



"Museum culture is not rock and roll; the riggers may be considered aliens ..."

So what is rigging, anyway?

From the entertainment industry point of view, each sector has evolved its own meaning. In television, for example, rigging has more to do with the activity of hanging the lighting equipment itself, because studios usually have an installed suspension system that allows technicians to hang luminaires directly, without worry about the inherent strength of the structure from which the suspension system ultimately hangs. In outside broadcasts, rigging may have more to do with building temporary platforms, working with lighting stands and cable management than with using lifting equipment. Theatres usually have a suspension facility of some sort and although Sod's law always applies, there is generally a bar fairly close to where you want it.

In both cases, it could be

argued that the rigging can be undertaken by the electricians or scenic department; the systems are managed by technicians ('flymen' in theatres, who are not of necessity riggers), stage or scenic staff.

Lastly, there are venues where

no suspension facilities exist. Every production brings in everything it needs - rigging, and now riggers, are required.

It might be useful to consider

some of the styles of rigging and the terms used to describe them now the trade is being (reluctantly?) accepted as an essential requirement in many cases. The days when lighting technicians were always

A look at things (impartially, of course) from a rigging point of view . . .

considered responsible for rigging the motors and trusses for a production, or the stage crew for the flying of scenery and props for large-scale productions have largely disappeared. More and more the activity is seen as a discrete process and a trade in its own right, rigging provision very often being made by the house, and the riggers may be working for the venue, not the production or promoter.

Production rigger/ing refers to

the rigger/ing directly relating to the production (funnily enough), be it a touring concert or live event, a theatre show or a corporate event.

House rigger/ing is a term used

to describe riggers and rigging who are generally supplied by the house to hang a production. This is usually to protect the venue's interests but also facilitates the loading in and out of a production since managements generally want to tour the minimum staff necessary. House riggers may be from a contractor who services the venue, or the house may have full-time riggers or employ them directly on a freelance basis.

Concert rigging almost always

relates to live popular music, but can include orchestral productions. In the concert world, rigging is to do with providing or augmenting a suspension facility for the needs of the production. In such situations, rigging is the activity of installing and the equipment so used.

Event rigging is a hybrid term

used for any live event, typically but not necessarily outdoors. Rigging is often split into the rigging required to build an outdoor stage and then the hanging of one or more productions' technical requirements.

Concert and event rigging may

include stage building and/or scaffolding and other specialised rigging disciplines, from 'SkyCam' type camera rigging work to the opening ceremony productions at large sports events. The recent trends in supporting videowalls and speaker arrays for stadium

concerts have crossed over into other markets including sports events and ceremonies.

Exhibition rigging in larger halls

is similar in approach to arena rigging; the equipment or objects being suspended are nothing to do with the rigging contractor as they might be for a production rigger. A rigging contractor will generally take a brief from a client, then liaise direct with the venue; this is similar to rigging a concert in many cases.

Museums, galleries and other

attractions often require high quality rigging; the suspended objects could well be valuable, unique, even priceless, and be required to hang very precisely and unobtrusively.

Circus rigging is most closely

allied to arena rigging in terms of technique; the main difference is that loads are almost always dynamic - and human.

Stunts and flying effects in film,

TV and theatre use many methods found in other sectors and in some ways is closest to circus rigging since loads are likely to be human.

So that is at least eight

rigging styles, before thinking about theatre, conference, sports and film rigging.

Rigging is a skill that often goes

unnoticed and unappreciated. Like many 'manual' occupations, rigging can be perceived as simple. In fact it can be a hugely complex task in both practical and theoretical senses. Qualified engineers are an essential source of knowledge but require practical skills to realise their designs. Riggers are often able to 'imagineer' a solution to a problem and then approach engineers to confirm or calculate forces and reactions in order to select appropriate equipment and structures. Using engineers is often necessary because a rigger is not (nor likely to be) a qualified engineer. The law requires sufficient competence in designing lifting operations that will often be in the province of engineers, not riggers.

Much of a rigger's work is

impossible to record or describe. Often a job can be roughed out for commercial reasons or safety management, but the actual activity is unknown until the job is started. There is a skill in doing this, a kind of professional guesswork carried out in a defined timeframe, with the resources estimated as being necessary to hand, but the job is usually something that has never been done before and it is unlikely to be possible to mock up or trial many projects.

A typical example of this is

a recent project carried out by a well-known rigging company where (real) aircraft were lifted, manipulated into 'action positions' and secured to a particularly unhelpful building structure.

This involved some nifty rigging

to install the hoists used to lift the planes, specialist airframe engineering and the design and fabrication of very special 'flying points' from which to lift the aircraft as well as structural engineers working to ensure the building wasn't being overstressed.

On top of that, museum culture

is not rock and roll; the riggers may be considered aliens and the trust of a client to let riggers loose on valuable, if not irreplaceable, objects has to be earned. The bona fides of riggers are often only recognised when work on site starts. Again, this is because of the unwritten methods and the invisible nature of rigging work.

This is a common feature of all

rigging work when an entertainment rigger has to fit in with other trades outside the entertainment industry. It would be fascinating to learn if this interface existed in the past in other areas of rigging - did ship's riggers find it easy working with naval architects? Do overhead power transmission riggers get on with pylon designers? The symbiosis of engineer and rigger is an important relationship, and one that must be developed to ensure that productions are safely and efficiently rigged - whatever type of rigging is being used.