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## LIGHTING THE FIRE WITHIN

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### The Ice Is LD Bob Dickinson's Canvas for the 2002 Winter Olympics

Bob Dickinson is no stranger to the Olympics, having lit the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Atlanta Games. But that was summer 1996, when neither ice nor a post-9/11 sensibility needed to be accommodated. Though planning for Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympic Games in Salt Lake City began as early as four years ago, some features needed to be reconceived last fall. "Many things we would have done in the opening, after September 11 we thought were suddenly inappropriate," says Dickinson, who was interviewed in the midst of preparations for his latest extravaganza, the 74th annual Academy Awards. "In doing the opening, our cueing tended to be very conservative. Although there was color, it was color that was theatrically plausible given the particular element we were working on. We avoided being too showy, with large chases or whatever." In general, he adds, "The Opening Ceremony tends to be more serious, more interested in delivering concepts and messages, and setting a tone for the Olympics."

That's not to say that the mood was entirely somber during the February 8 event in the 55,000-seat Rice-Eccles Olympic Stadium. There was plenty of showbiz razzle-dazzle in evidence, from performances by Sting, Yo-Yo Ma, the Dixie Chicks, LeAnn Rimes, and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, to the graceful movements of 800 ice skaters, not to mention Michael Curry puppets. And in terms of numbers, the lighting system wasn't exactly conservative. Vari-Lite Production Services supplied more than 800 automated luminaires of various types to the ceremonies, while 3,000 instruments came from the unlikely source of Price Club.

Conceptually, the Opening and Closing Ceremonies were developed by executive producer Don Mischer, scenic designer Jeremy Railton, Dickinson, and many other creative partners. But, as usual with this kind of event, there were some strict parameters. "There are masters you have to obey, and there's protocol," says the lighting designer regarding the Opening Ceremony. "Usually the local organizing committee has elements they would like to see represented — for instance, Salt Lake City has a rich history in the settling of the West, and was the home to many Native American tribes." A tribute to the victims and heroes of September 11, highlighted by the presentation of the mangled World Trade Center flag, also had to be included. And, of course, the Olympic torch had to be lit.

The theme for the games was "Light the Fire Within," and Dickinson says, "That gave a springboard for developing some of the creative ideas." Including an ice rink for skaters was one of the first decisions made, though the LD says, "They did not want to do the whole show with ice." Hence the odd shape of the rink — swelling in the center, tapering at the end — that looked like a long-necked bird in flight. "It wasn't a specific image, but a pleasing shape dictated by the needs of the masters," says Dickinson. "Land areas" around the rink came in the form of ramps and uplit platforms. After the venue was designed, "What dictated the inventory was the creative decision by the producers not to make it into a rock show." Indeed, most of the production elements — a "Child of Light" being pursued by "The Fire Within," salutes to pioneers and Native Americans, those amazing Curry puppets representing bears, beavers, snakes, and other Wild West fauna — were of a more restrained character.

"We knew that it would break the hearts of the producers," Dickinson continues, "if we had to have lighting towers separating the audience from the performance. So we decided to try to light this from the perimeter of the venue."

separating the audience from the performance. So we decided to try to light this from the perimeter of the venue. That's the first limitation we had to defeat. We did some tests to decide what instrument could throw light from far away that is available in quantity, reliable in weather, reliable in software — reliable, period." A bright enough level for television was needed, and Dickinson wanted to avoid the xenon-based equipment that had given him trouble in Atlanta. The answer: the Vari\*Lite® VL2416™ wash luminaire, 192 of which were used to light the ice, augmented by 238 VL5Arc™ lights, many of which were employed on the stadium audience. "The position was rather flat and oblique, because to elevate the lights to a nice, sexy angle would have been cost-prohibitive," says the LD. "Using a combination of 2416s and VL5Cs, I was able to illuminate the field in a highly controlled manner. We found that a bank of eight 2416s, behaving as a single instrument, could give us 60fc on the field from 300' [90m] away, and the diameter of the area they would light was about 50' [15m] or 60' [18m]."

The Vari-Lite package also included 146 VL5™ automated wash luminaires, and 54 VL6™, 52 VL6C™, and 126 VL7™ automated spot luminaires. There were two Virtuoso™ consoles, one run by Laura Frank to concentrate on the VL2416s, and the other run by Christian Hibbard, to cover the rest. Other major participants were lighting directors Andy O'Reilly and David Grill. "Andy came in as a Vari\*Lite designer, and worked with me in deciding how to approach different elements scenically, and in cueing the show," the LD says. "Dave came in as the lighting director and worked with us in cueing and taking care of many of the elements that were outside the Vari\*Lite control. We used quite a few fixed instruments and followspots, supplied by Fourth Phase and Xenotech, and some 7kW xenons which were used for special effects and shaftage."

Getting the proper level wasn't the only issue to be addressed on the ice. "The oblique angles created some problems," says Dickinson. "If you wanted to light somebody on the ramp, keeping the blow-by from hitting the ice was difficult. Also, after you've put 500 or 600 performers on the ice for 15 minutes, it turns to powder. So it was more like a horizontal cyc than a shiny, reflective surface. But being this nice, big, white surface, it did take light wonderfully. The problem was, many of the costumes also were white, and it became very difficult at times to separate the person skating from the ice itself. If you bring in a blue wash from an oblique angle, and the audience is sitting right in line with that light, someone dressed in white and against white basically disappears. So I put in floor lighting, like footlighting, around the perimeter of the ice, and around the ramps that ran on either side. This allowed me to light people up, and get a different quality of light onto them, without spilling onto the ice."

MR-16s were used for this purpose in the rink; along with cabling and fiber optics for effects, these had to be installed prior to the installation and freezing of the ice. On the land surfaces of the field, Dickinson used what he terms "PC250s" — ordinary 250W outdoor work lights, purchased at Price Club (hence the PC). "They're UL-listed, with a glass face and a cage over the glass face, and they come in a waterproof container," he says. "They're basically a big flood light, with a T-type bulb. There really is nothing else that low-profile which delivers that much light and is available in that much quantity. Plus we could order them in the color we wanted, which was white." Ordinarily, the lights come in bright yellow, which was the color used to uplight the stadium's round Plexiglas-surfaced mini-stages.

There were many striking lighting effects during the nearly four-hour Opening Ceremony, but maybe none was so beautiful as a huge Michael Curry bison, lit from within to reveal a silhouetted stampede of much smaller bison. "They were just going to put a 1,000W bulb in there, but in a television environment, a 1,000W incandescent would have done nothing," says Dickinson. "We came up with a 2k xenon bulb placed on end, so it was running vertically, not horizontally. We put it in a Lexan® tube for safety, because there were people inside there, and if it were to implode it would injure them. We also put in cooling fans. Because the xenon source is so small, the shadows are hard, so we got very crisp images of the charging herd of bison."

In comparison to the Opening Ceremony, the February 24 Closing Ceremony, with performances by Christina Aguilera, Bon Jovi, Harry Connick Jr., and ice-skating champs like Dorothy Hamill, Katarina Witt, and Scott Hamilton, had more of a party atmosphere. "Its purpose is not only to officially close the Olympics, but also to have a huge celebration for the athletes," says Dickinson. "We were able to cue it as one might cue a concert or a performance on the Grammys." The VL7 positions were adjusted, and 20 of the spots projected high-resolution gobos for a "Great Moments of the Games" segment. Apollo Design Technology received artwork for some gobos February 18 — less than a week before the Closing Ceremony — and the rest three days later. The company produced 72 ColourScenic images in time for Saturday night rehearsal. Looking toward the 2006 Winter Olympic Games in Torino, Italy, Fourth Phase Image Systems provided a dozen 6kW Pigi xenon rotating projectors for a sequence promoting elements of Italian culture from the Sistine Chapel to the Ferrari. The unveiling of the 2006 logo, projected on the ice, capped the presentation.

Some of the lighting rig at Rice-Eccles Stadium was left up for the 2002 Paralympic Games, which ran March 7-16, with an Opening Ceremony featuring performances by Stevie Wonder, Wynonna Judd, and others, lit by David Grill in collaboration with Bob Dickinson and Bob Barnhart. The venue was reconfigured for more of a thrust-type show, and some of the lights were struck. But there were still about 600 Vari\*Lites in the air, and the flame in the Olympic cauldron, still illuminated by the trusty VL2416s, continued to burn.

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