

Francis Reid: A Life-Time in Lights



For Francis Reid, the light sometimes changes only in the subconscious. “You never see it,” he said, “the lights work very much with the music. I remember my guru, Carl Ebert, used to say to me when we watched rehearsals: ‘Francis, can you hear the light? Can you hear the light?’”

Francis Reid, lighting design expert in the world of theatre, obliged with a brief interview while he was in Bangkok for a workshop



Known as the lighting design guru, Francis is a well-established figure in the theatre world, having spent 43 years in the light design industry. He is also always falling off pavements, or down a hole because he walks with his head up looking at the skies, sunshine coming through between buildings, reflections in potholes and on puddles of water. Born in 1931, Francis believes he is a product of a mixture between art and engineering. One of his grandfathers was a landscape painter; the other an engineer. After studying science and psychology at Edinburgh University, Francis spent five years in stage and production management including Repertory Drama, Touring opera, the Aldeburgh Festival and Edinburgh Fringe.

knowledge, Francis was recently in Bangkok for a 2-week workshop on lighting design, and agreed to make some time to answer the following questions:

How did it all begin, Francis?

I started being involved in theatre in 1954, but it was, really, the Edinburgh Festival. 1947. I always thought of myself as the “Child of the Edinburgh Festival”; it made a big impression on me, I was sixteen. The Edinburgh Festival is the reason why I’m sitting here talking with you now. If it hadn’t been for this festival, I would now be a - I don’t know - a banker?

The festival was a big explosion of culture - suddenly, I saw good opera, and international performing groups coming together after the war was over. I

Now a freelance theatre lighting designer and lecturer, travelling all over the world (far and wide from Adelaide to Hyderabad, Reykjavik to Tel Aviv) to pass on his ideas and

remember seeing the theatre companies of Jean-Louis Barrault from Paris; Gustaf Grundgens from Germany; and the great conductor Bruno Walter re-united with the Vienna Philharmonic after being forced by the Nazis into years of exile.

Being sixteen, you’re at an impressionable age. I got excited about theatre. Yet I said, “This is not to be a job, to work in the arts, you know, is .. uh .. not a good idea.” So I went to University in Edinburgh, and read science (a science degree majoring in psychology).

After University, I was in the Army for two years. For my second year, I was stationed in Germany. I went to the opera every night, maybe went to the theatre four nights a week. Naturally, I became involved in work with theatre after leaving the Army.

Why lighting?

Aha ... I didn’t start off with lighting; I started working as a stage manager. But after 2 years, something was fundamentally changing in theatre. People wanted to do more with the lights, and technology was making previously impossible ideas viable. Lightings became more important, and I started to be interested in the field.

During the beginning of the 60s, a new profession of "Light Designer" emerged from what used to be a job shared by the director, stage manager, you know. I became a light designer about that time and moved to England.

My guru is Carl Ebert, German director, who left Germany because of Hitler. He taught me everything. I first saw his work at the Edinburgh Festival, became his light designer one day, and worked with him. I learned from him. I believe in everything he did.

Being 66 now, I light maybe only 2-3 shows a year; much of my work now is talking and writing. I do a lot of workshops.

What are your first considerations upon embarking on a project to light a performance?

My first thought is, "How is light going to help in this performance, what can lights do?"

I know that I've got to make it visible, I know that I've got to illuminate it, and I know that I have to bring out the sculptural and three-dimensional.

And how should colours be used? We use lights to create



space and time, or enhance atmosphere, and ambience according to whether the mood is happy or sad, etc..

I read the script twice; first time as if it is a novel, and a second time to carefully analyse the story, looking for ideas and concepts. After this, usually I have a meeting with the director, scenery and costume designers and talk about the show. I watch the rehearsals, and we'll go from there. We must integrate everything.

Then I start to draw plans, and they are only finalised at a late stage of the production process. I also need to have a lot of management skills because I have to work within a budget, and a tight schedule. So a lot of lights design is management skills, in managing time and budget.

You have defined light designing as illogical decisions made in a logical sequence. Can you elaborate?

Everytime I work, I prepare the light beams with perhaps fifty spotlights, and like the strokes of a painter's brush you add a little pink here, a bit of green there. You don't always have

a reason ... you feel, "I need some green there." If you tried to work out why you wanted green there, you would never find the reason. If you worked with pure logic, it would look boring.

So where does the "logical sequence" come in?

You must *plan* in a very logical way for the entire process by questioning what you're going to do, where to put lights, what would be the best light to use, what colour is needed, etc..

You have to make a series of decisions; they are not always logical, but you make them in a logical order.

Is there a language for those who work with lighting?

Yes, there is a common technical language, and I also wrote a

book called 'ABC of Stage Lighting' which is a glossary of the terms we use and what they mean.

How involved are you with stage lighting in Southeast Asia?

A lot of my recent work has been in the region. I've done workshops in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Kuching.

We ought to organise a SPAFA workshop or training and invite you to share with us?

I'll be delighted to.

As lighting is used effectively to emphasise poignant moments in a performance, are there much conflict with directors over what to emphasise or do you have much freedom in the matter?

We work as a team. The production team is usually made up of a director, choreographer, scene designer, costume designer, sound manager, and lighting designer. The boss is the director, and if there is disagreement, the final decision rests with the boss. It doesn't come to that much, because the arguing, the debate are always necessary for working together to produce something.

What is your greatest regret, if you've got one?

I don't think I've got one, but I wish at one point I have worked on a movie - just to see how it works. You choose to work in the arts because that's the life you want; you don't choose it to make money; and I didn't. No, I have no regret; I have a good life.

What is the most essential thing in your work?

The lighting has got to be integral. It must be integrated, and not something superimposing from the top. The biggest professional moment of my life as a light designer was a day after one final dress rehearsal. The director was giving notes to all the actors, scenery designers, and others; and then he came last to me, and he looked at his book, and turned the pages, and he said, "Oh dear, I'm very sorry Francis, I didn't notice the lights tonight." It made me feel good because the lights must have had integrated with the set.



What aspects of your work do you like most?

I love working with soft romantic light that fits the music. The gentle light. I'm not a "slash-bang-disco-light" man.

And what aspects of it do you dislike most?

Pressure of time, always not enough time; you need time to be creative, but are usually working under the stress of a tight production schedule.

If you weren't involved in lighting design, what else do you think you might have been doing?

I could have been anything. Maybe I could have been teaching science at school. That would be bad news for the students.

Is there a production you would very much like to attempt?

Yes. I like very much the music of Handel, and I've done a few Handel operas, but I would like to do a Handel opera, for example, "Alcina", in a big opera house. They never asked me.

What was your greatest act of courage?

Oh ... working in the theatre. To live, and bring up a family while working in the arts is a big de-

cision of courage to me. Also a big decision for the wife.

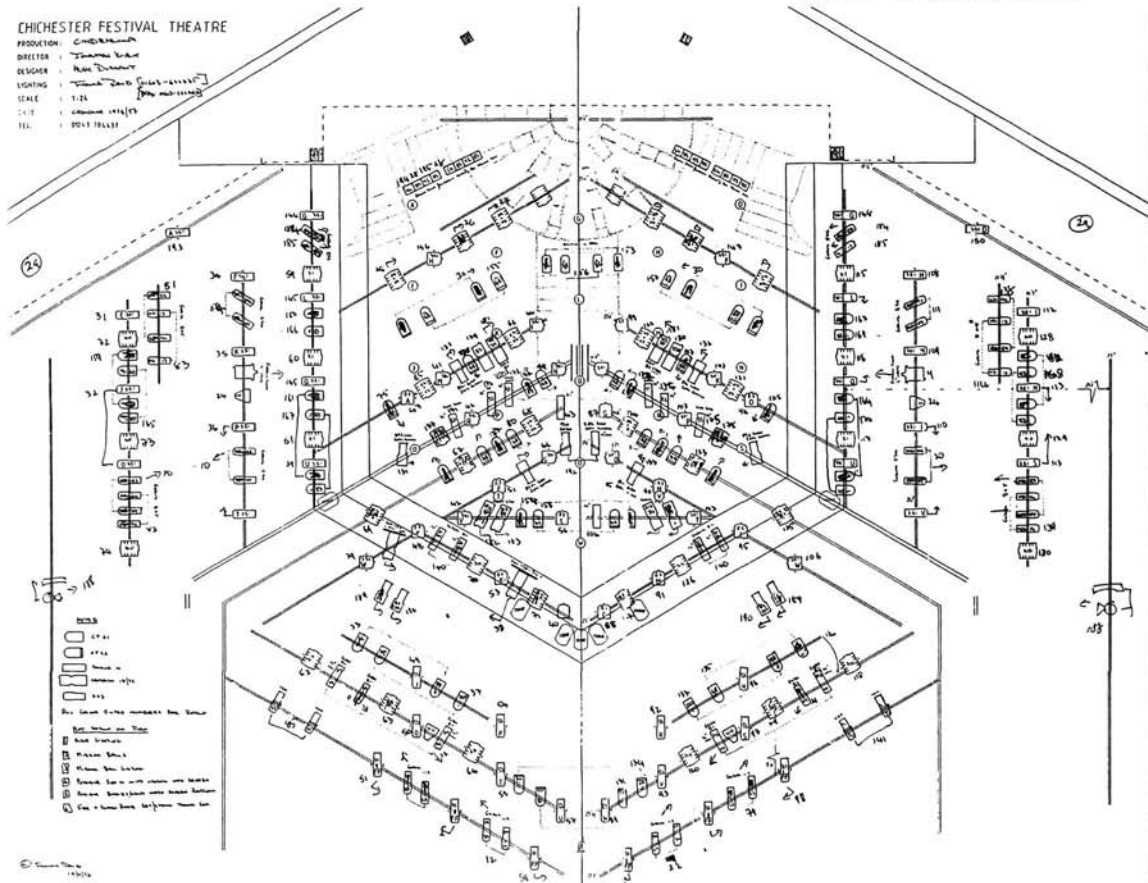
What (apart from lighting design) is the greatest love of your life?

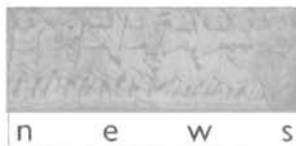
My wife, my children, and my grandchildren.

Francis lives with his wife in Norwich, England, and continues with his involvement in light design, workshops, and gives advice on theatre design and

technology. He is also the author of *The Stage Lighting Handbook*, *The Staging Handbook*, *The ABC of Stage Technology*, etc.. and is currently completing his ninth book. With a sparkle in his eyes, and an enthusiasm of a child, he said he was looking forward to more travelling to experience the world, and to share his experiences, of which there must be a vast amount - as lighting design guru, and 42 years "in the lights". ■

Example of a plan by Francis





Fixing up Ban Chiang National Museum

The Tourism Authority of Thailand, Japan's Overseas Economic Co-operation Fund (OECF) and the Fine Arts Department have allocated a budget of 7.8 million baht to improve the National Museum of Ban Chiang and archaeological sites at Wat Poh Si Nai in Udon Thani province.

Ban Chiang, which was designated as the 378th World Heritage Site in December 1992, contributes an "exceptional testimony to a civilisation which had disappeared".

Work commenced in October 1996, and is scheduled to be completed by October 1997. The museum and historical sites are open for visits as usual.

Meanwhile, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, USA, shall also be celebrating the 5th anniversary of Ban Chiang inscription as a World Heritage Site on the 24th of October, 1997.

The 1972-73 excavation of the Ban Chiang site was jointly directed by the late Dr Chester F Gorman and Mr Pisit Charoenwongsa (currently Senior Specialist in Archaeology of SEAMEO-SPAFA).

An interesting point relating to Ban Chiang is that, even prior to its excavation, public attention had already been drawn to the discovery of red-painted pottery and a number of bronze implements from previous test excursions.

The site was consequently subject to looting, as a result of which many valuable items were lost.

Another Theory on the extinction of Dinosaurs

In a recent article written by Henry Gee for *Nature News Service 1997*, the often discussed subject of the demise of dinosaurs in the world was again seized upon. It asked, why did the dinosaurs die out suddenly, about 65 million years ago?

It has been suggested that mass extinctions happen in a regular cycle, about every 26 million years, and that impacts of asteroids might be to blame for most or all of them. There is available evidence that earth was hit by a 10-kilometre-diameter asteroid from space around the time of the "mass extinction" of dinosaurs, other animals and plants at the end of the Cretaceous period. It is, however, difficult to conclusively prove that the asteroid had caused the extinction; and researchers have cast doubt on such a case after analysing the fossil record in detail.

An international team of researchers reported that extinctions - mass or otherwise - do not require any identifiable cause at all, and that since they happen naturally, any search for individual causes would be fruitless.

Dr Ricardo Sole of the Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya in Barcelona, Spain, and his colleagues have studied the pattern of extinction over geological time. They found that mass extinctions need not have any particular external cause. Such extinctions are not phenomenal and distinguishable from the smaller and more numerous extinctions, or even the extinction of individual species.

Dinosaurs were constantly appearing and disappearing as extinction is a process of evolution.

There were times during the existence of dinosaurs when these creatures were abundant, and other times when they were less so. These fluctuations, which were due to many,

different causes, did not apply to dinosaurs as a group, but to individual animals within particular dinosaur species, and to any other species (dinosaurs or not) with which particular dinosaur species interacted.

Speculation was put forth that perhaps the winters had been abnormally warmer (or cooler) for a few years, so that food plants did not grow in the usual amount to be sufficient for, say, herds of Triceratops. This situation might have altered the pattern of Triceratops' migration, and in turn brought on a series of effects on the behaviour of other dinosaurs, animals and plants, parasites and disease organisms. With such assumptions, extinctions are difficult to predict because of the combined influence of endless and unfathomable possibilities.

The article concluded by postulating that dinosaurs might not have survived the asteroid impact - while crocodiles and the birds did - simply because their populations dropped to such a point that regeneration became impossible.

Man's best friend first domesticated in SE Asia?

Based on a new study which analysed genetic material, human relationships with dogs may have begun earlier than 14,000 years ago; it was also found that the canine animal may have been domesticated some 135,000 years back, according to a report on the study by Nicholas Wade (*New York Times News Service*).

Most breeds of dog today possess the genetic codes of a single lineage of the female wolf. It was suggested that domestication was so rare that it may have happened only a few times in human history.



The report said that a jaw around 14,000 years old of a dog is the oldest known discovery, found at a Palaeolithic grave at Oberkassel, Germany. A reason for the lack of archaeological evidence of dogs in earlier record is related to how archaeologists view the bones of wolves, which have been found in human settlements 400,000 years ago. Scientists proposed that for thousands of years, the first domesticated dogs physically resembled wolves and did not look as dogs do today until humans commenced a more settled way of life about 10,000 to 15,000 years ago, which in turn affected that of the dog.

Dr. James Serpell, an animal behaviourist at the University of Pennsylvania and editor of a recent book on canine evolution, *The Domestic Dog*, finds unlikely such a thesis that the first domesticated dogs looked like wolves for thousands of years, says the report. He said that it was difficult to imagine that a domesticated animal would not diverge in appearance almost immediately, proposing instead that dogs might first have been domesticated in some part of the world, such as Southeast Asia, where substantial archaeology on the subject has not been carried out.

To restore or not to restore Angkor Monuments

Cambodia

26/8/97

The *Cambodia Daily* recently cited a report which said that some of the jungle growth, that has made Cambodia's centuries-old temples of the Angkor period uniquely enchanting, has been designated for removal.

It was reported that parts or all of three trees (two of which were at

least 150 years old) had collapsed at one temple site, crushing several laterite and sandstone blocks, and impeding restoration work. About 241 trees at six temples have now been slated to be cut down.

Questions have been raised about when history stops, and restoration begins, since the foliage which grows and surrounds a monument is also regarded as part of its history. While temples must be accessible to visitors, its relations to the surrounding environment must also be preserved.

These questions on what defines history, and in what stage of it should monuments be preserved in, remain a central concern; and for members of the World Monuments Fund involved in restoration work at Angkor, the debate is becoming increasingly urgent.

Kim Umemoto reported in a recent article on this debate about whether the trees and vegetation should be removed to save ancient structures from ruin, or be spared, so as to maintain the "romantic" ambience which impressed visitors. Such debate can go on for ages if history is not given its due consideration. The question remains: should the trees grow naturally untempered and destroy monuments which are irreplaceable objects of history?

A case in point is Preah Khan, a Buddhist monastic complex that was commissioned by King Jayavarman VII and consecrated in 1191. "It consists of a vast area of 56 hectares in which one can get lost in a maze of enclosed galleries, shrines and gate chambers," the writer wrote.

That the structure of this temple is more delicate than the more solid pyramid type of temples is a serious conservation concern to the World Monuments Fund (WMF), which is supervising the preservation of the Preah Khan temple area.

The US-based WMF's Conservation Project in Cambodia is basically a maintenance programme in preserving the temple as a partial ruin. It stresses reconstruction of areas which are at risk of falling apart, rather than the restoration of the temple to its original condition.

Preah Khan is totally surrounded by thick jungle, apart from where paths for entry were created by clearing away growth.

Ronnie Yimsut, WMF's environmental consultant, has been making detailed surveys of the trees within the temple area to find out the state of their roots. Giant fromagier trees - Cambodians called them spong (*Tetrameles nudiflora*) - present a risk of causing great damage if they should collapse. They grow quickly because their seeds are spread through bird droppings, and germinate in spaces between the stones of a structure, the article explains.

The fromagier tree, when growing on a temple, can force the stones apart till the structure becomes dependent on the tree for support.

WMF choose not to cut down any tree unless it becomes absolutely necessary. If the roots of a particular tree are weak and the tree poses a danger of falling and crushing structures, there are other measures to consider, such as removing huge branches higher up the tree to reduce its impact on falling.

The engineering method used in construction of the temple is another problem the conservationists encounter. The walls of Preah Khan are mostly made of a single layer of stone, and the temple does not have a strong centre as mountain temples do. The walls were built vertically without patterns, bonding techniques or mortar to hold them fast.

WMF teams are applying a herbicide to new growths on parts of the temples, and plans for a nature trail within the temple compound have been made. Identification and descriptions of the various flora and fauna to be found within Preah Khan shall also be available on this trail.

At present, visitors can also have impressions of Preah Khan as it once was, with the entire northern part of the temple's interior cleared, and with the help of brochures that illustrate the floor plan of the monument.

As importantly, the forest around it, and in the south of the complex, gives one a sense of the natural environment within which it nestles.



The World Monuments Fund is a private, non-profit foundation whose aim is to assist in the preservation of the most significant artistic and architectural heritage.

WMF sent its first team to Angkor in 1989 and began work at Preah Khan in 1992.

For more information or donations, please contact World Monuments Fund Preah Khan Project, 949 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10028, USA; or call (212) 517-9367.

Findings indicate man's relatives evolved in Asia

Some of the earliest evidence for the evolution of monkeys, apes and humans have been discovered by Thai researchers. Among the evidence were fragments of lower and upper jaws and teeth of an average-sized monkey-like creature recovered from a coalmine in present-day southern Thailand. It is believed that the creature lived about 40 million years ago.

Dr. Yaowalak Chaimanee and Dr. Varavudh Suteethorn of the Department of Mineral Resources, together with Dr. Stephane Ducrocq and Dr. Jean Jacques Jaeger of the University of Montpellier II, France, called the creature *Siamopithecus eocaenus*, or "dawn ape from Thailand".

It is estimated to have weighed between six and seven kilogrammes when it was alive, and was about the same size as the contemporary South American howler monkey, *Aloutta*. Their discovery has been reported in the January 30 issue of the science magazine, *Nature*.

It was in the 1930s that the search for the earliest anthropoids in Asia

began. The remains of two extinct creatures, *Pondaungia* and *Amphipithecus*, in 40-million-year-old fossil deposits were found in Burma. The discoveries were, however, so fragmentary that their evolutionary positions have been difficult to determine. There were researchers who have suggested that they are more closely related to primitive primates such as tarsiers and lemurs, and are not anthropoids at all.

As monkeys, apes and humans are categorised as higher primates, or anthropoids, establishing the origins of anthropoids has proved to be a contentious problem.

Angkor and Siem Reap set for tourism

Angkor Wat is now subject to a plan which will transform it into a nightly opera for 1,500 tourists. The spirit of King Suryavarman II (1113-1150) projected against the 12th century temple walls will appear before visitors strolling through the monument, as the sounds of the jungle and ancient battles surround them.

Following an official approval, in November 7 last year, of the \$20 million project of YTL Corp of Malaysia to organise the light and sound show, Francis Yeoh, chief executive officer of the company, said that it will be "the greatest show on earth", *Phnom Penh Post* reported.

YTL Corp has also been contracted to restore the Independence Hotel in Sihanoukville, in addition to their joint ventures with the Hong Kong-based General Hotel Corp. to construct two new hotels in Siem Reap outside the hotel zone: The \$6.5 million, 40-room Aman Resort and the \$13.5 million, 135-room Chedi Hotel (next to the Hotel Grand D'Angkor).

According to the *Phnom Penh Post* article, Yeoh (YTL's 41-year-old

CEO and the son of the company's chairman), believed that Angkor Wat has unlimited potential, and that it is one of the areas in the world still untouched by commercial development. He announced that Siem Reap will be turned into "a dynamic sleepy little town" as the result of a master plan.

This plan covers the next ten years of building many new hotels, a conference centre, golf course, sports facilities, hospital, art museum and multi-complex residential housing, complete with moats, modeled on the Angkor temple.

Other hotels will be erected. Another Malaysian company, Monomas, is to build a 200-room hotel, and the Le Meridien group will build a hotel in Siem Reap, also outside the hotel zone, said the report.

Ros Borath, the architect and director of Apsara, questions the benefit of so many hotels outside the tourism zone, explaining that the reason for the zone is to keep the historic character of the city of Siem Reap.

Apsara is the agency established to protect Siem Reap and the ancient monuments in the light of economic development.

It is reported that Siem Reap Governor, Toan Chhay, said that about 1,000 families, living and farming on land within the tourism zone, have already been asked to move to another area a few kilometres away. He said that although these villagers were not happy, some assistance will be given to them, adding that the new land they will be offered is better for farming than those in the tourism zone.