

A 'genius' new twist to sound, light show

Musicians can use CeeLite's product to make instruments dim, fade or flash.



STEVE TRAGER

The Roots now use LEC lighting for their 6-by-15-foot stage sign. A band member said the lights "give you the illusion that they are big signs, but they are really the size of paper."

Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, drummer-songwriter for the Roots, went to a Red Hot Chili Peppers concert at the Wachovia Center in December and saw his friend Chad Smith's sound-activated illuminated drums.

"I was amazed. I was also silently jealous," Thompson recalled in an interview. "I was like 'Yo, man, where did you get that drum set?'"

Smith, the drummer for the Los Angeles-based rock quartet, told him the company that developed them was in the hip-hop band's backyard. "So he introduced me to the guys. I was like, 'I have to have that now. Pronto,'" Thompson said.

Keith McPhee, the Roots' production manager, sent the Yamaha drum set to CeeLite's Blue Bell offices, where the hardware was removed. The wood shells were shipped to Taiwan, where the light panels were attached and wired.

Thompson said he got the drums, which are programmed to dim, fade or flash when hit, in time for the Grammy Awards in February. "I've done about 40 shows with them. I love the technology. It's absolutely genius, and it's been a hit with the audiences everywhere."

Thompson said the band liked the technology so much that the LEC lighting is used for the Roots' 6-by-15-foot stage sign.

"It's really great because back in the '70s you had to haul big-time letters with the band's name behind stage," Thompson said. "Now these lights give you the illusion that they are big signs, but they are really the size of paper." - **Linda Loyd**

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