



**PROFESSIONAL PROFILE:**

Name: Peter Small  
Profession: Lighting Designer  
Experience: 7 years  
Location: London, England  
Website: [www.pslightingdesign.com](http://www.pslightingdesign.com)  
Upcoming Shows: *Baby Reindeer* (West End Transfer and New York Transfer); *WHAT REMAINS OF US* (UK Tour for Bristol Old Vic/Korean National University of Arts)

*Peter Small is an Offie and Theatre & Technology Award nominated lighting designer working across theatre, dance and opera as well as architectural lighting. Recent designs include The Great Christmas Feast, an immersive production for the Lost Estate, Olivier-winning Baby Reindeer for Edinburgh Fringe and the Bush, London, and the Fringe First-winning Square Go, seen in Edinburgh, New York and UK Tour.*

**THE INTERVIEW:**

**City Theatrical (CTI):** How/when did you get started in the world of professional lighting design?

**Peter Small (PS):** If you take professional to be paid and credited post training... Then the first design was *ALMOST NEAR* at the Finborough Theatre in London (Fringe!) in 2014. I was suggested for the job because I was the associate lighting designer on the main show that we played over the top of on their day off!

**CTI:** What's your favorite part about being a lighting designer now?

**PS:** I think being able to work with light and use it to convey a story and collaborating with others to make good

work. I also enjoy the lifestyle, traveling and being self-employed.

**CTI:** How would you describe your lighting design aesthetic in a couple of words?

**PS:** I'm never actively pursuing an aesthetic, but I do try to be bold and unafraid to really push something to the most concentrated version of the idea and offer that first.

I think it is so easy to keep hashing away at something and end up with muddy weak work, so I am always trying to take it back to the original inspiration. I also find integrating as many 'motivational' light sources as possible into the work and building out from there very interesting.

**CTI:** Who/what are your greatest influences on your lighting aesthetic?

**PS:** Many people have influenced or inspired me (Thank You!), and I often try to connect with what something should feel like, and start there. I try to keep the lighting connected to the emotional story that's happening before worrying too much about anything else. I do notice things in everyday life though, things in nature or things like strong sunlight coming through a gap under the door into a dark room. I enjoy when I do notice something and think how I could use that.

**CTI:** What would you say is the most interesting project you have worked on recently, or at some point during your lighting career?



*The Great Christmas Feast | London, England*

**“I try to keep the lighting connected to the emotional story that’s happening before worrying too much about anything else.”**

**PS:** Recently I undertook my first architectural lighting design project (a multi floor building in Holborn: Two screen cinema in the basement with bar and box office, ground floor foyer, floors of hot desking, top floor offices with screening room complete with roof garden! All with “highly designed dramatic lighting”, as that was the brief).

A rather unconventional and behemoth first project perhaps but the client was clear about wanting someone with a theatrical background, even though I would need a consultant to ensure what we were dreaming up was meeting the regulations!

The experience was surreal, art deco throughout with a focus on opulence and eccentricity, the client would often bring in sketches of ideas he had done at 4AM, which would be duly turned into renders for discussion, it was exciting to do something so essentially familiar and yet so out of my comfort zone.

**CTI: What was it like to win Outstanding Achievement in Affiliate Theatre at the 2020 Olivier Awards for *Baby Reindeer*? How was that show’s lighting unique?**

**PS:** A team effort! The production was a true integration of all elements. Complex sequences dissolved into effortless storytelling where the audience was hanging on every word without the

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technology getting in the way.

Lighting specifically, I suppose it was all lit “inside out”, so most all of the light came from within the stage out into the edges, rather than coming in from the audience’s point of view. The changes were predominantly very sharp, abrupt and frequent to match the storytelling. The rig was exposed so the layout of units and visual composition of cues were considered.

I suppose the other thing was you could never really be sure if what you were seeing was lighting, video or a blend of the two, which was often a nice way to play with people’s expectations.

**CTI: Congrats on the opening of *The Great Christmas Feast* production post London’s second lockdown in December 2020. We’re sorry to hear the show has closed due to re-entering England’s national lockdown. Are there any key learnings you’d like to**

**share about designing a show during the COVID-19 era?**

**PS:** You find yourself very happy to comply with anything if it means you can get back to doing what you love! We all got into our routine of PPE pretty quickly and it became normal. I never felt like COVID-19 got too in the way of the design process. I think that’s largely due to the team around me.

Key learnings would be I hope you like “Zooming” because you are going to be on there a lot. Everything runs slower due to distancing and procedures to keep everything sanitary. The hire companies need the shop order far earlier than you might be expecting (or like!). Moving lights and flexible equipment are great as they reduce both prep time at the hire company as well as ladder work on site, and allow you to get a list out earlier. Try if you can to be aware of how things might need to be rigged as dense, or particularly interesting requests can prohibit safe working, and so can be difficult or not possible to rig. We always found a way but did have to course correct a little. Perhaps a little also that inflicting limitations does always seem to bring about good work!

**CTI: Any shout outs to team members who helped make it possible?**



BABY REINDEER | Bush Theatre  
London, England | Photo by Michael O'Reilly

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**“I think more people will know more about colour, given where we are going with LED.”**

**PS:** Lots! [White Light Ltd.](#) for guiding me through hiring equipment during the COVID-19 era, PRAX Lighting Ltd. for all the practicals, and Junction Ltd. for the giant Gasolier practical.

The whole electrics team lead by Adam Squire, my lighting programmer Tom Davis, production manager Rich Irvine and his team, everybody at [The Lost Estate](#) particularly lead producer Eddy Hackett, who always even in spite of everything wanted to make the right decisions for the production - not the easy ones.

**CTI: What are some of the challenges of technology you face in our world of high tech lighting?**

**PS:** So they are well known already but as you ask...

- Intensity of LED sources, even the “best” static units struggle at a larger throw in my experience. You don’t really have a static LED option for the usual trick to swap to a 2K unit or even an Arc unit.

- Dimming on LED, even with the “best” units you often do have to compromise slightly right at the low end on closer delicate work I find.

- Price and availability of decent LED units on mass, from wanting to execute a big idea needing a lot of units or a venue wanting to replace their inventory often

it’s either a question of compromise or blowing the budget.

- To improve the control systems we use to enable us to do more quicker and make the machine do more for us. Schedules are still often the crunch point for bringing some ideas to the real world. The more the machine can do, the more we can focus on lighting and get a better finish.

- Data and colour management, as we see more multi emitter, multi attribute and multi cell lights being the standard and using more of them our philosophy for how we communicate about it starts to become rather outdated and slow. It’s something I am actively playing with and welcome discussion!

**CTI: What do you see for the future of lighting?**

**PS:** I think LED will mature and get brighter with better colour, dimming and come down in price and become more available to everybody.

Visualization/VR/AR, I think it will continue to become more prevalent and normal in our world.

I think it will be interesting to see if the price of automated follow spotting/ integrating XYZ data into the console comes down and filters into smaller markets. It would be good to see trackers as normal as radio mics, no more

focusing moving light specials on the dancers, they’re just right every night wherever they are...

I think more people will know more about colour, given where we are going with LED. I think a more detailed understanding of colour will be essential to getting the most from the units.

**CTI: Any other thoughts or hopes for the future?**

**PS:** Just to hope that everyone who works in any form of industry affected by COVID-19 is okay and hanging on. To hope that we can all get back to it as soon as is safe to do so and hopefully with some healthier consideration to work/life balance! Stay Safe!

*For more information on Peter Small, visit: [www.pslightingdesign.com](http://www.pslightingdesign.com)*