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“This isn’t a standard performing arts space.” A Historic Circus Steps into the Future with Elation Lighting

CSD Group and Elation light the Peru Amateur Circus for a new era

Held each July in Peru, Indiana, the Peru Amateur Circus is one of the few remaining amateur circuses in the United States. Committed to preserving this beloved community tradition, the Circus Arena at Circus City Festival, Inc. (CCFI) decided it was time to move beyond its decades-old incandescent lighting system and turned to CSD Group for a state-of-the-art upgrade featuring Elation LED lighting and an Obsidian control system. Backed by years of trust in Elation’s products and support, CSD Group delivered a solution that has transformed the circus experience, leaving organizers blown away by the capabilities of the new lighting system.

The project was made possible through the generosity of Robert Cultice, the leadership of CCFI Board Member Bob Sucharski, the engineering expertise of CSD Group, and the dedication of a team of volunteers who donated weeks of their time to complete the installation.



Held annually in mid-July, the Circus City Festival features approximately 200 performers, ages 7 to 21, who take part in ten performances over eight days, continuing a regional circus tradition that dates back to the late 1800s. A large number of volunteers come together to support these talented young performers, some of whom have gone on to perform with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, Shrine Circuses, and other professional productions.

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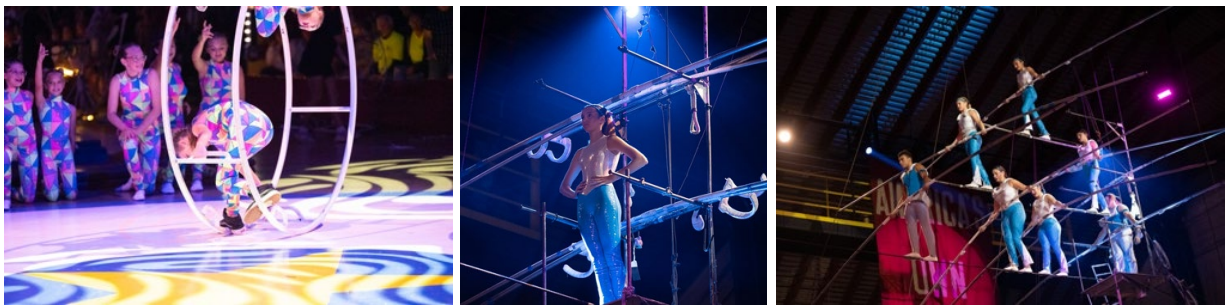
One of Elation's long-time integration partners, CSD Group, a national AVLA systems integration company based in nearby Fort Wayne, completed an audio upgrade for the venue in 2025 and was entrusted to design, install, commission, and train volunteers on a completely new theatrical lighting system. Project Manager at CSD was Jim Gall.

According to Dave Singer, Client Relationship Manager at CSD Group, the relationship with Peru Circus made the lighting upgrade a natural next step. "We earned the client's trust after completing their audio upgrade, so when they were ready to modernize their lighting, we recommended an all-Elation solution," said Singer, who went to Peru Circus shows last year to get a feel for how they work and what they needed.

"Their old system consisted of decades-old incandescent white light fixtures with gel frames, so there were limited options for color changing," he said. "The lighting was quite stagnant as gels weren't changed often. The new design gives them complete color flexibility, moving light capability, and the ability to highlight performers and accent their costumes across all three rings while creating a much more immersive experience."

Immersive Environment

Logan Decker, Lighting Designer at CSD Group, developed the new system design, which the Peru Amateur Circus team appreciated for its atmospheric feel and attention to detail. The design process began in [Capture](#) previsualization software, which Decker used to model the show in 3D. "We designed a full 360-degree lighting system that allows them to highlight any of the three performance rings at any time while creating a much more immersive environment for both performers and the audience," Decker stated.



Trussing surrounds the entire outer perimeter of the performance area, forming a large rectangular lighting grid approximately 120 feet long by 40 feet wide that spans the arena inside the bleachers. This configuration gives them the flexibility to position fixtures wherever needed and easily add more in the future if desired.

Designing for a Three-Ring Environment

Alongside the ringmaster, a cast of performers and full live orchestra, the main floor is divided into three separate rings. A key requirement was to spotlight the action in one ring while keeping the other two softly lit as they reset and prepare for the next act. Because activity can move rapidly between the three rings, flexibility was critical.



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Singer noted that designing for a circus environment required close collaboration with the client. “This isn’t a standard performing arts space,” he said. “We worked closely with the circus to determine fixture locations that delivered the best lighting while avoiding interference with performers. For example, we had to change some fixture locations because of the trapeze artists, who fly in and out with safety cables.”

Elation Lighting System

The new system features sixteen Elation [Fuze SFX](#) moving heads, eight [Fuze Wash 500](#) Fresnel fixtures, twelve [Paladin Brick](#) LED battens fitted with 60-degree lenses, two [Magma Prime](#) hazers, an Obsidian [NX1-16](#) lighting console running Onyx, and a Netron [EN12i](#) for DMX distribution. CSD worked with Elation’s manufacturer’s rep firm, Five Lakes Marketing, and representative Ed Cheeseman.

“The Fuze 500’s main priority is to provide a general wash in spotting performers, ringmasters, or equipment anywhere in the arena at any time,” Decker explained. “I chose them for their excellent color output, color accuracy, and full color capabilities, as well as the high CRI and wide zoom range.”



The Paladin Bricks, RGBW floodlights with IP65 protection, provide vibrant color onto the arena floor and into the audience seating areas. “Their high output and full-color capabilities really help create energy throughout the space,” Deckers says, “and the 60-degree lenses allow for ample coverage of the whole arena.”

For dynamic looks, CSD specified Fuze SFX fixtures, LED spot and effects moving heads capable of projecting tight beams to wide washes. “The Fuze SFX fixtures are used for their ability to create an energetic atmosphere through the use of gobos, zooming beams, and their movement capabilities,” Decker said.

The SFX’s gobo selection, CMY color mixing, color wheel, and dual prisms provide the flexibility to create a wide variety of dynamic looks throughout the performances, as well as project a logo within the space. “There are certain performers they want to highlight during their acts—from tightrope walkers and unicyclists to fire performers and trapeze artists—and the Fuze SFX is perfect for that,” Singer adds.



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To fully reveal the beam and gobo effects, the design incorporates two Magma Prime hazers, producing a thick, even atmosphere that enhances beam and gobo visibility and helps spread the color to every inch of the arena.

Obsidian's Intuitive NX1-16

Although the new system represents a dramatic technological leap, it also needed to remain approachable for an all-volunteer production crew with little professional lighting experience. Ease of use was especially important when it came to the lighting console.

"We needed something more powerful and robust than a traditional dimmer board but also something they could step into with the least amount of confusion," Decker explained. "The NX1-16 was chosen for its compact versatility and is ideal for the limited control space we had available. It's also powerful with plenty of universes for expansion. Over my eight years of using the Onyx platform, I have learned that it can be as simple or as advanced as you need it to be, depending on how you set up your views and faders."



Using Onyx, Decker created an intuitive programming environment tailored specifically for the circus. "I implemented a 2D layout of the arena right into their fixture layout, giving them an exact idea of which lights are where. The ability to change fader behavior allowed me to create simple on-and-off cue lists they could use during showtime. The motorized faders are always a huge plus as they can change banks during the show as needed and not lose control of anything active," he said, adding that the software has been initially set up to be simple, but it also gives them the flexibility to grow into more advanced programming over time." A touch screen was also added, giving them an easy-to-view visual overview.

Singer adds that CSD clients and end users really like the NX1-16 console for the functionality. "The circus came from an analog lighting console, so they were a bit intimidated at first, but it has proved to be intuitive, and they are very happy with it."

CSD also integrated a Netron EN12i to manage DMX distribution throughout the venue. "I've worked with Netron devices over the past few years and they've been user-friendly and extremely reliable," Decker said. "The integration with Onyx allowed me to configure routing right from the



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console, which is very important in this install as the EN12i is situated on the mezzanine opposite the control booth. It was very helpful for quick and easy routing changes during install and commissioning.”

Immediate Impact

Throughout commissioning and training, reactions from circus staff and volunteers confirmed the project’s impact. “People were walking in and out of the arena space and every reaction was nothing short of being blown away by the capabilities of the rig,” Decker recalled. “Some members of the board of trustees were there and were speechless over what we had accomplished within their budget.”

For CSD, the project also reinforced the company’s confidence in Elation’s complete ecosystem. “I tend to lean toward Elation in all of my designs and am very impressed with the fixture quality for price, the Onyx platform, and the Netron devices,” Decker stated. “Elation has earned my trust, and I will continue to use them in the future.”



A Community Effort

The lighting upgrade was as much a volunteer success story as it was a technology project. Sucharski spearheaded the project, coordinating the purchase of the new lighting system from CSD Group while working alongside a dedicated volunteer team that included Tim Bessignano, Joe Greene, Sam Myers, Bill Slonaker, and Jim Bradley. Together, the volunteers donated five weeks of their time and expertise to complete the extensive installation.

The project involved removing the arena’s existing lighting and wiring, installing more than 4,000 feet of new wiring, adding a new 200-amp three-phase electrical panel, and installing the new Elation lighting system. Through their countless volunteer hours, the team saved CCFI approximately \$23,000 in labor costs while delivering a safer, brighter, and more reliable lighting system that will enhance performances for years to come.

“Working with CSD Group has made the transition from old to new seamless and flawless,” said Bob Sucharski. “CCFI is grateful for the services they provide as well as their patience and



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expertise. CCFI is an unusual youth circus organization, and CSD Group took it all in stride and made the show even more spectacular with their products and services!”

CCFI also expressed its sincere appreciation to Robert Cultice for his generous donation and to Sucharski and the entire volunteer team for their exceptional dedication and service.

A New Chapter for a Historic Tradition

The installation was completed in March, prior to the start of practices, and made its performance debut during the Peru Amateur Circus’ annual summer festival July 10-18. The client is reportedly thrilled with the new lighting system and excited about the capabilities it provides in bringing a new level of energy to one of America’s most unique circus traditions. The finished system gives them tremendous flexibility, not only for the circus but also for other clients that use the space, like churches and special events, so the rig will get year-round use.

Photos: Rebecca Daniels Portraits (www.rdanielleportraits.com/, rdanielleportraits@gmail.com)

About Elation

At Elation, we collaborate with leading professionals in the lighting industry to help bring extraordinary experiences to life. As a designer and manufacturer of a wide range of high-performance entertainment lighting products, we’re proud to be a trusted partner to top lighting professionals and production/rental houses around the world. Our commitment to quality, innovation, and creative solutions has made us a go-to resource in the industry. We also offer an advanced line of lighting control products through Obsidian Control Systems, and a full range of dependable specialty effects called Magmatic. Elation serves clients worldwide through offices in Los Angeles, Mexico City, Canada, and the Netherlands. We invite you to take a closer look at elationlighting.com

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