

DOKA'S ALEXANDER FOKICHEV: INTERVIEW

ALEXANDER FOKICHEV, THE COMPANY'S CEO, TELLS US A COUPLE OF WORDS ABOUT THE COMPANY'S PAST AND PRESENT, AND FUTURE PLANS.

This year DOKA celebrates its 20th anniversary of partnership with Clay Paky. Doka was founded in the late 1980s, as the Soviet Union was slowly transforming to become the Russian Federation. The company has a rich history and a lot of experience, and Alexander Fokichev, the company's CEO, told us a couple of words about the company's past and present, and future plans.

ZioGiorgio: Your company was founded in the late 1980s. How did you begin?

Alexander Fokichev: Our company was founded in the USSR times, on the 6th of May 1987 as a scientific-technical center of youth "Doka". Those were the first non-governmental, self-sustained organizations, which became the first forerunners of new property relationships. The center was founded by Alexands Chuyenko, who was at that time the first secretary of the Komsomol district committee of Zelenograd, he was one of those who contributed in the development of the legal solutions that confirmed the status of such organizations. At first we, the youth from Zelenograd, made everything: we invented an ultra-thin sapphire scalpel for ophthalmologists, a solar battery car, the first computer games ("Tetris" was invented by Doka's researchers, we then sold the rights of development), we even developed satellites. From 1989 on we started to develop and produce the system of lighting management DL-80 and original light matrices, and that's how it began. Our first client was the Ostankino television center, and our matrices could be seen during "Pesnya-90,91,92" television programs.

ZioGiorgio: Which brands did you first start to deal with?

Alexander Fokichev: We were developing and couldn't offer our clients a full spectrum of appliances without global leaders' products. The first negotiations started in 1992, and at the beginning of 1993 we signed the first dealership contract with the companies FAL, ADB and Jem smoke machines. FAL at that time offered a large choice of projectors and fixtures for discos, clubs and theatres. ADB was and is one of the oldest and most renowned companies in the world as far as theatre fixtures are concerned, the company can offer light consoles, dimmer systems, classic theatre projectors. Jem produced smoke machines, but then they sold the brand to Martin Professional, and smoke machines are still being produced under that name. FAL sold its trademark to a Chinese company, and the only one that is still alive nowadays is ADB. In 1994 we started working with Clay Paky, the company we are still working with, which is our main partner and this year we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of our partnership.

ZioGiorgio: Was the passage from the USSR to the Russian Federation difficult for your company?

Alexander Fokichev: Well, Doka was founded in the USSR times as a self-sustained organization, so we didn't have problems as our society and State were transforming. We had already started to transform earlier.

ZioGiorgio: How did Doka survive through the crisis?

Alexander Fokichev: I remember the crisis of August 1998 really. At the beginning of September the phones in our office stopped ringing all at once. It was quite terrifying. I reminded myself that the crisis was only here in our country and not all over the world, so I started to look abroad. We already had some experience of exporting components for intellectual projectors : step motors, dichroic filters and gas-discharge lamps. ROBE's director likes to remember that their first scanners were manufactured using Russian step motors bought from Doka. I decided to turn to that program but didn't have time to: after 2 weeks the phones started ringing again. The crisis of 2008-2009 didn't hit us so hard. OK, we saw a reduction of about 40% in the number of projects, but it was not so critical for our company.

ZioGiorgio: What can you tell us about the Russian market of professional equipment?

Alexander Fokichev: The market has become saturated with information, thanks to new technologies. So when I consider the origin of the information I also consider it as a witness of this information-rich environment. In the past, the client called you because he didn't know where else to go. Today everybody knows everything thanks to the Internet. We carried out some research in our company and the results were that 95% of calls are made on the basis of information taken from the Web. Mailing lists and trade shows are not that influent any more. That is why companies have to convince their clients with other things. And this is what we've been doing so far.

ZioGiorgio: Which kind of equipment is more requested?

Alexander Fokichev: To date we are a theatre company. So I see it more from the theatre lighting designers' preferences point of view. The classical theatre light is still alive and popular. Not much time ago, very carefully, theatre lighting designers started using LED fixtures. For example, Clay Paky K20 LED projectors are very popular, as well as RGBAW projectors of the Lustr series from ETC. Doka is a company that offers a full spectrum of services for stage technology, and we offer theatre mechanics (manufactured both in-house and imported), video-projection systems, electro-acoustic and communication systems. The demand for such systems is explained by the necessity of most Russian theatres to be rebuilt and renovated. As far as show lighting is concerned, the Sharpy fixture by Clay Paky is having a great success. It has such a small and light body that turns fast and precise and has a sharp and bright beam from a 190W discharge lamp. This brand name has already become a kind of a common noun used on the market.

ZioGiorgio: What do you think about LED technologies?

Alexander Fokichev: LEDs that have become more and more powerful and bright, they have made modern lighting appliances explode, including lighting for shows and the stage. LEDs have a very long lifetime, about 50,000 hours, more or less the same as the lifespan of the appliance itself. The power absorbed is two or three times less than that of traditional lamps. Of course, they are the future. But in theatre lighting LEDs appeared later than in other spheres. LED

fixtures do not have a good focus and it is difficult for them to compete with the brightness of discharge lamps, but it won't last long.

ZioGiorgio: In which important projects has your company taken part, as far as equipment, technology level and prestige are concerned?

Alexander Fokichev: We've participated in a great number of important projects during these years. The most tragical one was the "Nord-Ost" musical (when the terrorists took hostage the spectators of the theatre, editor's note), the first biggest theatre project was the reconstruction of the lighting production system of the Novosibirsk Opera and Ballet Theatre, the longest and the most prestigious one for me is our collaboration with the Bolshoy Theatre; I also liked to work on the reconstruction of the Voronezh Drama Theatre, it means when you have an interesting team and the client knows what he wants you have great results: a beautiful building, its interiors and technologies correspond to one another.

ZioGiorgio: How many stages are there in the realization of a project? Designing, simulations (do you use any simulation software?), installation...

Alexander Fokichev: The project starts from the elaboration of the concept. There are different technological ideologies for the stage. For example, the Russian theatres, being repertory theatres, often use the firmly fixed floodlight system with a large number of different fixtures. The modern European theatres, that often represent areas for rent, prefer systems without fixed floodlights, where, using a flexible commutation system, you can change the position of the fixtures rapidly. After having defined the concept, you can start to make the project. At this stage the fundamental technological decisions are made, the specifications of the equipment are prepared and the plans of the placing of the equipment are made.

The next stage is the "working documentation" stage, that forecasts the exact calculations of the length of the wiring, wire sections, tube banks etc. It all ends up with the cable register and detailed estimations. If the theatre is a State one, as the majority of the theatres in this country, the project must pass an expertise check. After the positive conclusion the tender can be started to choose the contractor and then the works begin. If necessary during the projection phase we make a 3-dimension model of the future venue using the 3D max software, then we "hang" the equipment in the hall with the help of the Light Converse software and evaluate the real conditions of lighting in the hall. An example of this type of work can be the development of the show and effects of the lighting system for the concert and sports venue "Fetisov-Arena" in Vladivostok, where it was necessary to find a scheme to place more than 200 powerful moving body fixtures.

ZioGiorgio: Do you organize any courses or education events for your clients and collaborators?

Alexander Fokichev: Yes, we do. I think we were among the first to have introduced the tradition of workshops and seminars. The first one took place in 2000, and the next one is going to take place quite soon – from 4 to 6 of June. The workshops are attended by technical theatre staff, lighting designers, scenographic designers, everybody who works with the stage. We show samples of new equipment, invite representatives of manufacturers we work with, attendees can get advice or exchange experiences and ideas with colleagues.

Nine years ago we collaborated in the publication of the unique book "Theatre Lighting". The book was written by the senior lighting designer of the Bolshoy Theatre Damir Ismagilov and by

the lighting designer Elena Drevalyova. They have considerable experience in teaching this profession at the School-Studio of the Moscow Art Theatre.

This year during our workshops we are going to present the new edition of the book.

ZioGiorgio: What are Doka's plans for the future?

Alexander Fokichev: To work of course! We are working on more than 10 projects, both in the capital and outside. We are going to organize a workshop where we will present the new edition of "Theatre lighting". We would also like to renew our company style and image, as well as completely renew the web-site of the company. And we will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of collaboration between Doka and Clay Paky. So, we have a lot of things to do!

ZioGiorgio: Thank you very much, good luck in realizing all your goals!

Anastasia Klinushkina

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