

Meet Alex Specht of Spechtrum Lighting

May 2018

Today we'd like to introduce you to Alex Specht.

Alex, let's start with your story. We'd love to hear how you got started and how the journey has been so far.

I've been lighting up the industry since 1998. After growing up, playing guitar in bands, I thought my professional interest would be studio engineering. I came to realize that it was incredibly boring and frustrating spending so much time in a small enclosed space saying to bands, "that sounds great, but could you try it again."

I thought to create atmospheres for bands, honing in a new sense of art, and developing a new craft in an interesting trade, would be a path of countless avenues. Paired with physical activity of setting up and tearing down the shows and fact that every day would be different, I felt that my future was on track. I started out with a highly reputable company Upstaging Inc. where I learned my chops in how to build a show and the mechanics and techniques involved. Which also included the formalities on how to work and interact with people. A lesson I learned that holds a high percentage of ability. After a couple of major tours (Metallica, Korn, and Sevendust) as a technician, I came to the point where my true ambition was to get behind the console and create atmospheres for live bands on my own accord.

I moved over to House of Blues Chicago, so that I could cut my teeth into lighting live performances. Which in turn, lead me to more interaction with my production community and not only lighting bands but a diverse multitude of events. One of which was lighting for televised performances. This leads me to a gig on the side working at Channel 11 WTTW Chicago. Working on such shows as Chicago Tonight, Check Please! and the televised live band performance show Soundstage. (Which my first day on the job was September 11th)

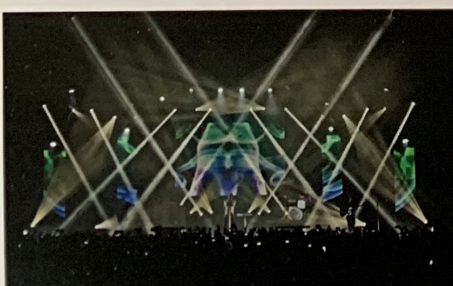
Another path HOB introduced to me was Electronic Dance Music shows. I never realized I would have had an interest in it. I was unaware there was an entire world of clubs that solely adhere to this kind of show. So, the next step was Crobar Chicago.

The city's most notorious dance club at the time. It wasn't my comfort zone at first, but I loved doing lights to the music. It was all atmosphere without the worry of making sure a band could see their instruments to play or lighting up smiling faces of pop bands. Complete Light and Shadow contrasts. Free Form Art of Contour and Accents.

Years later, my ambitions grew heavier and realized I needed to move forward. I decided to go full freelance and take all of these worlds I encountered and apply them to other companies' needs. Sound Investment was my first introduction into freelancing. A growing company that was in their first to second stages of their development, was the perfect fit to help, learn and grow from. And, are now a full on a powerhouse of a production company and are now starting a branch out in New York. Also, one of the only companies to be within the city limits. Most companies are suburban based in industrial sectors of town.

A fun fact is that a good portion of the company are people I grew up with in my neighboring home town 3 hours west of Chicago. All of my closest friends one by one moved up here from our small towns to start their careers and it is an amazing blessing that we can take that childhood relationship and direct it towards our production careers and collaborations. Spent a few years programming for dance club installations and within that network, helped launch the first year of Wavefront Chicago Beach Party. I designed both stages with the help of being backed up by Audio Integration Services..who was the production company to supply the gear, personnel and the main captains of the Pirate Ship. After many festivals, events, and installations (I'd mention the clubs but they turnover like pancakes in this town and are done and gone)... I longed for touring again. One of the companies I freelanced for Windy City Music worked with the band ICP. I know it sounds horrible but it actually was a beautiful experience. 4 years worth. It was a SHOW!

ALEX | Meet Alex Specht of Spechtrum Lighting in Old Irving Park



It was a hot mess... but definitely a show. I had the freedom to experiment and do whatever I wanted with this act. After that, Robb Jibson of SO Midwest offered me a gig for Panic! at the Disco, who he had been lighting for a few years prior to taking over Fall Out Boy. The trial run was a European tour where I was able to get a feel for the band and their dynamic. We hit it off great and they were into my particular style of lighting. They asked me what I was doing for the next year and signed on to be their guy. That was 6 Years ago. Amazing shows, experiences, band, crew... starting from our artist Brendon Urie, through the tiers of management, crew, and personnel...

I've always said it's the perfect balance of Bros and Pros. This, in turn, launched a new level into my career. Gave me opportunities in the off seasons to work with other bands that I was privileged to light. Pierce the Veil allowed me to showcase a dynamic aggression full of elaborate scene transitions.

New Politics range from a dirty rock show basement party throws down to an ethereal new wave experience Front Line Assembly brought me back to feeling like a teenager listening to Industrial Music. Dark German Freedom. Its hard to ask for much more. And the game continues. I've seen the world, with purpose. It's not the part of the globe that matters. It's how you relate to it and find your interest and appreciation. I'm the most comfortable within my production setting. It's a community that resonates with each other. Everyone with the same goal.

The Show

So, a daily interaction can be a one-liner, jokes and quick quips that refer to the end result. Almost saying nothing, but everything is explained in a few syllables. It's a common unspoken bond. Once, I'm in show mode, that's all I care about, the show and the people involved. This is the beauty I've found in this industry. Just a nod to somebody can replace a half hour conversation. Then there's the show... that is the reward.

Watching as all of the ideas you had to create a backdrop, dynamic atmosphere, and visual experience, come to fruition before your eyes as you're controlling it in real time. Every beat and every cue is a constant momentum of action and reaction. That's only from my perspective. The other side of that view is the audience. There is a collective pulse that binds the audience with the band. The idea is to create a world in that venue that amplifies that pulse and encapsulates the sonic imagery of the music.

It is, however, a subconscious art. As you're providing the experience, nobody knows you're doing it. They just feel the accentuated moment. You can make the greatest lighting cue this side of the sun... and everyone sees it as the band got better. I love being the man behind the curtain. I don't want to be in the spotlight, just have control of where to direct it. Recognition is very humbling to me. Whenever a patron actually is aware of the lighting and its effects, I am very appreciative of their accolades they give me after the show. Especially if they've brought a kid to their first concert.

Everyone remembers their first show and how it impacted their formidable years. There's no comparison to seeing them wide-eyed and dropped jaw. You can't compare the expression on their faces and the million thoughts running through their head. No gig is too big or too small for me. My only focus is on making a show come to life and creating an experience for others so they will always have that moment that lays a marker in their life that sets a path in motion. One single moment of a show can make the moment in a person's life... if I've had a hand at that moment, then my I did my job and can go to bed smiling. And this is why I love what I do.

We're always bombarded by how great it is to pursue your passion, etc. – but we've spoken with enough people to know that it's not always easy. Overall, would you say things have been easy for you?

When Equipment Fails. Nothing is more stressful than being in charge of the big moment and a technical factor out of your hands surprises you with a full on failure. You're ready for the cue... you've prepared for this moment... the overwhelming suspense engulfs you... and... nothing. Bummer. It's a burn that will scar you for a couple weeks. However, the other side of that coin is when equipment fails and you know how to fix it in short window of time.

There is no comparable rush than when all hell is breaking loose and you have a plan of attack to solve the problem. There's a potential within yourself (that you sometimes forget about) you unleash in the heat of the moment. Next thing you know, you find yourself moving at speeds you never knew you were capable of and owning strengths that suddenly made a guest appearance to the party.

Has luck played a meaningful role in your life and business?

Positive vibes and preparation. I consider myself very lucky of the opportunities that have fallen onto my lap. But, at the same time, I've worked very hard, learned by failing and strived to hone in tomorrow and the days to follow. I'm humble, but also know the value of hard work, decisions, and drive.

