

Lighting-The Good, The Bad, The Ugly By Joe Bunn for DJN

I'll be honest with you, I'm not a lighting guy, I'm a DJ. In fact, until recently, I ran my lights always on sound or auto mode. In fact, sometimes I still do depending on the event type. In this article, I do want to cover some of the things that I've learned about using lighting as a DJ over the past 30 years.

First and foremost, let's talk briefly about the technology. When I first started out as a youngster, the only lights that anyone had were an Avenger effect (Google it, total classic) or just old school par cans. Well guess what? They were heavy, hot, and the bulbs would cost you a fortune, and they blew out often. Nowadays, almost everything is LED-lighter, cooler, last forever with more features. Lately, I have been using three different types of fixtures for our events (which are normally weddings or corporate events). I use white Chauvet EZ Par 64s for our uplighting, a Blizzard Weather System for a dance floor wash, and a Chauvet Intimidator Duo Spot 155 for moving heads.

Let's talk a little bit about uplighting first. If you aren't offering this service as an add-on, and when I say add-on, I mean getting paid for it, not just "tossing it in", then you are missing out on a golden opportunity. These will pay for themselves in no time! Not to mention, they make the room, the photos, and you look better! Do a little research, but I've found the Chauvet ones we use more than do the trick and we carry them in the soft carry bags vs. road cases since most of my guys drive small SUVs or cars.

As for the dance floor lighting, for a while, a few of us were just using the Chauvet GigBar IRC for folks that wanted a basic dance floor lighting add-on. I'll be honest, it was an OK concept, kind of an all-in-one light show with strobes, laser and a derby type effect on each side. Here's the issue, those derby lights and that laser will leave spots on people all night long and guess who hates that? Photographers. Trust me, they are going to be cussing you out when it comes to editing photos and trying to get the light spots off the bride's dress. Just go for a nice wash type bar like the Chauvet 4Bar or Blizzard Weather System instead.

I've noticed though, that sometimes that isn't quite enough or the look that the client had hoped for, that's where the Duo Spot 155 comes in. The beauty of this fixture is that it has two moving heads on a short bar with a hole in the middle. I use an Ultimate light stand (not speaker stand), slide the 155 over the top down about 8 inches, and then add the Blizzard on top of it. One stand, one plug to the wall, and boom, done, light show!

If you want a little more control, the Blizzard comes with a nice wired foot pedal board that allows you to black them out, freeze, change to auto or sound. That's nice so that if you go into a slow dance, you can kill them. What I recently did to kill the 155s is I found a pedal on Amazon, which I think is used to control tools normally,

but I use it to make my lights go dark. Just search “Power Maintained Latching Foot Switch” on Amazon. For \$30, it’s a steal! If you’re more of a control freak, then you’re going to want to learn DMX to some degree. Recently, my buddy Jeremy Brech and I had an hour long phone call about the Chauvet Xpress 512 and Show Xpress software that I hooked up to my extra computer. After that call, I was able to effectively control my light show and even program it to go to the door for the grand entrance, to the cake for the cake cutting and to the center of the dance floor for the first dance! With a little help from a friend (or really YouTube), you’ll be able to master DMX just like you mastered DJing.

So we have touched a little bit on what lights I use, but let’s talk about how to use them properly. For uplighting, we have been pushing amber pretty hard lately since it seems to go with all décor, but of course, if they client wants something else, they get it! We leave them static through dinner and usually change some of them near the dance floor to sound mode during dancing (if the client is cool with that). As for the dance floor lighting, if we use them with the Chauvet Show Xpress software (mentioned above), then they are used for the special moments like intros, cake and first dance. If we don’t do the programming, they don’t even come on until after dinner when open dancing begins. As I said, the last thing you want is the bride to look green or have little spots all over her dress during a special moment like her first dance!

As I said to start, I’m far from a lighting expert, I really just want to rock dance floors, but as we have seen over the years, the role of the DJ has taken on many different roles. PA guy (for running ceremony mics), wedding planner (when there isn’t one), and even lighting tech. I’m always happy to answer your questions. Just shoot me an email or find me on social media!