

## Women in live production and how ETCP can help you stand out from the crowd

IN THE PAST DECADE we have begun seeing a surge of women in the entertainment and live production industry, but even with the gender equality movement, we are still observing occupational segregation on job sites. Often, I find myself being the only woman on the job. Having worked very hard to prove my abilities and skills as a rigger and electrician, I observe women constantly expected to prove themselves. Not only are we required to show that we are just as capable as our male counterparts, but we need to far exceed their knowledge and skills in our fields to be considered equal.

Employers and coworkers are more apt to train new male riggers than female riggers. It is a common assumption that women would not be able to haul a chain motor while on a beam or be able to climb steel or scaffolding, therefore they remain as ground riggers and not given the opportunity to climb. On several steel builds, I have seen women being left on the side while the men were pulled from one task to complete another that any of the female riggers would have been fully qualified to perform. This results in a group of girls sitting on the sidelines, watching the boys doing the work, thus creating more misconceptions about the abilities of women to

perform the job.

Not to say this is the natural order of things in the entertainment industry. I have had the pleasure of working with several employers and leads who have praised their female riggers and electricians. In fact, colleagues Michael Matthews (ETCP Certified Arena – Rigging, Theatre – Rigging, Entertainment Electrician, and Portable Power Distribution) and Mike Herman (ETCP Certified Arena – Rigging) have been invaluable supporters and mentors of mine, and always use opportunities to teach and help their crew without any gender bias. It is more common to see women electricians and lighting technicians than it is to see women riggers. The expectation for women is to handle lighter material and be more artistic and creative. I believe this is the reason we are seeing more female lighting technicians and lighting board operators; however, the rigging world is still dominated by men since it is considered to be a rougher job that requires physical strength.

We need to look beyond gender roles and recognize that a person's ability to be successful at their job is determined by their skill rather than their physical strength.



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Being a woman in a man's world has prompted me to work on my strength, not only physically but mentally as well. Knowing that you will be underestimated is initially frustrating. As humans, we have a natural desire to be appreciated and receive praise for our knowledge and accomplishments. After more than 15 years in the industry, I thrive on being underestimated because it provides me the opportunity to stand out. Arriving to the job site prepared with all the gear and being knowledgeable and skilled will only take you so far. The key is to step up and be the first to get on the beam or climb the tower.

Criticism is always around. I have never felt the need to play into the stereotypical role of a “woman” on the job. I have always viewed myself to be capable of performing my duties the same as

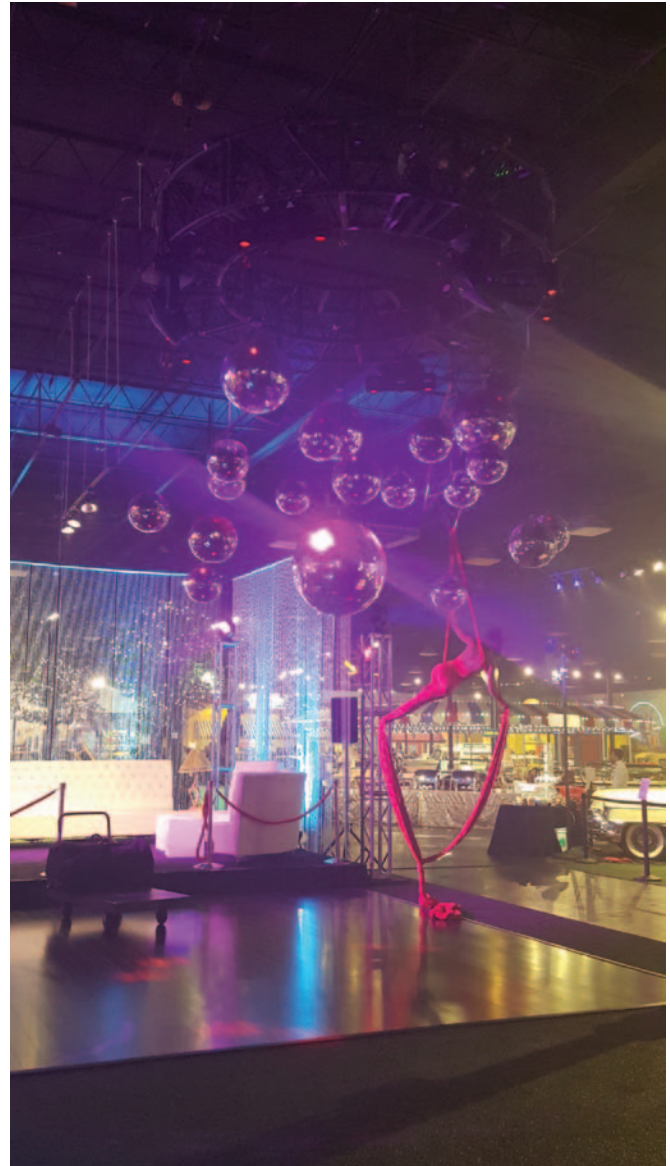
Theater rigging for touring Broadway production *Come From Away* at Broward Performing Arts Center in Fort Lauderdale, FL.



**Mother grid rigging for 2.8T slanted mirror provided by PRG at the Fillmore Miami Beach for the band Phoenix's 2017 tour.**

my coworkers. As a lead, I am perceived as tough and even harsh sometimes. It is not because I am a tougher lead than the men; instead, because people are taken back when they see a strong female figure in a male dominated industry. A study conducted for the *Journal of Applied Psychology* (Volume 89, #3) shows that successful women in male dominated industries are viewed as difficult to work with by their peers.

The stage brought me to where I am today. I fell in love with climbing while performing on silks. Learning to trust my body and strength, followed by learning about the hardware I am hanging from, led me into rigging. Looking back at those years, I am amazed by how little we were educated about our equipment and safety, and how catastrophic rigging our hardware incorrectly could have



**Aerialist rigging at Staluppi's Cars of Dreams Museum in North Palm Beach, FL.**

been. It was commonplace for performers to rig their own hardware and there was no thought given to whether or not it was rated to withstand the dynamic loads it was subjected to. The industry has changed a lot since then, and ETCP certified riggers are available to inspect the rigging, educate the performers on safety, and limit the number of avoidable accidents.

My first experience in electrics and lighting also began on stage where I designed for several student productions. Little did I know that about 12 years later I would become the head electrician at the Fillmore Jackie Gleason Theater and have the opportunity to work on a wide variety of events, from rock 'n' roll tours to Broadway, ballet and opera shows, circus acts, private and corporate meetings, and TV and film/video. This diversification is where we challenge





Ballroom rigging and lighting for a dinner event at Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach.

ourselves and our knowledge in our disciplines, and learn how to adapt, communicate, and educate our peers and clients.

My passion for the industry was my first drive for seeking to further my education and become an ETCP Certified Entertainment Electrician and Arena – Rigger. When you love something, you have the desire to learn more about it. And if you have the drive, you will also want to advance your skills, improve your knowledge, test yourself, and grow in your field. This is where you make a career out of your passion. Every certification opens up a new opportunity. Your employers observe you are willing to put the time and effort into learning and applying new skills and knowledge on the job site. It is at this point that those around you see past your gender.

In the last few years, many colleagues have approached me about ETCP and the requirements for certification. Seeing the industry embrace the program shows how influential ETCP certification is becoming. The ETCP requires the technician to have the experience and knowledge to be a valid candidate. This does not mean that as a certified technician you are required to have all the answers and know everything, but rather that you are constantly learning and finding resources to advance your skills and hone your craft. Recertification requires not only hours of experience working in

your field, but also proof of continuing education. This is why more employers are seeking ETCP certified riggers and electricians. The ETCP certification is not just a measure of knowledge and experience, but also dedication.

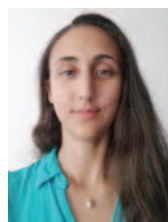
I have been questioned why I have dual certifications; often I am asked if I am a rigger or an electrician. To me, these disciplines work hand in hand. On a recent job, the rigging team was asked to run supply conductors along the beams from two services to the audio and LED racks. Because of my electrician's background I was able to identify that the feeder was not sized appropriately to the load. Further investigation proved my observation correct and the error was rectified before the services were energized, thus avoiding a potentially hazardous situation. This is one of many instances where the dual certification has proven to be invaluable. As riggers we are often required to work with power. Not only do we assist the electricians with their power cables and to reach their lighting fixtures on the trusses overhead, but we also manage our chain hoists' power. Riggers need an understanding of power and how our chain hoists function to safely rigging objects overhead. As electricians, we need to have some basic rigging skills, after all, we are hanging lights on trusses rigged over attendees and performers, and it is vital to know what is required to get our rig up in the air safely.

“... your knowledge is what makes your coworkers rely on you for advice and recommendations on how to perform the task at hand in the safest and most efficient way.”

Being ETCP certified does open doors and create employment opportunities, but the real reason to become certified is for you. Being able to walk onto a jobsite and be confident in your skills and knowledge is priceless. As a woman, you will see yourself beyond your gender and realize that your knowledge is what makes your coworkers rely on you for advice and recommendations on how to perform the task at hand in the safest and most efficient way. Whether you are a man or woman in this industry, don't be afraid to ask questions, and don't let the fear of harsh criticism deter you from continuing to learn and grow. ■



IATSE Local 500 stagehands at the Fillmore Miami Beach set up for Sports – League of Legends.



**Maya Nockari** is an ETCP Certified Arena – Rigger and Entertainment Electrician. She began her career on stage as a performer, where she found her passion for the technical aspects of the entertainment industry. From rigging and lighting for the stage, she moved on to hold several management positions in corporate audiovisual event production with PSAV. But her path led her back to the entertainment side of the business, serving as head electrician at the Fillmore Miami Beach. She is currently one of the head riggers at the Broward County Convention Center in Fort Lauderdale, FL and still travels as a freelance master electrician, head rigger, pyro technician, and project manager.