



Crewperson: Paul David Birks

Age: 48

Job: Lighting designer

The Shend interrogates LD Paul David Birks

Turn someone in for questioning . . . E-mail: crewcuts@lsionline.co.uk

Recent Activity? International Indian Film Awards, Youth Commonwealth Games.

Worthy past glories? Melbourne Commonwealth Games Closing Handover, Iron Maiden, Burj al Arab Atrium, Launch of the Grand Lisboa Casino in Macau.

Why are you what you are? Ran out of money at University, got elected as the Student Union stage manager.

Three best things about your job? The massive variety of places, people and events I have been involved with.

Three worst things about your job? Chasing people for money; Cancelled gigs; People who take the piss and treat crew with no respect (you know who you are!).

Detail the equipment you use in an ideal world? I'm very open minded - some of the best work I feel I've ever done has been on very tight budgets in third world situations with local equipment. It's not the tools, it's how you use them.

Most crucial invention since you started that improved your job? Skype - so I can stay in touch with my family every day, easily and cheaply.

What do you never leave home without when working? Laptop.

Proudest moment? Becoming a dad ('moments'!).

Best gig while working? Lots - especially pulling off a West End Musical showcase for a BA-sponsored event in the grounds of the British Embassy in Bogotá with local equipment, never rehearsed, live as the sun went down - it all looked stunning and worked perfectly.

Best gig as a punter? *The Wall* Pink Floyd first time round at Earls Court.

Biggest nightmare on the job? After the brand new lighting desk I'd programmed through rehearsals for Jimmy Nail completely failed (as did the back-ups), operating the show from side stage with dimmer rack test buttons and a DMX tester for the movers was pretty rank.

Most irritating request from artist? 'More smoke' - when you can't see the band anyway (for Sisters of Mercy).

Artist from the past you'd most like to have worked for? Pink Floyd (I know, I know!).

Most reliable piece of equipment? I can't think of anything that hasn't gone wrong at some stage.

What phrase sends a chill down your spine while working? Isn't getting a chill down our spine the reason we do this?

What invention would make your job easier/better? Video cameras that could reproduce my shows as they look to the naked eye.

What other member of the crew would you least like to be?

Monitor engineer (I did that for a while at Virgin's Venue years ago). If you get it right, nobody notices, if you get it really wrong the Musos throw the mic stands at you!

Which other member of the crew do you take your hat off to? Caterers without question. (Everyone says that - I wonder what a caterer would answer?)

Three best sounds and three best videos on the crew bus? In general I prefer that music is kept in-ear on the bus and certainly never sing, hum or otherwise reproduce *any* of the tunes from that night's gig. But one of my favourite times was being taught to listen to Christy Moore by Robbie McGrath (FOH engineer). I suppose Black Eyed Peas *The E.N.D.* is my music of the moment. Video-wise, episodes of *Top Gear* - sad but true; Still love watching *Blackadder*; Anything that makes me laugh out loud.

Most irritating thing on the crew bus and why? Going to bed after the bus has stopped for the night - I can fall asleep in a minute if it's still moving.

Best hotel you've stayed at while working? The Maharajahs Hunting Lodge Udaipur in Rajasthan, India was stunning - although I got mugged by a band of monkeys because I was carrying a banana on my way out of breakfast.

Like all music journalists, are you really just a frustrated musician? I suppose so, up to the age of 15 I was working as a singer and then my voice broke!

Any artist you'd happily swap places with if you had the talent? Lots I like to tour with, but I'm happy with what I have and wouldn't swap for anything.

Members of the audience you loathe the most? People on the guest list who stand behind you at the desk chatting to each other during the quiet bits when you're trying to work.

Any artists you'd happily spend time with socially? Yes, quite a few - but any musician comes near my three daughters and I'm getting a shotgun.

Best passing-through-customs anecdote? A gruff US Customs Guard joking with me in a really thick accent, kept calling me Sideshow Bob, when *The Simpsons* was new in the UK! I hadn't got a clue what he was on about and just kept nodding and smiling 'til he let me go on my way.

Bizarrest sight you've ever seen at work? Having a mega-famous 80s pop sex symbol showing the crew her latest boob job and saying "Best money can pay for, boys".

Favourite artist to work for? Ella Fitzgerald stands out as one of my faves.

Favourite food and drink on tour? Sushi, Roobios Chai tea (God, I must be getting old).

Favourite venue / Most hated venue? Hate lighting rock music at the Royal Festival Hall. It may be great acoustically, but . . . Love it or loathe it, you can't beat The Barrowlands for a great show.

Open air or under a roof? Under a roof - 'cause sometimes as a lampy up a tower in the middle of a field it can all seem a bit remote.

Best festival? Big Chill.

Best item of clothing when working? Thermal underwear for all-night programming outdoors in the cold.

Closest you've come to death whilst touring? Went to Rio with the Brand New Heavies as LD and production manager. Soon as we arrived the crew jumped in a couple of cabs down to Copacabana beach. Everyone got out of the cabs but as I was paying, I was the last one out. As I got out I couldn't see anyone and walked into the middle of a car chase and gunfight between the cops and some bad guys. Everyone else had got out before me and seen them coming but first I knew was the whoosh, whoosh, whoosh of bullets going past!

Most outrageous thing you ever did on tour? *Most* outrageous? I almost certainly can't remember the *most* outrageous.

Most sensible thing you ever did on tour? There must have been some crazy nights when I was sensible enough to say: "That's it, I'm off to bed now, got a show to do tomorrow."

orangestreet@hotmail.com
www.techniques.org.uk