

SoftPlot 9: In The Real World

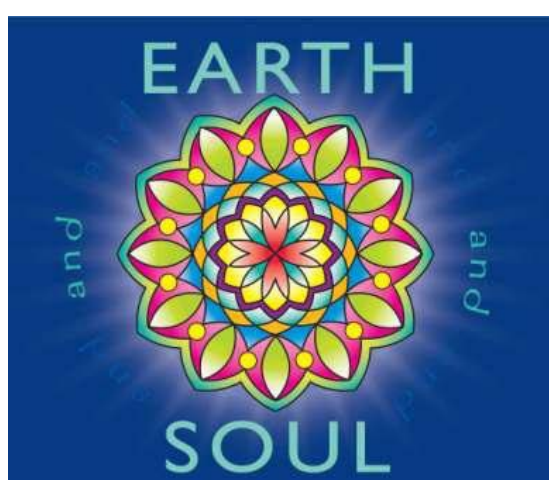
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If you haven't heard, the new version of **SoftPlot** (Version 9, for you keeping track at home) is out. Version 9 offers a host of upgrades from the previous version, including a built-in **Soft Symbols** library from **Field Templates**. Not only that, but it's easier to use and implement than ever before.

But how does **SoftPlot 9** really perform in the wild? Does the program work under pressure and deadlines and with the demands that a nightly theatre performance requires?

This month, we talk to premiere lighting design, Chad Jung of [Chad Jung Design](http://ChadJungDesign.com). He provides us some insight into how the new version of **SoftPlot** holds up in the real world and how it made his life as a lighting designer so much easier.

So without further ado, here's Chad to give us "The Real Story..."



Under the Hood

So, you've never used **SoftPlot** before for your lighting designs, but you're thinking about checking it out? Well, I'm here to let you know what sets **SoftPlot** apart from the rest of the competition and how it works in a real production.

First off, **SoftPlot** thinks like a designer. I use it to design every show I work on, which is not to say that I don't use other programs to communicate with my team as needed, but no other is specifically geared to creative design process.

SoftPlot is the multi-tool of my lighting design tool box. I have been using the program for 10 years now and it is a huge time saver.

What I like about the program is that it streamlines the design process allowing me to create the look rather than having to worry about the logistics at every moment. It's like having a design assistant at every turn to track inventory, draw a section, calculate how a light will hit the stage, research attributes, figure out rigging and power needs, work on rentals; the list is endless.

"It's like having a design assistant at every turn..."

Recently, I upgraded to **SoftPlot 9** which has opened the door to a number of key solutions from previous versions. Some of my favorite upgrades are **Soft Symbols** & Inventory Alerts. **Soft Symbols** is a SPECTACULAR addition to **SoftPlot 9**! Talk about added value, Steve Shelly has created a very professional symbol library that really keeps my plots looking clean and professional. Tracking inventory is now a SNAP. Every time I add or delete a light the onscreen inventory changes and lets me know where I stand.

I recently used **SoftPlot 9** on an original musical titled *Kids Who Care's "Earth & Soul"*. 200 young actors from all over the world (including Italy, Indonesia, Albania, Germany, Spain, Israel, Finland, Scotland, Switzerland, and Latvia) came to Texas produce an original work. This year the production involved a group of kids digging their way through the earth. **SoftPlot** was there for me from start to finish.



To begin, it was easy to import the DWG of the scenic design, by John Aaron Bell, into the venue drawings. **SoftPlot** makes it very simple to create basic 3D drawings so that my section and front views are automatically ready to go in no time. The first task was fixture selection, I needed some automated fixtures to help build the movement and drastic color changes of the production. I used **SoftPlot** to test a variety of fixtures/placements to get the most bang for my buck. The inventory included 12-VL2500's, 10-Scrollers, & 100+ S4's.

Creating the plot was just point and click, one of my favorite things about **SoftPlot** is the cooperation between spreadsheet and plot, which makes it easy to add a system of lights on the plot and then jump to the paperwork and pick color, templates, and channels. There were some questions about how to light some of the tricky blocking moments on the set, but with **SoftPlot** I was easily able to turn on each light to be sure it would hit as needed. After the drafting was done, the paperwork was automatically ready to go.

SoftPlot is a great tool for my Master Electrician and Programmer too, the Focus Schedule makes it easy to export footages to create hang tape labels and **SoftPlot** creates a shop order to make rentals fast and easy. When working with a Moving Light Programmer, I use the software to create JPEGs of my moving Light Focus Positions. This allows me to hand a stack of positions to my programmer so he can focus movers while I focus conventionals.

Working with **SoftPlot** makes designing fast and easy because it is all at my finger tips in a user friendly system. I recommend **SoftPlot** to everyone, from beginner lighting students to seasoned professionals. Today I'm working on a show for Dallas Opera with 80 movers and **SoftPlot** is designing the show with me.

All in all, I have to say that I am very pleased with **SoftPlot** and how it handles shows. If you're a lighting designer and have heard about the program, but have yet to check it out, I say make it happen. Try it out. Kick the wheels and get a feel for it. You owe it to yourself to see how it can enhance your workflow and process.

Happy Designing!

