realized we had a lot of space overhead. It felt like we were looking at a big black void over the stage. That’s how the circular lighting rig came about.

CTI: Would you say LED set lighting has made design roles harder or easier?

Boritt: You can get so much punch out of very small things with LEDs, so it makes life easier. In a 1-inch wide piece of LED tape, you can light something up. It is very useful.

My one gripe with it is I find the LED light feels harsher than incandescent. I feel like if I see it

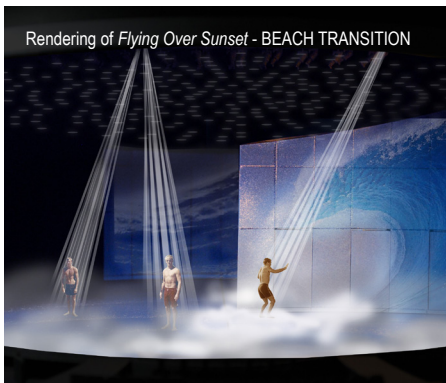
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in my peripheral vision, cutting into my cornea in a way incandescent doesn't.

King: LED tape as an invention has been quietly revolutionary in the theater, as it is now possible to put a light source in an incredibly small space. It is incredible how far it has come, but there's so much further to go.

CTI: How can LEDs be improved?

King: LED just doesn't have all the wavelengths. There are spectral peaks at red, green, and blue. Even though we can now have more and more colors in these diodes,



maybe up to seven now, it is still a long, long way from the infinite spectral wavelengths of a tungsten source.

We talk a lot in the lighting community, and we think we see different light now than 10 years ago. All those billboards, how we perceive light after sunset... we're evolving along with it. At the same time, LED has a long way to go before it can replace incandescent. Even a top of the line LED fixture is not as good on skin as a regular Source Four.

What am I waiting for? A proper LED replacement for a tungsten light bulb. It gives you that delicious shift to warm as you get lower and lower in intensity.

Tungsten shifts warmer as it gets lower in intensity, which is exactly what happens when the sun sets. We perceive that shift in our DNA.

CTI: Going forward, would you say the trend of lighting in scenery is still continuing?

Boritt: I think there will always be a lot of overlap. It's all sort of one big image we're creating in the surface of a story. I can't imagine doing a show where I don't have

strong feelings about where the light is going. If you did a realistic box set, it might look fine... but if you have an object in there that you want to highlight, you have to have a skilled LD in there to make it come alive. The two areas go hand in hand and have to complement each other.

King: The ultimate goal in any production is that we're all on the same page telling a story. You're not talking about the lighting vs. the set vs. the clothes. They should all fit together in a holistic way.

By necessity, all the edges are fuzzy...

“Sets are sculpture that are revealed by light. They are controlled by what the lighting designer is doing. It's important to work with an LD you can talk to. It elevates both of our work.” - Beowulf Boritt

where responsibilities end and begin. All departments overlap and should coexist together. That's when you get the best work.

CTI: We're curious about your thoughts on re-opening Broadway. How will Broadway be different this time around?

King: I'm hopeful that there will be some change. Broadway will have to confront some truths about itself. I am hopeful that that reflection will force us to be more equitable.

Boritt: When Broadway comes back, I'm also hopeful it will be in a more equitable way.

CTI: Do you think *Flying Over Sunset* will be different when it re-opens?

Boritt: Knowing James Lapine, he'll have had a few ideas. I suspect a year of thinking will yield some new design elements.

King: We didn't all press pause in our lives, and that will necessarily affect how we approach it.

Find out more about **Bradley King** at: bradleykingld.com

Find out more about **Beowulf Boritt** at: beowulfborittdesign.com

Buy future tickets for *Flying Over Sunset* at: flyingoversunset.com