

The Flying Karamazov Brothers

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The lighting for “The Flying Karamazov Brothers” was basic, but vital. The lighting designer/stage manager, Shannon Rhodes, fulfilled his essential duty: to illuminate the actors and action. Near the end of the show, I noticed that the light dropped off far upstage, but a performer only once stood that far upstage for any length of time. But generally, the action was all very visible, and the juggled objects were lit as well. Looking at the placement of the lights which I could see, I believe the good “juggling lighting” was aided by the use of top- and down- light which ensured that the air above the performers’ heads was as well lit as the performers themselves.

The lighting for the show gave hints as to how the Karamazovs would use 200 lights if they had them. The special used on Smerdyakov for his “moment of revelation” indicated that the Karamazovs could easily work lighting and specials into their banter. The lighting designer’s job would then be as much to support their creative ideas for how they could use light in their pieces as it would be to give creative input on the special uses of light. Many of the pieces could have used more precise area lighting, had it been available, as well. For example, the many static scenes that took place stage center (e.g. the Marimba, the cigar and coin) could have dimmed the sides of the stage more to focus attention more on the action.

The other special that was used illustrated the use of light to draw attention, to create emotion — and in this case to serve as the punchline of a joke. At the top of the show, the stage was dimly lit, but the special on the easel upstage right was bright, drawing the audience’s attention to it. This special dimmed at the start of the show, and we didn’t notice it again until the intermission, when it again drew attention, causing the audience to wonder what the easel was going to be used for. In the second act, the special remained bright as the Karamazovs began their long sequence of “objects of terror.”

The lighting helped sustain the suspense of the act until the finale, when the lit sign “Terror” punctuated the end of the last routine. This was a clear case of audience manipulation by the clever use of light. I was surprised, however, to realize how short the final spot of light on “Terror” could be to be effective. I probably would have been the audience over the head with the point by prolonging that last moment, but it was just as/more effective to keep the effect short and pithy.

I couldn’t see the lights over house from where I was (though I did pinpoint the location of the easel spot at intermission), but I did notice the back-light and side-light. There were mini-10s on the proscenium arch whose function I didn’t catch. The lights were mostly par cans, either ungelled or colored amber or blue. There was a white breakup projected on the stage at the top of show, but I don’t remember seeing it used at all during the show. There seemed to be a 6 across and 2 deep layout of lighting areas, although I don’t know if the front-light was in the same arrangement. The basic stage-lighting was very even, though, a good quality for a piece like this. I don’t remember seeing the color shift during the juggling; I think the main lights were amber and white when the performers were on stage, and blue before and after the show and during intermission. There was a not-so-subtle dimming of the lights before the cigar/match/coin pieces.

The “new” things I rediscovered were 1) pointed lighting (like at the end of Act II) doesn’t have to be drawn out to have its effect, and if often better kept short, and 2) smoke/spit/dust in the air shows up really well if the air is well lit.