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A Heads Up with Tom Youings

With Covid-19 lockdowns worldwide and health authorities urging people to self-isolate and practice social distancing on a massive scale as part of an enormous effort to #FlattenTheCurve of this global pandemic ... we are reaching out to industry friends, colleagues, associates, partners, etc., and asking them to share their #StayAtHome and #QuarantineAndChill activities with us during this extraordinary time.

Just completing his second year of University at Guildford School of Acting, Tom is studying Theatre Production, specialising in Lighting, and his goal is to become a lighting programmer after graduation. Alongside studies, he works as a freelance lighting technician to gain invaluable experience with rental companies on assorted productions and festivals.

Robe: Where are you right now?

Tom: Currently living in a student house in Guildford, Surrey.

Robe: What are you doing to fill the time whilst isolating / on lockdown?

Tom: I'm taking the time to improve as a technician as much as possible. I am updating a visual CV on my professional Instagram @tom_youings.

I am also taking this time to reconnect with some of the amazing people I have met over the last year and a half - I've realised that when times are busy, it is easy to lose connection with some of these people.

I want to reconnect with these industry professionals, maintain these valuable contacts and nurture these friendships, gaining inspiration from how others are using this time to better themselves.

Alongside this I am going to take some time for myself, doing things I enjoy like playing video games and teaching myself to play my guitar (currently rather unsuccessfully!)

Robe: What is the most creative thing you can do in isolation?

Tom: When the lockdown started, I decided I wanted to practice and improve my programming skills. My initial plan was to use the ETC Offline Editor to practice different aspects of programming.

I decided to reach out to some friends at Storm Lighting, a hire company I work for regularly, to ask if they owned any LX Keys I could borrow to make this easier. Unfortunately, they didn't but they have now allowed me very generously to borrow one of their Eos Programming Wings! Thank you, Storm Lighting!

So, I can link my desktop to the programming wing and use it as a console instead of my PC's keyboard. I have also networked this to my laptop, allowing me to use the Capture visualising software and their pre-made rigs with the desk. My plan is to work through ETC's training sessions on their website, as well as attempting to create some light shows to go alongside some of the original music that my best friend has on Spotify.

Robe: Are you looking after anyone else during the Covid-19 crisis?

Tom: I am not currently looking after anyone specifically, but I am trying to keep in contact with as many of my friends and family as possible.

At this time, staying indoors can really take a toll on mental health so I believe if we can stay in contact with many people, fill our days catching up with old mates, it will help each of us stay positive through this confusing time.

Robe: Has anyone inspired you since this started?

Tom: The whole industry is inspiring me.

It has been incredible to see everyone from around the world coming together through social media to keep our industry alive and keep the joy that theatre and events bring to everyone.

Someone specific who has inspired me is my lighting tutor at GSA, Mig Burgess. She always puts her students and friends first and is using this time to help us progress as much as possible in our studies.

Alongside this, she is using her own experience of mental health issues to try help keep people positive through a time where individuals' mental health can really be negatively affected. She does this by going live on Facebook posts and Zoom meetings where she is unbelievably supportive and honest about her personal situation and really helps others by providing amazing advice. But most of all, Mig is a super-friendly person to talk to. Thank you, Mig!

Robe: Favourite book / movie / Netflix series / viral video

Tom: Currently my favourite TV show is The Walking Dead (American post-apocalyptic horror TV series for AMC based on the comic book series by Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, and Charlie Adlard) which I have been watching for years.

I am also a massive fan of the Marvel Universe, so those films and TV shows are a fun way to fill my time.

As well as this I am trying to watch as many shows as I can online. An example of this is the musical "Eugenius" which I watched a couple of weeks ago. It is an incredible show and seeing the amazing lighting design by Andrew Ellis made me so happy to be part of such an inspiring and fun industry.

Robe: What's the first thing you would like to do when we are through it?

Tom: I honestly cannot wait to work on a production again! The work I do is genuinely what I love. I have such a passion for theatre lighting I cannot imagine doing anything else. The feeling I get when I am sitting behind a lighting desk in a theatre is unlike any other and I can't wait to be part of the teams that create incredible productions again.

Robe: Own question / answer / message of solidarity or something you would like to say?

Tom: Now is a time to be proud of what we do. I know the industry has physically come to a stop and that's scary but look around you. Look at how people are getting through this tough time. They are listening to music, watching TV, films, and streams of shows. What we help create, no matter what your specialist area, is really helping the world through this crisis.

I am proud to work in an industry where we can create something that takes the audience away from the outside world, they can forget about issues like this Covid-19 virus and can have fun and be joyful. This is what people need right now.

I am so proud of what we create, and you should be too.

