Jean Rosenthal

1912-1969

Rosenthal Collection at the University of Wisconsin
Bibliography of Material By and About Jean Rosenthal
Jean Rosenthal's Broadway Lighting Credits
Jean Rosenthal's "A Photo Essay on Light"

Jean Rosenthal is considered one of the pioneers of theatrical lighting design. She emerged as a specialist at a time when a show's lighting was usually handled by either the scene designer or the master electrician. It was during her thirty three year career that the Lighting Designer joined the Scene and Costume Designer as a member of the production team.

Eugenia (Jean) Rosenthal was born in New York City on March 16, 1912. She was the daughter of Drs. Pauline (a psychiatrist) and Maurice (an ear, nose and throat specialist) Rosenthal and attended Manumit School in Pawling, NY and the Friends Seminary in Manhattan. After briefly studying acting and dance at the Neighborhood Playhouse during the 1929-1930 academic year, she became a technical assistant to Martha Graham, a member of the school's dance faculty. This was the beginning of a life long association with Martha Graham and her dance company. Between 1936 and her death in 1969, she designed the lighting for fifty three dances in the company's repertory. She returned to the Neighborhood Playhouse as a lecturer and production advisor during the 1937-38 and 1940-41 seasons.

During her three (1930-1933) years at Yale University she studied theatre history with George Pierce Baker, scene design with Donald Oenslager, costume design with Frank Bevin, and lighting design with Stanley McCandless. In the spring of 1933 she left Yale for New York City where she joined one of the WPA Federal Theatres. By 1935 she had become a technical assistant in Federal Theatre Project 891. John Houseman was the producer, Orson Welles the director, Nat Carson the scene designer, and Abe Feder the lighting designer.

When Houseman took a leave of absence from the Federal Theatre in 1936 to produce Leslie Howard's Hamlet, he brought Rosenthal along as the second assistant stage manager in charge of lighting cues. When the man from the rental house, who was to install the lighting system became ill, Rosenthal became the electrical technical director as well as the second assistant stage manager. This is, perhaps, her earliest "lighting" credit.

In 1937 she joined John Houseman and Orson Welles as the production and lighting manager of the Mercury Theatre. Although only credited as "Production Manager," it is believed that she designed the lighting for the eight productions staged by the company. When the Mercury Theatre Players moved to Hollywood to produce Citizen Kane (1941) for RKO, Rosenthal remained in New York City and opened a theatrical supply house: Theatre Production Service, Inc. (TPS) . Through TPS she offered a complete design and supply service.

In 1958 she created Jean Rosenthal Associates, a theatrical consulting firm which would become involved in at least thirty architectural projects, including the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, CN, the Juilliard School of Music in New York City, and the Los Angeles Music Center's Dorothy B. Chandler Pavilion.

During her career she designed the lighting for over three hundred productions. Her Broadway credits include West Side Story (1957), The Sound of Music (1959), Barefoot in the Park (1963),

She believed her most artistic work was accomplished in the "institutional" theatre -- the dance, opera and drama repertory of the *New York City Ballet* (1948-1957), the *Martha Graham Dance Company* (1934-1969), the *American Ballet Theatre* (1960-1968), the *New York City Opera* (1950-1954), the *Dallas Civic Opera* (1957-1969), and the *American Shakespeare Festival* (1955-1959). These "institutional theatres" gave her more time for experimentation than was possible on the commercial Broadway stage. For example, the production schedule for the Broadway bound musical: *Baker Street* (1965), called for only four days of technical and dress rehearsals before the first preview performance in Toronto.

A number of the designs she created forty years ago for the *New York City Ballet* are still in the company's repertory. Her plots have been adapted to changes in equipment and audiences expectation, but because the original concepts, specials, and cue placement have been retained, the program still carries the credit: "Lighting by Jean Rosenthal."

She died, after a long battle with cancer, at the age of 57 on May 1, 1969, ten days after attending the opening of her last creative work: Martha Graham's *Archaic Hours*. The last Broadway show to close carrying a "Lighting by Jean Rosenthal" credit was *Fiddler on the Roof* which ended its 3,242 performance run on July 2, 1972, three years after her death.

Jean Rosenthal described Broadway lighting as an attempt to make the actor appear "jewel-like." She achieved this by surrounding the performer with light, often creating the impression of "light and shade on a stage that contain[d] no shadows." Instruments were mounted on the balcony rail, box booms, side torms (or booms), and overhead pipes. Her major contributions were the addition of deeply colored washes of back and side light to the designer's vocabulary, and an organized approach to lighting dance.

In addition to her numerous lighting projects, she designed the sets for three Broadway shows: *Conquering Hero* (1961), *The Beast in Me* (1963), and *On An Open Roof* (1963) and wrote several articles on lighting and technical production for magazines like *Theatre Arts*, *Opera News*, *Musical America* and *Impulse*.

In the late 1950s, Miss Rosenthal began developing plans for a book on lighting design. She would dictate the material when she had time. It would be edited and shaped by writer: Lael Wertenbaker, and illustrated by her assistant, Marion Kinsella. During the early 60's Jean was constantly in demand, so little work was done on the book. In 1968 she was diagnosed with cancer. During her long stays in the hospital she was finally able to dictate the essential material that would become the basis for her final legacy. *The Magic of Light*, which has long been out-of-print, was published in 1972.

She received the Henrietta Lord Memorial Award from the Yale School of Drama in 1932, and the Outer Critics Circle Award, during the 1968-1969 season, for her contribution to stage design.

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**The Rosenthal Collection**

**The Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research**

A collection of her lighting design documents, including light plots, hook-up charts, cue sheets, and production notes are on file in the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theatre Research, which is housed in the Archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society, on the campus of the University of Wisconsin in

http://www.northern.edu/wild/jr.htm
Included, among the many shows, are the lighting designs for the Broadway productions of *The Sound of Music* (1959), *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way To The Forum* (1962), and *Hole in the Head* (1957); the New York City Center presentations of the New York City Opera (1950-1954), New York City Center Dance Theatre (1949), and City Center Light Opera Company (1954-1957). Shows from outside the New York City area include the Los Angles productions of *The King And I* (1958 and 1965); the Chicago Lyric Opera production of *I Puritani* (1955) and the *American Dance Festival* at Connecticut College in New London.

The completeness of the files range from a few brief notes, a rough light plot sketched on graph paper and a scribbled hook-up chart to a nearly complete record of the development of a lighting design. For example, *The Sound Of Music* file contain...

- the correspondence between Miss Rosenthal and the producers,
- a copy of Lindsay and Crouse's working script,
- Oliver Smith's 1/4 inch scenic sketches,
- the 1/2 inch scaled floor plans and designer's elevations of the set,
- fabric swatches from Lucinda Ballard's costume designs,
- Miss Rosenthal's rough sectional studies and preliminary layouts,
- final light plot, torm elevations, equipment list, hook-up chart, focus charts, magic sheets, and cue sheets.
- and thank you cards and telegrams from numerous members of the production's staff and cast.

Several of the New York productions include not only the original Broadway design, but also the cut-downs used by the national company and the bus-and-truck tour. The lighting layouts for several shows, including *Baker Street* (1965) and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962) were also reduced when they were moved into a different Broadway house.

During the 1950s and 60s, most Broadway shows did a short, two or three stop, "try-out" tour before coming in to New York. The front of house hang was usually modified at each out-of-town theatre. Some times, as in *Baker Street*, the changes were minor: the box boom units were 6x12 Lekos in Boston and Toronto instead of the 8x11s specified for New York. Other times the changes were more substantial. The original light plot for *Winesburg, Ohio* (1957) called for 48 (all 6x12 Lekos) front-of-house units: 24 on the first balcony rail and 12 on each box boom. In Baltimore, 4 lamps were cut, and the remaining 44 units were divided between the second balcony (28) and the two box booms (9 each). In New York, according to notes in the file, the box booms were cut, and the lamps, now down to 38 (28- 6x12 Lekos and 10- 1500w 8" KliegLites) were divided between the balcony rail and the booth pipe.

The smallest show in the collection is the 1959 Neighborhood Playhouse's production of *Dear Liar*, 20 lamps and 4 sections of foot lights controlled on two-- six channel Davis Dimmers. The production then went on the road before opening on Broadway. The road plot was very close to what was done at the Playhouse: 22 lamps and 4 sections of footlights controlled on one 14 plate road board. The two additional lamps, and dimmers, were for specials. When the show opened at the National Theatre on March 17, 1960 there were 58 lamps, 4 sections of foot lights, and 3 sections of border lights controlled on 48--500watt dimmers mastered through one 14 plate road board. At the Playhouse and on the road, each of the three acting areas were primarily lit by 4 lamps: 2 on the balcony and 2 on the first pipe. At the National Theatre, each area was lit by 12 lamps: 2 on the rail, 2 on each box boom, and 6 on the first electric. An interesting side light: according to the notes in the file, one of the students assigned to Miss Rosenthal's light crew by the Neighbor Playhouse was Dabney Coleman.

The largest production in the collection is *To Broadway With Love*. This extravaganza was presented...
in the Texas Pavilion during the 1964 New York World's Fair. The deeply curved stage had a 74 feet wide proscenium opening. The 406 lamps and the 63 sections of 500 watt PAR strips were controlled on 10 road boards with a total of 140 dimmers.

The collection also includes the paper work (repertory light plot, rep hook-up chart, re-plug charts, cue sheets and notes) for 32 of the works in the 1950-1954 repertory of the New York City Opera.

Among the dance designs included in the collection are those for the American Dance Festival, Connecticut College, New London, CN (1949-1950), the New York City Dance Theatre (1949) which used the New York City Ballet's repertory plot, the 1950 performance of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo at the Metropolitan Opera, the Ballet International (1944) and Ruth Page and Jose Limon in Paris (1950).

In addition to lighting the traditional theatrical forms -- drama, musicals, opera, and dance -- she also lit Judy Garland at the Palace (1951), Judy Garland at the Met (1959), the National Orchestra Association's Christmas Show (1948-1950), the The Lamb's Club Benefit for the Children's Clinic's Postgraduate Center for Psychotherapy (1961) and the National Congress of American Industry's Convention (1950) at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel.

The earliest lighting design represented in the collection is the from the six show repertory of the New Opera Company which opened its five week run at the Broadway Theatre in November 1942. The latest show represented is Happily Ever After which opened in March 1966.

The files for at least three Broadway shows, West Side Story (1957), John Gielgud's Hamlet (starring Richard Burton, 1964), and Dark At The Top of the Stairs (1957) are empty. A note in each folder, dated January 30, 1969, says that the documents were "Returned to JR." Although the paperwork for the Broadway production of Dark...Stairs has been returned, the light plot, hook-up chart, and cue sheets for the bus and truck company are still in the collection.

There are also files for several Broadway shows which do not carry the "Lighting by Jean Rosenthal" credit. The 110 In The Shade (1963: Lighting by John Harvey) folder contains only the script and cue sheets. The She Loves Me (1962: Scenery and lighting by William and Jean Eckart) file contains a revised hook-up chart and cue sheets and numerous production notes. Miss Rosenthal was apparently brought in to re-hang and re-cue the show, but no reason is given as to why.

One of the "Broadway" shows in the collection does not appear in the listing of Miss Rosenthal's design credits in The Magic of Light. The show is Hot September (1965), a musical adaption of William Inge's Picnic which closed out of town in Boston.

The collection does present a number of problems. Many of the papers are not dated, and there is often more than one hook-up chart or cue sheet making it difficult to determine which was the final design, and which was the preliminary sketch. The color media used in most of the early productions was Brigham gel, and when Rosco gel was chosen, it was identified by the old numbers, "No Color Pink" was #60, not #225. By the late 1950's she began using both Cinemoid (where "Pale Salmon" was #553) and Roscolene (where "No Color Pink" was #9-60 instead of #825) Most of the shows were controlled on four to six road (or "piano") boards. The typical "Broadway Play" had 42-3000 watt dimmers on three boards, and 12-6000 watt plates on the fourth. A "Broadway musical" was controlled on 70-3000 watt dimmers, on five boards, and 12-6000 watt units on the sixth.

The collection, which is contained in 41 document boxes, does not contain all of Ms. Rosenthal's work. The productions included were presented between 1942 and 1966. The most important works missing from the collection are her designs for the Martha Graham Dance Company and the New York City Ballet.
A Bibliography of Material By and About Jean Rosenthal


Includes black and white lighting sketches for Leslie Howard's Hamlet and Richard Burton's Hamlet, a small portion of the hook-up chart for Cabaret (1966), and the repertory light plot for the Metropolitan Opera.


Includes essays on lighting the play, the musical, the dance and the opera; documentation for Plaza Suite (Light plot, Hook-up chart, and selected Cue sheets), Hello Dolly! (Light plot, Hook-up chart, and selected Focus charts), the Martha Graham Dance Company (Light plot and Cross section); and the most complete listing of Miss Rosenthal's design credits.

"A Photo Essay on Light", which appears in the "Tools of the Trade" section (Illustrated and edited by Marion Kinsella), shows, through twenty-three photographs, how light coming from the standard theatrical lighting positions looks when focused on an actor standing on stage.


Contains Jean Rosenthal's repertory light plots for The New York City Ballet and The New York City Opera seasons at the New York City Center.


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