The McCandless Method

The **McCandless Method** is a particular approach to stage lighting, first proposed in a book by Stanley R. McCandless, ***A Method of Lighting the Stage*** (1932), which has been through several editions. The McCandless Method is still in use today.

In the McCandless Method, the actors are meant to be fully front lit but also provided with some "sculpting" of the features. Full lighting is provided by at least two lights from opposite sides, above the plane of the actors by about 45 degrees and approximately 90 degrees apart. These two lights come in from opposite directions. Top lighting may also be used for fill, as may limited footlights. McCandless described these angles as being the diagonals of a cube in the center of the acting area.

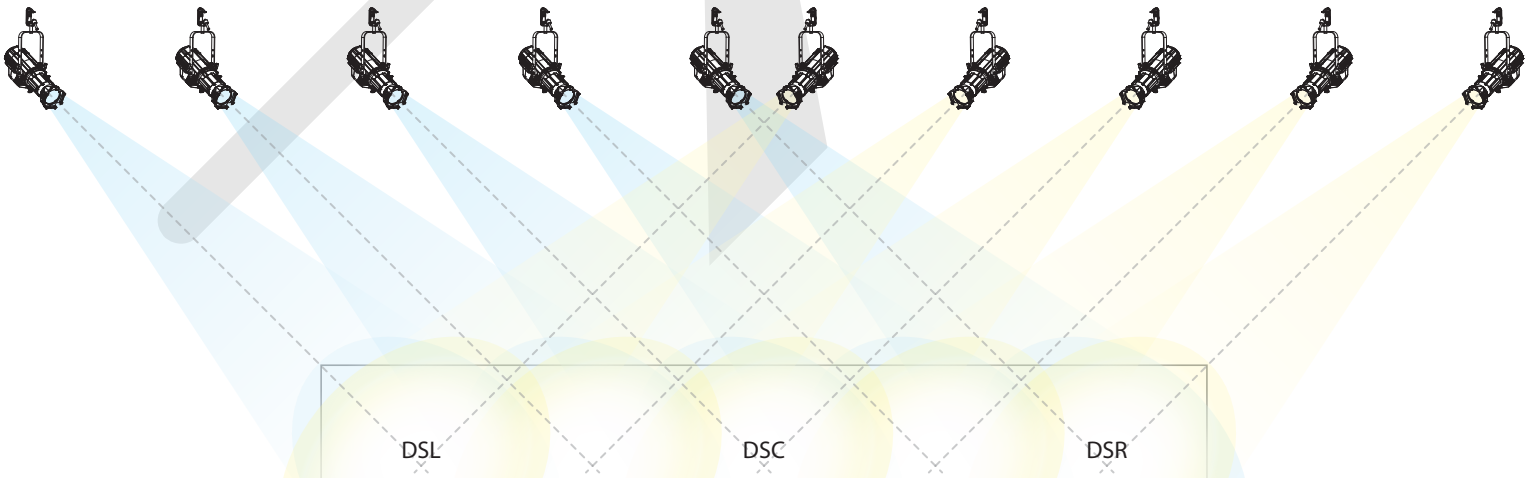
However, the key to the McCandless Method is that one light of the primary pair is "cool" relative to the other. One may be blue (a cool color, i.e. higher kelvin temperature) and the other amber (a warm color, i.e. lower kelvin temperature). Thus, one fills the shadows left by the other in a way that produces a degree of depth which is striking and recognizable on the stage, similar to stage makeup in the way it exaggerates and clarifies the actors' faces.

This method of pairing a warm luminaire with a cool luminaire simulates sunrise in an outdoor environment, as in real life, giving the production a naturalistic feel (notion of realism on stage invented by Constantin Stanislavski), thereby producing intimacy of the play with the audience. This coupled with the depth created, enhances the facial features of the actors, enabling them to convey emotion more effectively than before.

This comparison of warm and cool also enables the lighting designer to shift the balance of the warm and cool lanterns in accordance of what time of day it is. For example, if a scene was set in the middle of the day, the warm and cool luminaires would be equally bright, so the shadows created would be filled equally by warm and cool light, giving the actor's face a balanced look similar to that of standing outside in the middle of the day. However, as it becomes later in the day, the cool luminaires would become brighter than the warm luminaires, so the light upon the actors face becomes cooler overall, suggesting to the audience that the time has shifted into the evening, without any mention of time in the scene itself.

To be totally realistic in this representation of daylight, four conventional luminaires should be used to cover one area of the stage, in two pairs at 45 degree angles, so on each side of the actor's face both a warm and a cool light would be present. This would enable the lighting designer at midday to switch the warm light from one side of the actors face to the other, simulating the sun passing overhead in real life, enhancing the realism. Alternatively, this effect can now be achieved with two color changing LED luminaires. Smaller theatres with fewer resources use this method to great success with only two luminaires per area of the stage.

Hang the lighting fixtures for each system approximately 1/5 of the stage width apart. This will keep the beam angles equal.
Try to get the last lighting fixture at least in line with the last audience menber, sometimes this cannot be accomplished.



Divide the stage into an odd number of acting areas.
This could be as few as one and as many as seven or nine.
We will use five downstage acting areas for this design.
Aim the lights from each system to overlap to achieve even coverage across stage.
Use light diffusion or leave the fixtures slightly out of focus for better blending.

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