



LOGOSTHEATRE.LONDON

Jim Ashley-Down, Lighting Designer,
writes of his days with Kenneth McClellan
and Logos Theatre Company.

In the 'nineties I worked on three Logos productions: “King Lear” in 1996, then “Life Is A Dream” and “Scapin's Tricks” in 1997. I was involved with “Lear” from a very early stage. As well as being the Lighting Designer I was also Stage Manager during the run, I helped paint the set (at Logos's lock-up garage store in Tooting Bec), and I ran production errands for Ken, picking up props and things.

Kenneth McClellan, who I knew as Ken, proved to be a pivotal character in my past; I have very fond memories of him and will always consider him to be one of the most important people in my life, genuinely. I was very sad when I discovered that he had died. We lost touch for some years, and I had been hoping for a while to see him again.

In 1996 I had only just left school, when as an aspiring theatre lighting designer, I saw the advert in “The Stage” and applied for the job on “King Lear”. I was eighteen and a few months old. I turned up for the interview with very little idea of what to expect. Although I had worked in a local theatre during the school holidays, and had done a LOT of theatre while at school, I had no idea what the “real world” was like. I remember there were three or four people in the interview. The others I think were ready to say “thanks, but no thanks”, but Ken understood my passion and desperation to get into the industry, and persuaded them to give me a chance. Luckily they came round to his way of thinking, and we all had a very enjoyable working relationship.

To a very large extent Ken took me under his wing over the next year or so of our working association (before I disappeared off to Rose Bruford to do my lighting degree). I relished the regular chances I had to drive him home after rehearsals and have a cup of tea in his house, as he would often disappear behind a mound of boxes and return with some forty or fifty year old memento of his past and simply hand it to me to watch my reaction when I realised what I was holding. It could have been a programme listing his name next to some famous actor or director, or an old prop used by Olivier or some other luminary. His house was an amazing archive of theatrical memorabilia; if only you could find it. I think he knew where it all was though.

Ken was incredibly generous with his time and taught me so much; about Shakespeare, about the theatre industry, and about being true to what you believe. He was also generous in other ways. Many times he bought me lunch, sending me out with a few pounds to get something for him, and telling me “get yourself something too!”.

Several of the actors I worked with at Logos employed me on other shows. In 1996 to 1997, in addition to the three productions I did with Logos I also did four or five other productions as a direct result of the people I knew at Logos. Through Logos affiliations I also worked for my first time at the Edinburgh Festival, in 1998.

My gap year, and even several years following, were filled to brimming point, and all because Ken decided to give me a chance to prove myself.