Alicja and Dennis Phipps

Alicja Phipps has always been interested in electronics. As a child she wanted to be a television repair person. She now works with her husband, Dennis Phipps, in their company, Light & Sound Entertainment, which designs original content programming in a variety of areas—from rock concerts to the Olympics.

Light & Sound Entertainment got its name because Dennis believes strongly that the two are and should be linked. “It’s terrible when the music of a production does not match what you are seeing,” he says. “More and more theaters have lighting specialists come in and set up the theater with everything preset on a computerized lighting board. There will be a setting for ‘outdoor lighting’ and ‘nighttime’ or ‘sunset’. The problem with that is that every production will look the same, when in reality nighttime in Canada looks very different from nighttime in Florida. There are also different lighting considerations depending on your audience. A production in front of a live audience needs different lighting than one being recorded on video. For instance, the human eye picks up shadows a lot better than a camera will. If a production is intended for both a live audience and video, lighting needs to be arranged accordingly.”

Dennis continues, “The sound of a production is only as good as its setup, and nothing can replace the actual setting. The Red Rocks Theater in Colorado is terrific, for example, because stone has a very high reverberation rate, which is great for guitars. A huge wooden room like Carnegie Hall also provides a unique sound. However, these spaces and materials are not readily available.” The hardest projects, Dennis says, are those in which you cannot control the elements. “Sound elements include the size and shape of the space, reverberation, feedback, and temperature.”

“New media has its own set of challenges,” explains Alicja who oversees the conversion of live events into various other formats, such as CD-ROMs, virtual reality, and Web sites. “We have to think about how much information (sound and image) we will be able to fit on a disc or on to a Web page and how long it will take to load. If it takes too long, no one will ever see or hear what we’ve done.”

“We enjoy the creative process of every production,” claim Alicja and Dennis. “Each one is a unique challenge.”