



Liggett's lighting design for Ween, performing at Higher Ground in Vermont.

Wilco performing at the Tennessee Theater in Knoxville, Tenn.

# Jason Liggett

## The Visual Representation Responsibility



By Rob Ludwig

Six months after getting his foot in the door with a job in security, Liggett was working the lights.

All lighting designers want to create compelling visuals that inspire awe, but not many of them will tell you they feel a responsibility to represent the visual aspect of the band they work for. Jason Liggett is perhaps unique in that regard as he described in his quest to become the lighting designer for alt rock band Wilco. For someone who started as a security guard in a nightclub, Liggett has come a long way.

**PLSN: How did you get involved in the lighting industry?**

**Jason Liggett:** I got involved in the lighting industry by getting my foot in the door working security at a venue called Higher Ground, currently located in South Burlington, Vermont. At that time it was in Winooski, Vermont and my friends had just opened the club. I was doing security and I kept looking out of the corner of my eye wondering why nobody was worried about the details of lighting the talent. Eventually I started doing the focus, and the focus turned into running the lights.

**How long did you work security before you switched to lighting?**

It was probably about six months before I was helping out with the club's lighting.

**"Visually representing Wilco's music through lighting is a real responsibility. The textures of the songs and the intensity of the music is a lighting director's dream." —Jason Liggett**

**Did you have any previous experience in lighting?**

I had plenty of experience setting up various strobe lights and rope lights in the band I was in when I was a kid.

**Oh, you were also a musician?**

When the band used to get together to practice and play, I was always the guy who made sure the aesthetics were right to make it feel really cool.

**Every band needs a production designer or an aesthetic designer. You must have realized at a young age the importance of lighting and what it added to the music.**

I was fascinated and I would geek out with the black lights, strobes and stuff like that. I loved it.

**What happened after you became the lighting guy at Higher Ground?**

One of the club owners and production manager was Matt Sutte, and I credit him

as the guy who gave me the opportunity to start doing the shows for the bands who needed somebody, which was probably about 50 percent of the time. As far as the term "house LD," that took a couple of years after they opened before that became an official position.

I've been with them for about 11 years and I still work for them when I'm home.

**How did you make the move into freelance lighting design?**

The bands that would come through — the bands you would see all the time — a lot of them were local and would play at other venues in a 300-mile radius. I started to realize that it was a good idea to purchase some lights that I could throw in the back of a car

and travel with. It was probably around 2003 when I started to buy lights and do stuff outside the club, like one-offs in New York City.

**How did you develop the skills needed to be a designer?**

I would spend a lot of time talking to lighting designers and operators as they were programming — designers like Chris Kuroda, Saxton Waller, Wade Wilby, Hans Shoop and Johnny R. Goode, to name a few. The concepts of lighting are pretty logical but trying to figure out how to go about doing it all was the hard part. Luckily, there were a lot of lighting designers along the way who were willing to answer my questions. I really learned a lot of things from Nook's "LD-at-Large" column in PLSN.

**Tonight, we're at the Wilco show here in Royal Oak, Mich., and you're supplementing your rig with the house rig. How did your experience at Higher Ground help you with that?**

I know the job description of the house LD that I'm going to meet at any given venue. I know the questions to ask them because I was asked those same questions for years, so it becomes natural. Everything I learned helping touring productions set-up, I translated into working with the in-house staff on this tour.

**From what I understand, you submitted a resume for this job. How did you describe your specific style of programming?**

On my cover letter, I basically described my style. I said that visually representing Wilco's music through lighting is a real responsibility. The textures of the songs and the intensity of the music is a lighting director's dream. The transition of going from a coffee house to chaos, with taste, is essential to lighting Wilco.

**How long have you been touring?**

I have been touring around four years. The first big taste of touring I did was with The Benevento-Russo Duo and Mike Gordon in 2005 and 2006. The next tour I did was Yonder Mountain String Band in 2007. That was a great experience. After the Yonder Mountain String Band I worked with a band called The Sound of Urchin from New York City. We did