

Lighting designer comfortable outside the spotlight

May 29, 2012 10:00 AM Nick Marinello
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They say the neon lights are bright on Broadway. But backstage on Broadway and in theater houses across the world there's not nearly so much magic in the air. Here, beyond the riveted gaze of the audience, the quiet machinery of theater grinds away nightly, ensuring that what happens on stage transpires without a hitch.



Michael Batt inhabits a world rarely seen by theatergoers. Batt is the production manager in the Department of Music. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

"Then, a light bulb burns out," says Michael Batt, production manager in the Tulane Department of Music, "or the dimmer fails. Or the light cue is given too early and the blackout leaves the actor delivering the final lines in complete darkness."

Batt, a seasoned lighting director for [Summer Lyric Theater](#) at Tulane and other performances, inhabits the nuts-and-bolts world of theater production, sharing it with set designers, costume makers, prop builders, sound engineers and a whole assortment of technical types, most of whom are happy to function out of the glare of the spotlight.

He has spent more than two decades working in theater, yet Batt says he never wanted to be on stage. He only reluctantly indulges the request to be interviewed and photographed for this article.

He says that he is fascinated by what light can do to a stage and those upon it. "Critics rarely mention lighting in their reviews," says Batt, whose tiny office down the hall from the stage in Dixon Hall is decorated by wall art created for various productions over the years. "But when they praise a particular set design or costumes, I know I've also done my job well."

There's a lot of math in lighting design, says Batt. One has to know the relationship of watts, volts and amps if one is to distribute light effectively and aesthetically across a stage ? hopefully without overloading circuits.

But it's something for which Batt has an affinity.

"The idea of color and light and how they overlap, as well as form and modeling ? it just came easily," he says.