

# mobile *monthly* PRODUCTION



## CIRQUE DU SOLEIL® & MICHAEL JACKSON *The Immortal World Tour*

**Robert Roth**

"Oh Yeah? Watch Me!"

>> Q&A Part ONE

**ISP Technologies**

"Winning Friends and  
Influencing Mix Engineers"

**Martin MLA**

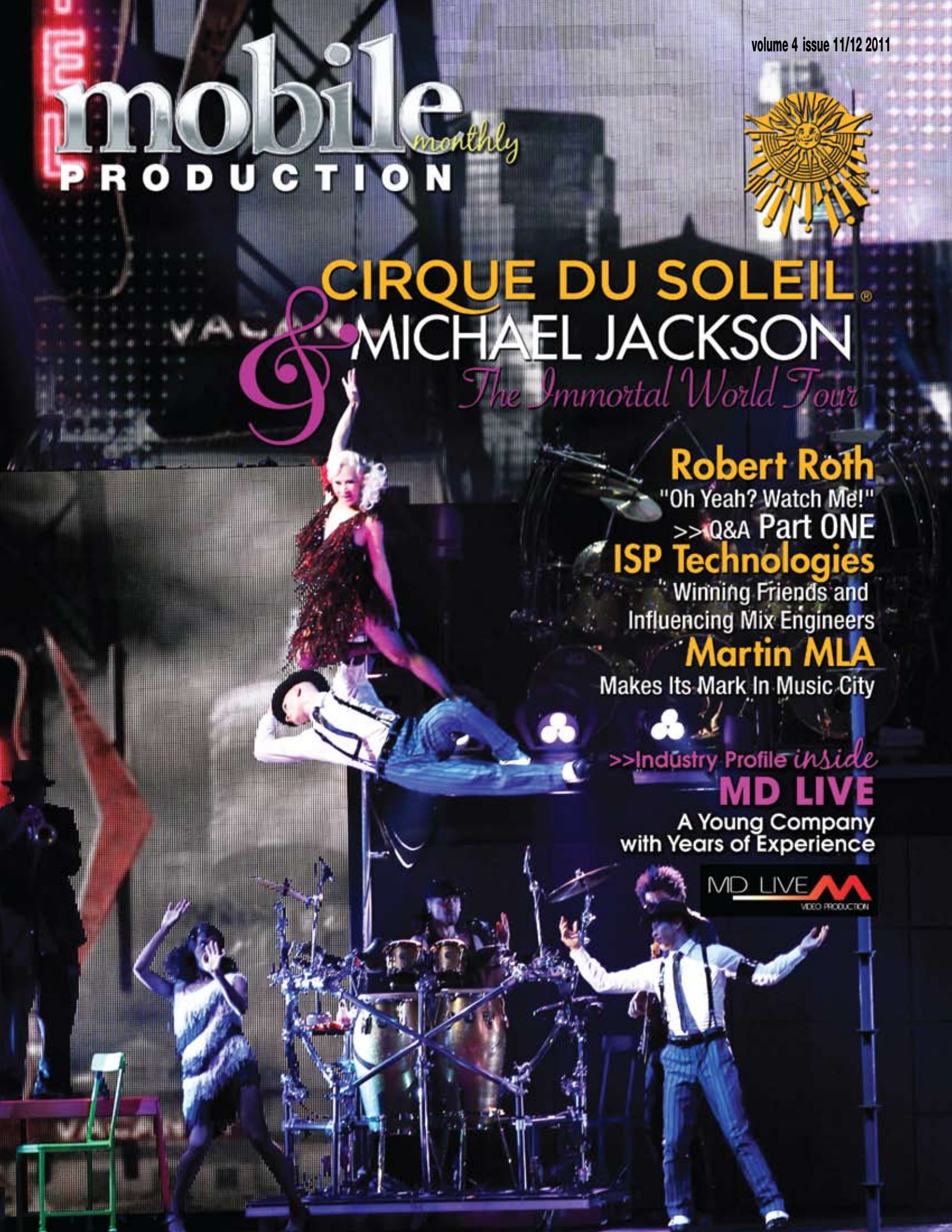
Makes Its Mark In Music City

>> Industry Profile *inside*

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*Paul Mitchell*





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## FROM THE *Publisher*



In this issue of *mobile Production monthly*, we take a look at Cirque du Soleil's latest masterpiece, Michael Jackson The Immortal Tour. Our Chief Writer Michael Beck had the pleasure of seeing this thing in action, and I'm sure you will find his report an enjoyable read.

Also this month we have 2 great audio pieces by Bill Evans. He made the trek to Nashville to checkout Martin Audio's MLA system as it was set up in the Bridgestone Arena for demo sessions. Bill also takes us to Michigan and Chene Park to talk with ISP Technologies.

Other stories we have this month include Mike Drew's MD Live Video Production and his work on the recently completed Rascal Flatts tour, a piece on Production Storage Group, and an interesting Q & A with concert lighting guru Robert Roth.

We hope you enjoy Tour Link 2012. We are here to have a good time, network, and above all, learn from each other so that we can all be a part of improving this already fascinating world of concert touring. Have a great 2012.

*Larry Smith*



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## PRODUCTION STORAGE GROUP Sets, Storage, Space, Solutions, Simple!

**T**he tour is ending; there are several trucks filled with scenery and gear which need a home until the next run waiting on the loading dock. You want it all cared for by professionals who know touring, the security intricacies and the demanding schedules touring professionals keep. You want the move to be simple and easy, commercial storage closes too early, the staging houses are filled with new construction. Enter **Manny Parodi and Production Storage Group** to the rescue stage right.



Albert Vasquez (left) Manny Parodi (right) from Production Storage Group



Jeremy Schilling (left) Gus Urbina (right) from Road Radios

BY TODD "TK" KRAMER

In August 2001, Manny Parodi founded and opened Production Storage Group, a company with a vision dedicated to serve the touring industry in a niche that needed to be filled.

After years of touring as a carpenter, Jumbo Tron tech, projectionist and stage manager Parodi, while preparing to get married, was looking to get off the road and yet stay in the business he loved. Opening doors on August 1, 2001 in the city of Commerce with a mere 40,000 square feet Production Storage Group has grown to operating three warehouses in greater Los Angeles from LAX to the San Fernando Valley with a facility in Van Nuys and Rancho Dominguez with over 170,000 square feet of space today. Parodi is currently preparing to open warehouse number four and will have over 200,000 square feet of storage space after January 2012.

Beginning his career in the industry with Mike Hirsh and LA Stage Call in the mid 1980's as a stagehand Parodi took in all the knowledge he could mastering many stage craft disciplines. "I wore as many hats as I could. Mike was my mentor I learned a lot from him, working as everything in every department. Parodi worked his way up the ranks absorbing knowledge every step of the way. I remember my first gig well; it was coiling four aught feeder cable for a Los Angeles County Sheriff's *sane* event. I was so new to the business I wore a white t-shirt, that was black by the end of the 16 hour day from coiling cable."

Building an impressive resume on the road touring with Gloria Estefan, Michael Jackson and Iron Maiden to name a few, Parodi quickly advanced within the industry. "I was good at getting gigs on the road but it was time after many years to move on and settle down and

get off the road. While on tour with Christina Aguilera, a light bulb went off and the idea for Production Storage Group hit me. No one was providing storage services catering to our industry at the time. Everyone was storing at staging houses or public facilities."

Maintaining Aguilera who was Production Storage's first client, from her *Genie In A Bottle* tour to today, Parodi is proud to have a high rate of client retention. "Most of our clients stay with us once they are here. We not only provide storage space but pay the greatest attention to client security and service. Production Storage facilities are available 24/7 by appointment only limiting access and traffic at all three warehouses. The clients generally provide their own labor which helps keep expenses down and adds to security efforts." Production Storage Group and Parodi believe in making the transfer of gear from truck to storage easy. "All of our warehouses have dock level loading; ramping is such a waste of labor, time and energy. Our facilities all have forklifts and dollies available to make the guys jobs easier. Labor usually comes from the client which helps keep their costs down."

"Scaling down crew helps me keep costs to the client down. We charge flat rates, with just two other employees. I'm pretty much the face of the company," adds Parodi.

"I love it when the guys come in, and with all the gear here from current and past tours, it's kind of like a roadie museum. I even have a mock elephant from Cher's Farewell Tour. How an elephant got on the tour bus I'll never know," says Parodi.

"Our business is pretty much word of mouth, so in return I like to refer good people and good companies when the



need arises. We have a few support companies under our roofs as well, Road Radios, Road Case Rentals and Mates Cartage to name a few. We refer a lot of people to gigs, it comes around full circle when you help others then everything works out great.”

Production Storage Group is growing says Parodi, “We’ve just started a division of wardrobe archive storage utilizing our climate controlled offices with proper storage and cataloging. We’re providing a database and easy access method to wardrobe storage that has worked out pretty smoothly.”

Steadily growing from a 40,000 square foot government lease to its current 170,000 since 2001 to its anticipated 200,000 in 2012 Production Storage Group is a company on the move.

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## Robert Roth "Oh Yeah? Watch Me!"



**When we think about the people who have brought innovation to this industry since the beginning, the short list has to include you. How and when did it occur to you that this was the direction you wanted to take?**

Well it goes back a really long way. I was a teenager living in Athens, Georgia. Having been born a New Yorker and transplanted to Athens by way of Miami was a real culture shock. There are good sides and bad sides with those culture shocks. One of the good things for me was that Athens had a really vibrant music scene being the college town that it is. I was never really a sports guy so I started going to see free shows at the University Union. A couple of times I saw what would be euphemistically called in this day and age a psychedelic light show.

**What time period was this?**

1967 or so. This was in the era of oil and water – in fact it was actually oil and glycerin once you really got into it – and I came home and told my dad the next day, "I could do that. I could do better than that". He says, "Well why don't you?" I agreed. "Why don't I?" So I went to the Jr. High principle

**"You love him or you hate him."** There are few people in our industry about whom that statement is less applicable than Robert Roth. Over the 40 years of his career many names have been used to describe him. However, hovering just over the top of all of them is one name that cannot be denied... Genius.

and borrowed some projectors from him and set myself up as the "Aurora Light Show".

**Okay. How did that work?**

The first night I did something they passed the hat and my mom and I sat up and counted it. I think they collected something like \$11.00 in change but the hook was set. And over the course of the next few years this became my big hobby other than the scouts – I'm an Eagle Scout, which is some of the best management training I've ever had in my life – this was my pass time. It was attached to music, which made it all the more important because like so many people in this business I also played music, I was a drummer.

**How did the hobby turn into "R. A. Roth"?**

Pretty soon it became clear to me that for every ten drummers there was one lighting designer and lighting was pretty interesting to me. So in my senior year of high school my father was transferred to Atlanta, which is when we moved to Tucker in suburban Atlanta.

**What did your father do that he moved around so often?**

He worked for Environmental Protection Agency.

**So as you were looking down the barrel of "what will I do after high school?" Did you have a plan?**

For some reason I had it in my mind that I was going to go to Georgia Tech and major in electrical engineering.

**That wouldn't have been a bad fit.**

Yeah but I would have wound up in architecture or industrial design or something like

that.

**Fair enough.**

As fate would have it, I was off to buy some JBL studio monitors for my stereo system that I'd scrimped and saved up to buy. When I walked into the place where I had to order them – back then this was special order item – there lying in a pile on the floor were 15 six inch quartz fresnels, a half dozen quartz lekos, a Scrimmer SCR dimmer pack and a little one scene board. I looked at the guy and asked, "How much for all that stuff over there?" Lo and behold it was roughly the same amount as I had in my pocket to buy the studio monitors. So I drove home in the family station wagon with this pile of gear and that's how it really all got started.

**When was this?**

We're up to 1972.

**Up to this point you'd just been doing the oil projection stuff right? Had you done anything like proper stage lighting yet?**

No. So I thought, "If I'm going to do this I'm going to have to figure out *how* to do it." The only way to test it out and understand it was to go to work for a bar band and start honing my chops and that's what I did.

**How did you find work?**

There were a couple booking agencies here in Atlanta and I knew some of the top guys in some of these agencies. So I went to them and asked which bands had the money to put on a lighting system. I hooked up with a faux English hard rock band from Atlanta. I toured all over the East and Midwest with those guys. Then in March of 1975 we got an opportunity to go out to L. A. and be a part of a project with some of the guys from Three Dog Night and Bobby Kimball who

later became the lead singer for Toto and some other people. So with 48 hours notice the sound guy and I loaded up the truck and drove out to California.

**mPm:** Just like that. You just up and split for the coast.

Yeah, that's how it happened.

**It's amazing no one ever wrote a song about that sort of thing.**

Yeah well after several months of working the dream, the time came to exit California. So we came back to Atlanta. The triumphant homecoming show of this band was triumphant in every respect except that there was no audience, but there was one guy who came out to see us named John Nash. John had a sound company called ILF, which stood for Intergalactic Lost & Found.

**Oookay**

Yeah I know. We could ask Nick Jackson what LSD meant. Light and Sound Design, that's right. In any case John was in the audience that night and he took me aside during one of the band breaks and explained that production is starting to become an integral part of the concert experience. He went on to tell me that lighting is something that he was being asked to package with sound and he suggested that I start up a lighting company. Backtracking just a bit, when I came back from California I had one of those pivotal conversations with my dad wherein it was discussed that this just wasn't really working out and maybe I should consider going to college or starting my own business. The money they'd saved for college was still there. And on that rainy night in early December of 1975 at that bar gig when I heard John Nash's words it all clicked with my conversation with the dad and I said, "That's it. I'm going to start my own lighting company." In the December of 1975 in the basement of my parent's house I started what would become R. A. Roth, Inc.

**What kind of gear did you have?**

I had a few thousand dollars that I'd saved and my father staked me the rest of the money I needed and I got a few Vermette lifts because I didn't want to go with air lifts. You have to remember at that time truss systems weren't all that common. It was ground supported towers with a dozen lights on them. And of course there were the famous square par cans that I actually started building in my hotel room with that heavy metal band.

**Why square? I always wondered about that?**

There were actually a couple reasons for that. One of the first touring rigs I ever saw was Michael Tait's system with Yes. He had four monstrous sized boxes that were numbered one through four. Because there weren't commercial par fixtures in England at the time he built a 4x4 array of boxes on yokes. So each box had its own yoke and it all had a master yoke and he had four hand lines to the corners and he would focus the thing by way of those lines. Each box had four lamps in them because in England they weren't producing par bulbs so he had to use four of them and wire them in series to make it work. The other thing that influenced the shape of those square pars was Pink Floyd. They came through Atlanta on the *Dark Side of the Moon* tour and I was sort of an unpaid stagehand and get this, they only had one truck. Can you imagine Pink Floyd in just one truck? Anyway, that stuff came in and it was individual rectangular boxes with par bulbs in them. So that's where the shape of my lights came from. I was taking my influence from two of the seminal rock bands of the day. I simply did what any young guy would do at that point, I copy-catted that stuff.

**When I was running your rigging department I was working a project that called for a very long cable run and we didn't want to have connectors along the way. So we were looking for cable that had a line of strain relief running through it. You walked by the conversation and asked what was going on. When we told you, there was no discernible pause before you directed us to contact a mining company and find out where they get their cable because they run single lines down into mines and need strain relief on the runs. We just blinked at each other and asked you how you had that information sitting on the top of your head like that and you said, "At the time of life when you guys were partying and chasing girls around I was reading catalogues." Is that really true?**

I can see myself saying that. (winking) I should have been chasing the girls.

**While I had my difference with some of your ways, that was the moment I started to have a good deal of respect for your intellectual capacity and resourcefulness.**

I'd forgotten that until you just brought it up. But I can definitely believe it because in trying to build a lighting company back then we didn't have an industry of James Thomas Engineering's or Tomcat's or ETC's. The continued on 38



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# ISP TECHNOLOGIES:

## Winning Friends and Influencing Mix Engineers

Considering they are working in a field where technology changes the tools of the trade all the time, audio pros can be a pretty conservative and hidebound bunch. Or maybe it is just that we have an aversion to updating riders. Whatever. But the bottom line is that there are an awful lot of “veteran” acts touring with riders that call for the same gear that was around the last time the act had a hit. Not that it’s bad stuff, but there has been an awful lot of new stuff released in the past few decades and a lot of it is miles better than the old stuff.



BY BILL EVANS

The issue is getting engineers and production managers to hear it and trust it and list it on the rider. This is especially an issue for smaller companies that don’t have huge marketing budgets or the ability to throw around a ton of free gear just to get it out there.

For such a company, the best bet is often to develop a relationship with a regional venue or production company. A system installed in an Indian casino or a municipal venue can go further for a smaller company than any tour ever could because over the course of a season, that regional venue will see a couple of dozen bands, most with their own engineer and there is no better way to get lots of people making decisions about what gear they will and will not use in front of your stuff.

Such is the case for Michigan-based ISP Technologies and Chene Park, a six thousand-seat amphitheater located at the banks of the Detroit River in downtown Detroit. That venue recently wrapped up a full season of concerts that

featured a complete loudspeaker system from Waterford, MI based loudspeaker company. The artist line up was heavy on R&B, Jazz, and Hip Hop and featured appearances by a diverse group including Lauryn Hill, Mos Def, Erykah Badu, the O’Jays and others.

The system consisted of 20 HDL 4212 Line Arrays, 4 HDL 4210 Line Arrays, 18 XMAX 212 subwoofers and a 14 piece ProWedge 212 monitor system. The 4212s were hung ten per side with 2 4210s per side added as downfill. All of the subs were ground stacked. Grand Rapids, MI based Stage Works oversaw the installation and operational aspects of the rig. Acting as both Chene Park’s system engineer and Stage Works head audio engineer, Johnny Winkler played a key role in pushing through the ISP rig to visiting sound mixers. “The ISP boxes are not familiar to a lot of FOH mixers but nobody can argue with the results. Once they have mixed on it, 9 out of 10 guys have been absolutely blown away.”

There were several challenges to the Chene Park concert series—along with the “captured” seating, there was a bob-

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bing and boisterous group of fans who anchored their boats in the river and listened to the performances. Also adding to the challenge is the Chene’s urban setting which required the sound to be contained while still providing the needed punch and low end that the performers required. This was taken into consideration when determining the system design. ISP’s Jon Waller worked closely with Winkler using a proprietary in-house prediction system to best determine array configurations.

Buck Waller, president of ISP Technologies, commented, “We are a Michigan based company and love to work with local large scale events in the state. That being said, we knew that some great FOH engineers from all over the country would use this rig and they would insist on a high level of performance regardless of the local connection. We received nothing but praise from them this season.” 🌟







## MARTIN MLA

Makes Its Mark In Music City BY BILL EVANS

It has been about a year and a half since Martin Audio introduced the MLA system in the U.S. When it was kind of sort of launched at the InfoComm show in Las Vegas in June of 2010, it made quite a splash with a combo of easy rigging, consistent and controllable coverage and more DSP horsepower per cabinet than NASA used to put people on the Moon.

In case you missed the hoopla, MLA is what Martin calls a “multi-cellular array”. The idea is to treat each driver in each box as a separate source and to use massive computer processing cycles to address and process the output of each driver in order to get in and really tweak and control coverage patterns.

We have all heard claims of amazing control over coverage, but the stories told about limiting where sound could go on some outdoor festivals in Europe got a lot of attention. The fact that the claims were being made by one of the smartest guys in the audio biz who is also on the short “generally not full of crap” list got even more attention.

Martyn “Ferrit” Rowe was - along with Jeffery Cox - one of the driving forces behind the original adoption of the L-Acoustic V-Dosc system and he has earned a high degree of respect. When he claimed enough of a drop off in level in the space of about three feet to make an SPL meter that had been reading 96 to drop enough that the meter would not read it seemed to violate certain principles held dear and even sacred by sound guys. You know, things like the Inverse Square Law.

They proved the point last summer by getting a bunch of media types out to a Zac Brown show in Chicago where we were able to see MLA being set up and tuned and driven for a show. It was impressive.

But the brainiacs at Martin do not just know how to do DSP for rocket-science audio. They are savvy enough to know that a system like MLA which is so different from the dominant line array paradigm - especially one with the kind of price tag associated with this system - needs to get in front of real working audio pros. And not in some ballroom at a trade show. Engineers want a place to take a full-size concert system and pound the hell out of it before they will think about adding a new line item to the rider.

### Banging At Bridgestone

With all that in mind, the three U.S. companies that have invested in full MLA rigs - On Stage Audio (OSA) out of Florida and Las Vegas, Delicate out of California and Special Event Systems (SES) out of South Carolina - have worked with Martin’s U.S. marketing force to arrange a series of demo sessions where engineers can get their hands on MLA and actually drive it.

After sessions in L.A. and Las Vegas earlier this year, Nashville was next on the list. Popped down right in between the Country Music Hall of Fame and the historic Ryman Auditorium, the Bridgestone Arena is home to both the local hockey team and plenty of national tours. Perfect place to hang a full size rig and the perfect city in which to invite a bunch of audio types to come down in the middle of the week to play with it.

OSA’s Mario Peoples and Jim Risgin were on hand along with some folks

from Delicate and SSE. Martin’s North America marketing guy Rob Hofkamp was there and Jason Baird “Research & Development Director” - one of the propellor-heads from the UK who really understand how MLA does its magic - walked a couple of dozen engineers through a 30 minute presentation on what MLA does and how it does. The session took place a couple of times a day over three days.

### Politics of Dancing

The biz being what the biz has become, not everyone was keen on being seen checking out a new system so we will leave names out, but a range of mixers and system techs associated with acts covering the musical spectrum from trad country to classic rock disguised as country to pop to modern rock to metal all showed up to hear for themselves if MLA could really do what Martin claims. And everyone we talked to walked away pretty impressed with the system.

During the public sessions, groups of audio types walked the room checking coverage and searching for seams. We call it the “sound guy two-step”. It’s a dance of sorts where grizzled road dogs take three steps forward and two steps back. Then two steps to the left and back to center, two steps to the right and back to center. All of this happens with their heads down as they listen intently for any audible “glitches” in the coverage.

And they were not finding any. Some of the brave (and more in shape) souls trekked to the top row of the arena to hear if the MLA was really able to keep audio off the “back wall of death” found in arenas all over the U.S. Others just kept walking back and forth through the six-foot deep space between where the front edge of the deck would be and where the

coverage really kicked in. It was pretty fun watching the looks on their faces as the level from the PA on the area that would be the stage dropped roughly 20 dB. It dropped to the point that the sound source appeared to be the reflections off the back end of the empty arena and not the speaker array hanging over head until you wiled into the coverage zone. You could literally hear the perceived source move in the space of two or three steps.

Hofkamp says that the current plan is to do at least four of these sessions in 2012 in order to spread the word. At least two A-List mix engineers brought in Pro Tools sessions from shows with their clients and mixed on the system as though they were prepping the room for a show. One brought his system engineer with him and they REALLY put it through its paces even insisting that they be able to bypass the “house” eq setting and start at a zero point in terms of system output and response and build the sound from the ground up. When we called it a day after a couple of hours with one duo we figured they were about done. A phone call later that evening told us otherwise. The pair had spent nearly five hours throwing everything they could think of at MLA and reportedly came away willing to add it to a very short rider list.

This is the kind of demo that makes sense. Not that it was perfect. It was cold (remember, it’s a hockey arena and there is ice under that wooden floor), too dark and there was nothing to eat or drink unless you brought your own. An actual deck and a band would have been nice too instead of canned tracks and Pro Tools sessions that were only heard by a few people in the private sessions. (We would tell you who, but then, we’d have to kill you...)

But all in all, a very worthwhile way to spend a few hours midweek. When the MLA “Touch Me, Drive Me” tour hits your town, you should really make the time to check it out. ●

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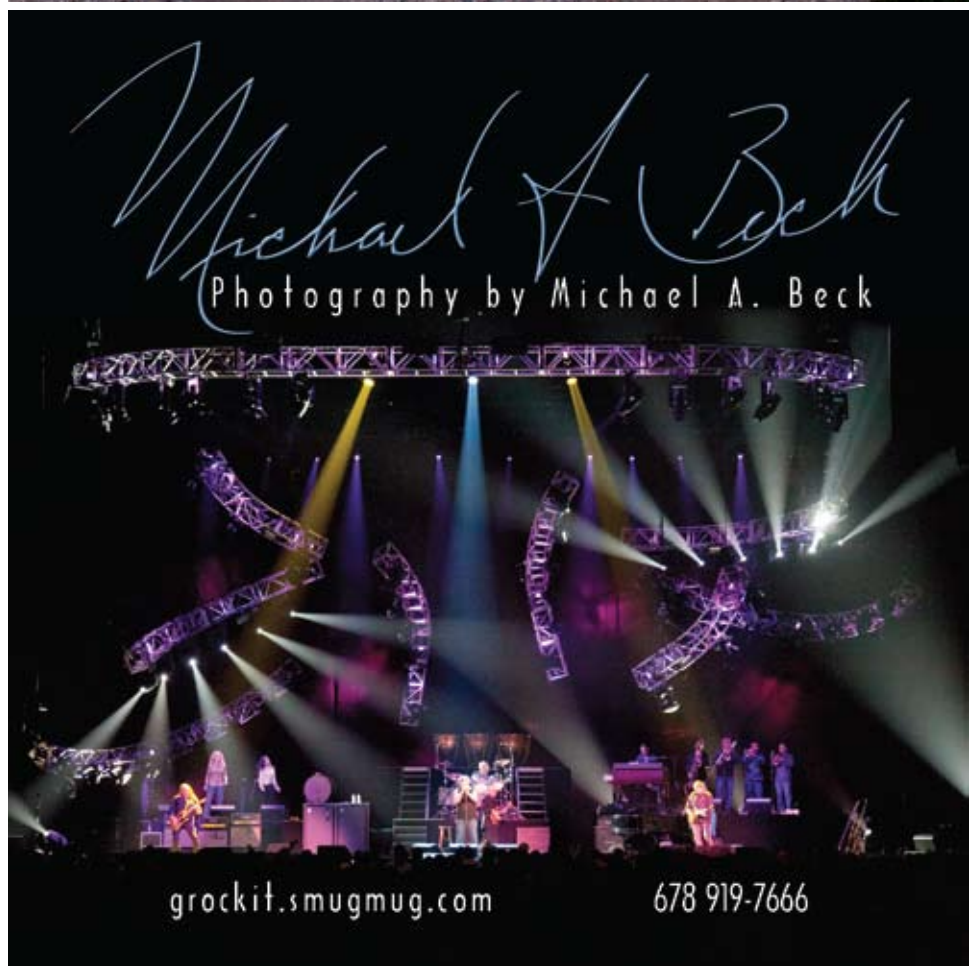


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## MD LIVE VIDEO

### A Young Company with Years of Experience

BY MIKE WHARTON

**M**D Live Video is a young company, rapidly establishing its name on the resurging Nashville scene. Created by Michael R. Drew in 2010, it was born out of a desire to meet the needs of its current tour Rascal Flatts, and the expanding roster of clients as a result of that exposure.

Drew's five-year association with the Flatts touring organization began as a camera-man working under touring Video Director Keith Lavoie. "Other than my father, Keith has been one of my main mentor's," says Drew.

Drew first stepped onto a riser behind the handles of a long lens camera at the age of fifteen. His father, Mike Drew, a Production Manager since the early 90s, hired him to fill in on a Common World Productions event.

Originally from Minneapolis, Drew relocated to Nashville to attend Belmont College to pursue a degree in political science. "Really, though... it was to check out and get

Mike Drew & company can be found on the web at: [MDLiveVideo.com](http://MDLiveVideo.com)

involved in the Nashville scene," he admits. Production work wasn't immediately forthcoming which led to a brief stint working at Pepsi sports marketing, before landing some freelance camera and LED work.

Quickly garnering a good reputation, this led to other freelance work with Screenworks, MooTV, CT and I-MAG.

In 2008, Flatts video director Lavoie moved on to other projects and Production Manager Kendall Carter tapped Drew to fill that position. Having worked from the "ground up" it was a well-deserved opportunity. With it came many more. Drew spent part of 2010 directing Taylor Swift's "Fearless" Tour while Flatts were on a break.

"It just got to the point around early 2010 where so many different ventures and offers were opening that I decided it was time to go for it," says Drew, in regard to creating his company at that time. It had a few drawbacks. He was basically a one man show in the beginning; booking crew, transportation, handling payroll, acquiring gear, as well as fulfilling his main duties as sole sales exec. Drew notes too that, "Suddenly you go from being everyone's best friend to being a competitor."

While the bidding process was still part and parcel to the development of last year's tour for Rascal Flatts, MD Live was able to deliver the unique product designer Bruce Rodgers requested; a 9mm white video tile. The band wanted a white video wall. Rodgers incorporated this concept into the entire set, as "he is always very aggressive with his video design," states Drew.

"It is a very heavy LED tour. Everything is white. There are 404 video surfaces, some of which are the upstage video wall, which has a set of three doorways the band literally walks through to enter and exit, and all the band risers have tiles for projection too," continues Drew.

Discussions for the current tour began in April of 2010, with rehearsals starting in June 2011; culminating in the first shows on June 16.

Drew attributes the success of MD Live to the fact that his crew members consist of freelancers he grew up in the business with. "They're all young and hungry to see this succeed as much as I do."

The crew is filled out by LED Techs/ Camera Operators David Bergfeld, Evan Smith, Patrick Eaton and Eric Wallace.

"They're a great team of guys eager to show up each day, which is evident in the camaraderie on the tour," says Drew going on to say, "I can't see myself doing anything else. I still get that rush each night just before show time when I sit down at my console."

"A lot of the up and coming bands are looking for one stop shopping," says Drew; "MD Live wants to fill that need."

As the company plans for the future, MD Live has recently moved into a larger programming and prep facility in Nashville. An editing suite will be added with an eye towards developing content as well. 🌟



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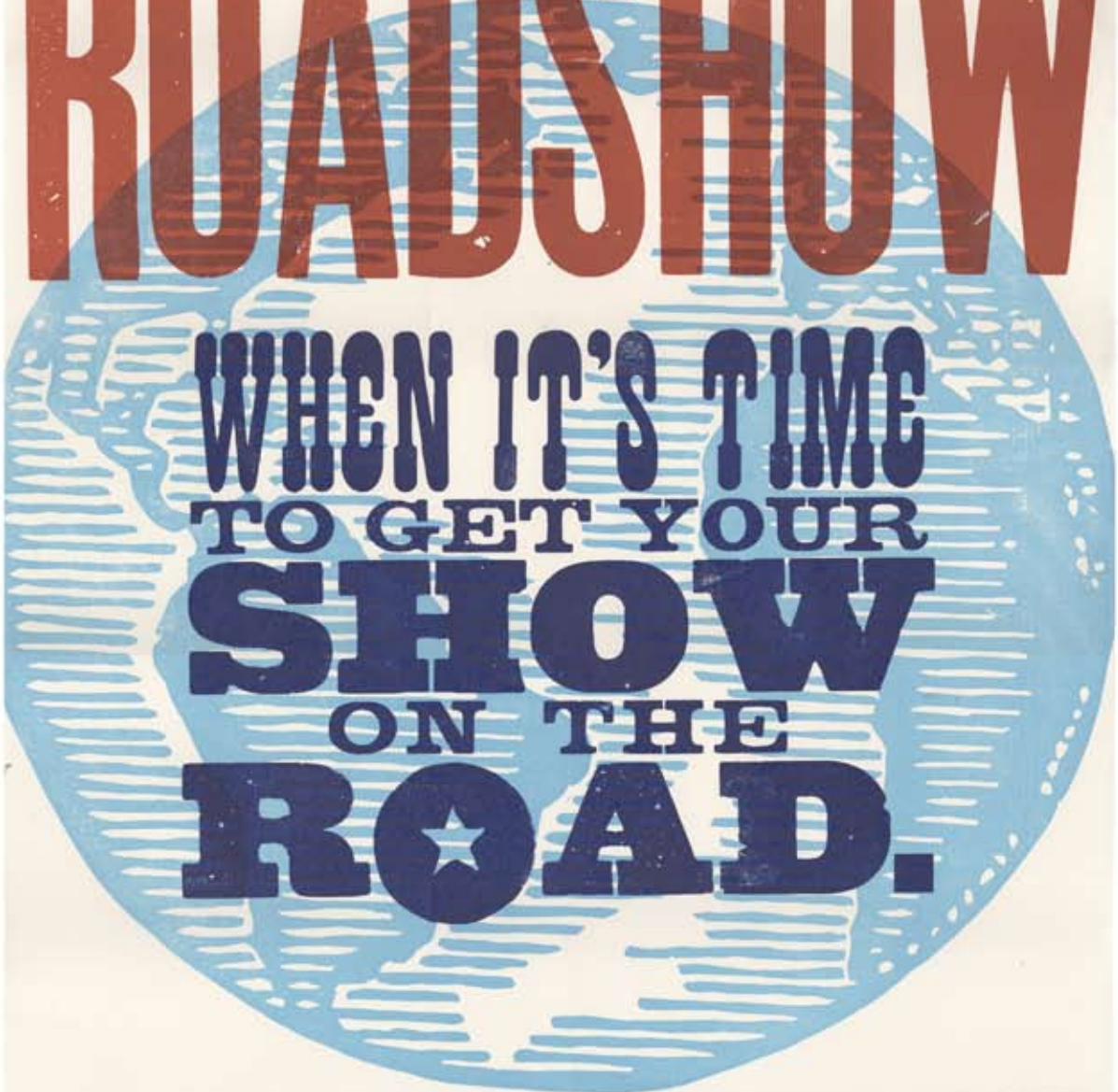
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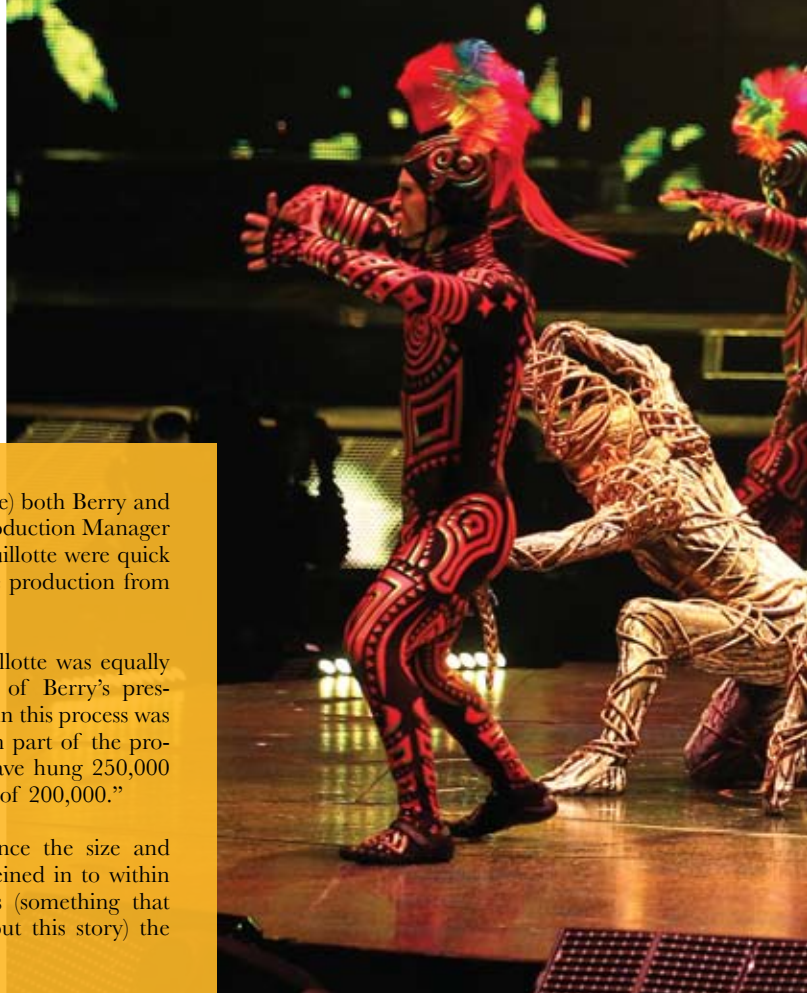
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BY MICHAEL A. BECK

### CIRQUE DU SOLEIL'S MICHAEL JACKSON THE IMMORTAL

WORLD TOUR WAS THE MOST AMBITIOUS ARENA TOUR TO GO OUT IN 2011 AND ARGUABLY ONE OF THE MOST AGGRESSIVE DESIGNS TO EVER TOUR ARENAS. IN THE WORLD OF CIRQUE DU SOLEIL SHOWS ARE DESIGNED BY THE CREATIVE DIVISION OF THE ORGANIZATION, WHICH THEN MUST BE TRANSLATED INTO ENGINEERING TERMS AND PASSED ON TO THE TOUR'S VENDERS FOR ASSEMBLY AND MANUFACTURING. THE PERSON WHO CARRIES OUT THIS TRANSLATION IS TECHNICAL PRODUCTION DIRECTOR STEPHANE LEMAY. WHEN LEMAY WAS FINISHED THE TOUR WAS PRESENTED WITH A 44 TRUCK PRODUCTION WEIGHING IN AT JUST SLIGHTLY OVER 200,000 POUNDS. BY THE END OF PRODUCTION REHEARSALS IT FINALLY HIT THE ROAD AT A TRIMMED DOWN 123,000 POUNDS STATIC (129K DYNAMIC) TRAVELING IN 34 TRUCKS.



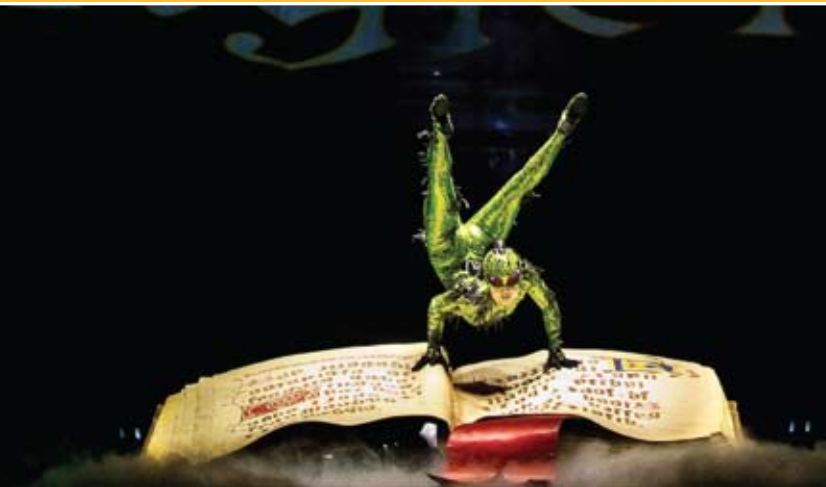
However, the fact that the show lost almost half its body weight and 10 truck sizes should not be taken to imply that the show lost its complicated nature. There is very little about this show that isn't challenging. At the top of the list of challenges is the fact that every arena tour Cirque had taken out prior to this one had been a modification of its tent shows. The Michael Jackson production was the first time Cirque has ever designed an arena tour independently of any other project.

In light of this new approach the very wise decision was made early on in the project to bring Jake Berry into the game as a consultant via his new company Jake Berry Productions. While this had a grounding affect on the pro-

duction (as one can imagine) both Berry and Cirque du Soleil Senior Production Manager for Arena Shows Pierre Guillotte were quick to say that this is a Cirque production from top to bottom.

That notwithstanding, Guillotte was equally quick to admit the value of Berry's presence. "Jake's collaboration in this process was essential. If he hadn't been part of the process we probably would have hung 250,000 or 260,000 pounds instead of 200,000."

As one might imagine, once the size and weight of this show was reined in to within more practical parameters (something that will be discussed throughout this story) the





CIRQUE DU SOLEIL  
**MICHAEL JACKSON**  
*The Immortal World Tour*



primary complication of this production was the one thing that separates it from rock shows of the same size, of which there have been very few in history. That difference is the nature of the activity that takes place on the stage.

Because the performers in this show require every square foot of stage area, the layout of set and scenery is not just critical in terms of the blocking of the show, but also in terms of potential injury and even death. Therefore, the opening of the show takes place with nothing on the main stage. In its opening condition the stage consists of four basic areas: main stage, barbeque deck, B stage and the ramp connecting the main stage with the B stage.

Because the show plays in an end-on configuration it is limited in size as is any concert stage, which in this case is 72' wide. But this show has a several large set pieces and props. The show also has a live – and incredibly good – band that plays behind the recordings of Michael Jackson's voice. The band plays on a riser that is 14' high and 54' wide affectionately known as the "barbeque deck". In addition to serving the obvious purpose of getting the band up off the main stage it also functions as a storage area for many of the props used in the show as well as backline stations.

The front of the barbeque deck is faced out with 15mm Korean made Everbrighten BR15 LED product. The video product doesn't just create a wall. At certain parts of the show the face of the riser expands out onto the main stage thus becoming a step unit to be used by the performers during the show. However, the step units don't extend all the way to the offstage ends of the deck. Because there has to be room for access/egress of the aforementioned props to the stage, the outside 9 feet of the face is oriented to be doors that are hinged in the middle that collapse and expand in order to open and close much the same way as an air wall in a hotel ballroom. The video product in the doors is the same as the step faces.

A first glance the stage area downstage of the barbeque deck looks completely empty. But as is usually the case with Cirque, looks are deceiving. In the center of the stage a 20 foot square section of deck that is faced with 12mm Pix2o LED product and covered with Lexand and hinged along the downstage end. During the opening of the show this portion of the stage is hydraulically tilted up into a vertical position thus acting as a front facing video wall. Because the LED product is the same as the three massive vertical LED walls that fly upstage of the barbeque deck the two presentations work very well when playing together. The upstage walls are spool systems, which means they deploy off of a roller in much

the manner marley rolls out onto a stage. The display consists of six roller carts that each contains a 10' x 21' roll.

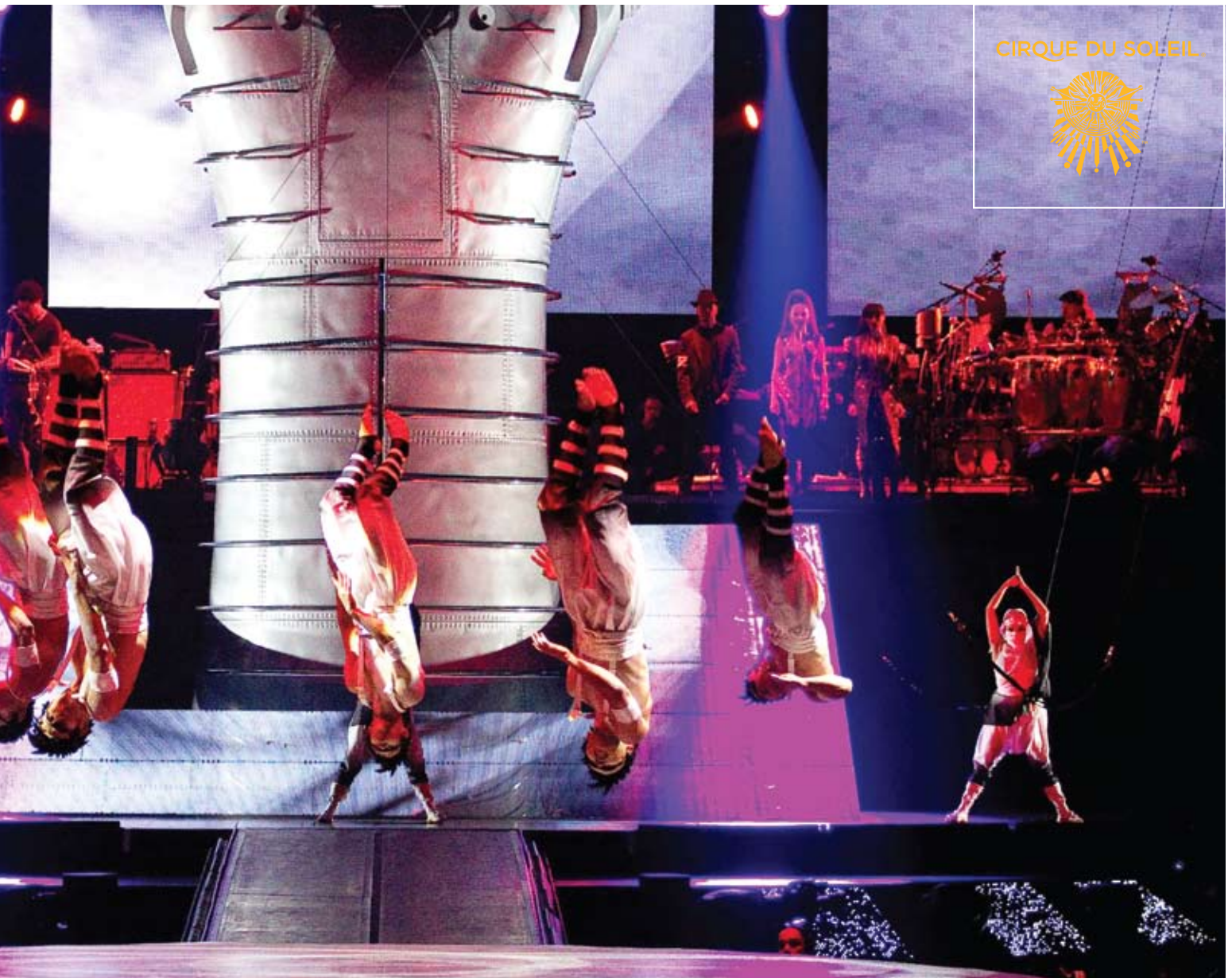
Going into rehearsals the most prominent feature of the show was a massive tree positioned in the middle of the stage. The tree actually existed in three primary parts: the canopy and the two halves of the trunk. We'll get into that somewhat odd description of the trunk in a moment. But for now we'll focus on the canopy. It weighed 17,000 pounds and took up four trucks. Because of the issues of weight and truck space that were constantly tugging at everyone's sleeve and certain structural concerns that were never truly resolved, the canopy of the tree was cut from the production during rehearsal.

However, the trunk was another story all together. It exists in two vertical halves. When it is split open the flat section of each side is faced with 12mm Pix2o LED screen. Due to space limitations this allows design-



ers to hide the trunk halves in plain sight on stage by simply turning the video face out toward the audience. When the trunk comes into play as a single entity it moves out to the center of the stage and locks the two sides together becoming the trunk. And while the canopy is no longer a part of the show it is substituted with a scrim arrangement that flies in and covers the area once occupied by the top of the tree.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL



Although the solution for keeping the trunk – and thus a superb acrobatic vehicle – is rather creative, the real creativity is in the way the units move around the stage. They are self-navigating and driven. The technology has been used to drive unmanned forklifts and other vehicles around factories and warehouses for a long time. However, this is the first time it's been used on a touring stage. Each half of the trunk has a rotary LED laser shooting down at the stage whereupon holographic reflectors are placed. Each reflector has a specific pattern which acts as a point of origin or termination.

Each unit has a drive motor that can be disengaged thus making it possible to push the unit from one point to the next. Once at each point the location is recorded into an onboard brain that stores the information. Once all of the navigational decals have been placed and recorded the unit is then parked and can now move smoothly into position in order to be used as the trunk and back to its home position. The entire move from one position to another is done with a sequence of three cues.

Because the trunk units also contain video elements they are connected to control via a snake that carries both power and control. However, they aren't the only set pieces that navigate in this same way. There is also the "Neverland" gate. Like the trunk the gate also travels in two pieces. Unlike the trunk pieces the gate units have no other purpose than to come together as the gate to Neverland. Therefore, they have to be stowed completely out of site for the duration of the show when they aren't being used. Storage isn't a problem

as they fit into the space on the ends of the main stage beyond the offstage ends of the barbeque deck.

The fact that the gates only have one purpose has an element of logistical benefit. Because the only data they need is directional avionics and 42 volt drive units – which are identical to the drives on the trunk halves – is powered by a battery thus allowing the gate to function wirelessly.

The ramp extending from the main stage to the B stage – known as the Travelator – has a vertical drop of two feet as it slopes down from the six foot elevation to the 42" B stage. It was given the name because it contains two conveyer belts that travel the distance of the ramp. However, because of the varying sizes of venues in which the show will be playing over the course of the tour the ramp can be constructed in lengths of 40, 30 and 20 feet. But the 20 foot configuration doesn't utilize the belt as there wouldn't be enough travel in the belt for the acrobats to do any of the creative work normally performed on the longer lengths.

The B stage is circular with a 28' diameter and its center consists of elevator. Because of the very short lift envelope below the stage the lift can't have any mechanical gear under the platform. Instead the platform is gripped and lifted from the corners by short forklift masts adapted for the job. This allows the deck of the riser to rest on the floor of the arena allowing for maximum concealment during times when props or personnel are being lifted into place or removed at the end of a performance.

The downstage edge of the main stage as



As one can imagine, a very important component of this production is the color pallet. The show runs through 250 costumes with more than 1,000 pieces all of which are vibrantly colorful. This adds a huge dynamic to the visual impact of the show."



CIRQUE DU SOLEIL.



## Vendors

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well as both sides of the Travelator and the perimeter of the B stage are adorned with 32 80cm x 80cm modules of 25mm Barco stealth LED product. The final note on the video portion of the production is the use of nine projectors: four 18000 lumen HD Christie digital video projector, installed on VIP dual yoke made my Zap Technology used for the downstage large screen, two 10000 lumen HD Christie digital video projectors installed on VIP yokes and three 10000 lumen HD Christie digital video projectors.

Motion control is a huge part of this show. In addition to the aforementioned set navigation there are also the 19 drum wenches and several VarioLifts in the show as well. Because there are automation elements in the A grid (over the main stage) as well as the B grid (over the B stage) there are more than one motion control operators around the room. The MC operator who controls movement in the B-rig is logically placed at the mix in order to be on top of the

action. The operator for the set pieces as well as the A grid automation is placed midway up the first level in the seats directly house right of the stage. In addition to those two positions there is also a back up operator who can jump in from his console in the event anything should go wrong with the motion control rigs for either grid. He also runs the all of the VaroLift movement as well.

A very important component of this production is the color pallet. The show runs through 250 costumes with more than 1,000 pieces, all of which are vibrantly colorful. This adds a huge dynamic to the visual impact of the show. However, that impact cannot be truly realized without the massive lighting system, which, along with the video, rigging (not including acrobatic rigging) and audio systems, was supplied by Montreal/Los Vegas powerhouse Solotech.

The lighting system consists of 431 instruments

almost all of which coming from the Vary\*Lite catalogue. Included in this number is the usual –if not ubiquitous – presence of the Vary\*Lite VL3000 Spot, VL3500 Wash FX and VLX. But there are other offerings from the VL universe that aren't as frequently seen are the VL880 and the VLX3. While there were also Atomic 3000's, Color Block's and BB7 Blinder's. However, the more interesting line item was the 78 VL880's.

Solotech Senior Vice President Touring Richard Lachance explained the reasoning for using this fixture, "The VLX-3 and the VL-880 both come in a small light weight package, and we were working the weight angle very hard. The need to save space was as powerful as was the requirement to keep the weight down. The acrobats needed all the floor space we could give them and these two lighting instruments filled that bill perfectly. The fact that the VLX3 has an LED light source with a life of 10,000 thousand hours illuminates the man-hours and expense of changing lamps."

All of this flew off of truss and a mother grid system put forth by trussing giant Tomcat. This was the largest contract ever taken on by Tomcat. We will be looking more closely at this system and many other parts of the Tomcat in a detailed essay devoted to the company, which will appear in *mPm* in the next few months.

The audio system wasn't exempt from the truck place pinch, thus all of the Meyer MX speaker cabinets are self-powered thus freeing up the space that might have otherwise be taken up by amp racks. These cabinets were developed specifically for this production by Meyer and are lighter and more powerful than any prior Meyer cabinet.

There is an aspect of this tour that is unique to this type of show. Because of the nature of the show there is a large medical presence on the tour. The tour carries a fully staffed P-Med unit. In addition to being able to handle any medical situation that may arise the P-Med staff also holds regularly scheduled emergency procedure training sessions for necessary tour personnel. Everyone who has to go into the air during the show is trained in fall arrest and emergency rescue procedures. Because the performers of the show have a broad array of sprains, bumps and bruises there is also a team of trainers on the tour as well. The tour also carries a full workout facility for the purpose of keeping the performers in shape. Finally, in the event of the unthinkable happening, the tour hires local medical staff and an ambulance is on the premise at all times.

There has been chatter in the past that says there is distinction between an arena show of this kind and a rock show that travels in the very same way. And yes there are some differences between the two production styles given that this has more moving parts than a concert. But for the most part it's the same thing and should be considered as such. However, don't take this

writer's word for it. "In the end it comes down to nearly the same thing," says Jake Berry, "At the end of the [work] day the artists have to validate the rigging on the Cirque show whereas on the concert tour the artists have to get a sound check."

Want more proof? Try this, 40 members of this tour were brought in by Berry upon completion of the U2 360° Tour including Tour Production Manager Andy "Andy O" Omilianowski. While this is his first time out as production manager he has a long career behind him as a stage manager within the organizations of production management "Yoda's" Jake Berry and Dale "Opie" Skjersteth. Omilianowski was very quick to explain the importance of Berry and Opie in his career, "Those guys are my mentors and without them I simply would not be able to do this job."

When the tour first hit the road it couldn't get into the venue in the one day first allotted for the task. Since then the production team has gotten the load in down to 11 hours with the floor being marked at 5 a.m. and the room being handed over to the performers by 4 p.m. At the end of the day the show is on the floor in roughly 90 minutes and out of the room in a total of three hours from the end of the show, which is down from nine hours at the beginning of the tour.

Omilianowski understands that this is still a long day by any standard. For that reason he chooses to have a laid back approach to managing the tour. "It's a challenge everyday in more ways than one just because of the size and nature of the thing. But we have the people to go above and beyond those challenges and make it a good fun day for everybody. We really try to have a good time. Working under Opie for 15 years and Jake for the past three, I learned how to take it all in stride and not get freaked out about the job," says Omilianowski.

Despite the fact that this show is the first one that Cirque du Soleil has designed from the beginning to be an arena show, it's not the first time Cirque has toured arenas. Currently Cirque has 850 people (including MJ) touring with arena shows. "We use the same gear and transportation as the 'mainstream' rock shows," says Pierre Guillotte. "We work in the same venues with the same IA crews." Granted there were a few design hitches on the front end of this tour. While it may be said that those hiccups were overcome by Jake Berry's consultation, the truth is they were overcome by the wisdom displayed in the decision to bring Jake into the project. Guillotte feels good about the outcome and the prospect of future productions. "Everybody knows that we learned a lot about creating an arena show from the ground up and we're walking out of this process with a wealth of maturity and knowledge," says Guillotte.

Makes you wonder what might be next. ❁

## PRODUCTION

Tour Production Manager -  
Andy "Andy O" Omilianowski  
Production Stage Manager -  
Nick Barton, Sean Robinson  
Production Coordinator -  
Aaron Seigler, Jessica Berry  
Technical Stage Manager -  
Martin Gauthier

## AUDIO

System Engineer - Sylvain Lemay  
Crew Chief - Colin StJacques  
Audio Techs: Étienne Lapré, Renato  
Petruzzello, Martin Paré  
Wireless & Comms - Charles Déziel  
FOH mix - Tim Colvard  
Monitor Mix - Alastair McMillan

## LIGHTING & MOTORS

System Engineer & Head LX - Denis  
Ayotte  
LX Crew Chief & Head LX - Yanick Blais  
Lighting Techs: Vincent Adieux, Benoit  
Paillé, Claude St. Cyr, Mathieu Lavallée,  
Louis-Charles Poudrette, Jonathan Cou-  
lombe  
Board Operator - Éric Bélanger

## VIDEO

Crew Chief - Jean-François Marin  
Video Techs: Philippe Valade, Louis-  
Philippe Gaudreau, Sébastien Cous-  
ineau, Domic Moreau  
Server Engineer - Pierric Ciguineau  
Video Director/Engineer - David Boisvert  
LED Tech - Justin Demeulenaere

## RIGGING

Head Rigger - Chad Koehler  
Riggers: Scott Fremgen, James Harrelson,  
Robert Slepicka  
Head Acrobatic Rigger - Craig Reid  
Acrobatic Riggers: Ryan Durocher, Peter  
Will, Kevin De Montigny, Britany Kiefer,  
Sean Barker

## AUTOMATION

Stage Auto Operator - TK Woo  
Front of House Operator - Menno Van  
Wetten  
Automation Techs: Simon Twigg, Greg  
Santos, Chris Davis

## CARPENTER AND PROPS

Head Carpenter - Jamie Pharand  
Carpenters: Johnny Gonzalez, Kerry  
Rothenback, Adam Beasley, Minh  
Nguyen, Josh Kapellen, Chris Ricalis,  
Dennis Osborne  
Head Props - Brian Bulmeyer  
Props: Joe Pollacek, Claudya Alain

## BACKLINE

Keys - Brian Girard  
Percussion - Brent Cook  
Guitars - Tim Mattefs  
Drums - Mike Cormier  
Keyboard / Sequence - Greg Rule

## POWER

Ivan Macias

## PYRO

Lead - John Arrowsmith  
#2 Raymond Seymour

## WARDROBE

Head Wardrobe - Bettina Bolzer-Bowles  
Wardrobe Staff: Ali Schwalbie, Susan  
Hoekstra, Amber Lynn Lacher, Julie Lep-  
age, Tanya Liquorish, Genevieve Corbel,  
Catherine Aubertin, Karine Denoncourt

## MISC CREW

Security - Tony Robinson  
IT - Edouard Boissonneault  
Laundry - Matt Krueger  
Merch - Sarah Dosch

## CATERING

Catering Crew Chief - Wesley Tischoff  
Chefs: Billy Lucas, Tony Donofrio, David  
Smith, Nate Serkland  
Dining Room: Nate Boals, Juli Heinen  
Buses & Drinks - Jason Kirby

## TRUCK DRIVERS

Lead Driver - Rémy Auclair,  
Drivers: Pat Bernard, Steve Collard,  
Brian Andrews, Richard Baker, Rodger  
Baughman, Patrick Bellefleur, Rob Bolin,  
Benoît Bourdages, Wayne Cameron,  
Brian Cochrane, Mathieu Delaney,  
Sylvain Desaulniers, Andrée Desnoyers,  
JP Desrosiers, Patrice Dubuc, Philippe  
Dumaure, Steve Flood, Richard Guil-  
lemette, Christian Hamel, Nick Kulyk,  
Vincent Lafrenière, Sylvain Lagacé,  
Nicolas Larouche, Mélanie Legros, Éric  
Leroux, Simon Losier, Adam Morris, Jon-  
nie Normandeau, Bernard Perreault, Rob  
Portwood, Don Rae, Steven Rawson,  
John C. Michael, Johathan St-Germain,  
Gareth Taylor

## BUS DRIVERS

Lead Driver - Brian Brown  
Drivers: Luther Hardy, Thom Blauvelt,  
Arther Blauvelt, Dennis Autry, Arlene  
Starr, Doyle Andrews, Brian Harlow

## CORE PRODUCTION STAFF - Montreal

Senior Production Manager -  
Pierre Guillotte  
Production Coordinator - Tanya Sarrazin  
Head Arena Rigging Specialist -  
Jeffrey Lucas  
Rigging Advance Production Manager -  
Brett Barrett  
Senior Technical Draftsperson -  
Alexandre Serdakowski  
Technical Draftsperson - Pascale Lefebvre

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL.



# Production Crew



Raffaele Buono  
Head Automation / Operator



1



Andy "Andy O"  
Omilianowski -  
Tour Production Manager

**1:** Brian Girard - Keys, Brent Cook - Percussion, Tim Mattefs - Guitars, Mike Cormier - Drums  
**2:** Denis Ayoite - System Engineer & Head LX, Vincent Adieux - Lighting Tech, Benoit Paillé - Lighting Tech, Yanick Blais - LX Crew Chief & Head LX, Louis-Charles Poudrette - Lighting Tech, Claude St. Cyr - Lighting Tech, Mathieu Lavallée - Lighting Tech **3:** Julie Lepage - Wardrobe Staff, Amber Lynn Lacher - Wardrobe Staff, Susan Hoekstra - Wardrobe Staff, Ali Schwalbie - Wardrobe Staff, Ali Schwalbie - Wardrobe Staff, Bettina Bolzer-Bowles - Head Wardrobe **4:** Carpenters: Josh Kapellen, Dennis Osborne, Jamie Pharand, Johnny Gonzalez, Minh Nguyen, Chris Ricalis, Kerry Rothenback, Adam Beasley **5:** Philippe Valade - Video Tech, Dominic Moreau - Video Tech, Sébastien Cousineau - Video Tech, Pierrick Ciguineau - Server Engineer, David Boisvert - Video Director/Engineer, Jean-François Marin - Crew Chief, Louis-Philippe Gaudreau - Video Tech **6:** Standing: David Smith - Chef, Reino Cruz, Wesley Tischoff - Catering Crew Chief, Mike "Bitch" James, Nate "Boalsy" Boals - Dining Room, John Parker, Zach Rudland. Crouching: Wilfredo Lopez, Tony Donofrio - Chef, Juli Heinen - Dining Room, Isaiah Myers. **7:** Joe Pollacek - Props, Claudya Alain - Props, Brian Bulmeyer - Head Props **8:** Greg Rule - Keyboard / Sequence, Alastair McMillan - Monitor Engineer, Étienne Lapré - Audio Tech, Sylvain Lemay - System Engineer, Colin StJacques - Crew Chief, Martin Paré - Audio Tech, Renato Petruzzello - Audio Tech, Charles Déziel - Wireless & Comms **9:** Acrobatic Riggers: Craig Reid, Sean Barker, Kevin De Montigny, Peter Will, Britany Kiefer, Ryan durocher **10:** John Arrowsmith - Pyro Lead (Shooter), Raymond Seymour - Pyro Tech (Shootee)



3



6



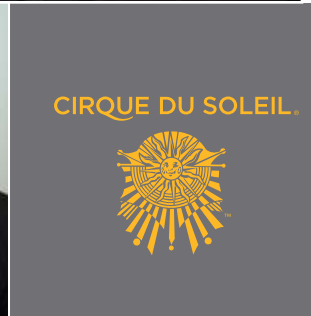
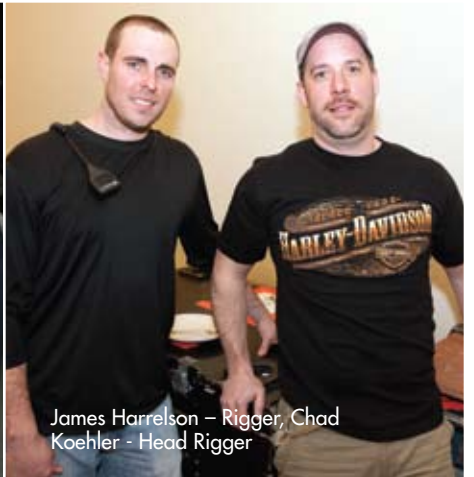
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# Worse Things Have Happened



~ MICHAEL A. BECK

On December 23, I was traveling back from Las Vegas after having taken in Cirque du Soleil's Michael Jackson Memorial show. While I'm not a fan of traveling that close to Christmas and I'm not the biggest fan of the bright lights of Vegas, I do love going there for one reason, and that is I get to see my old and dear friend Robbie Greenberg. The time spent with the Cirque team went very well as did the very short amount of time with Robbie.

When the time came to mount up and get back, I was quite ready to get back to home, hearth and my good wife Carolyn. The flight was enjoyable enough, which made the time go by a little faster. When I left the plane it was about 10:30pm and I saw a sergeant in the Air Force milling around obviously killing time before his flight left. I stopped in the restroom and when I came back out he was in line to get something at a newsstand. I cut in line and paid for his purchase and invited to him sit and chat and we'd kill the time together.

About 15 minutes later we said our good-byes and I headed for baggage claim. When I got there the carousel was still running but no one was around. The other thing that was missing was my bag. As the reality that my luggage had been lost began to wash over me, my stomach did the slow forward roll that anyone who travels a lot can relate to. I went to the office of the Department of Disgruntlement to ask what might have happened.

Unfortunately, the line was pretty long which means there were a lot of people who might be in the same shape I was in.

The truly sad news was that they were all in far worse shape than I. There was a family on its way to a cruise and their luggage was missing, which meant that they were about to embark on the ten-day voyage with only the clothes on their back and whatever carry-on stuff they might have. There was a woman whose pet taxi was missing along with the dog that was in it. Everyone there had a similar story to those.

Compared to these poor people I was rolling in clover. The worst possible scenario I could have faced was that my bag had been stolen. But I was 28 miles from home and a fully stocked closet. Because I carry all valuables in my camera case, which never leaves my side, I was able to hold it together in that light.

By the time I got up to the counter I'd seen these poor people catching a lot of misdirected anxiety and I just wasn't in the mood to pile on. I told them what was going on and they looked up my bag and ascertained that it had been checked into the airport and put on the carousel line. They gave me some paperwork to give the people at the "unclaimed bag office". When I got there I waited on line. It was truly sad because a number of the people in the first office I was in had been sent down here with the hope that this is where their bags had ended up only to find that the hope was false.

Again, when my turn came I just gave the guy my paperwork and he disappeared into his office. When he returned he told me that the bag wasn't in there and would I mind coming back and looking for myself. After an exhaustive search of every bag in the area it was determined that my bag truly was not there. Suddenly the aforementioned "worst case scenario" was looking a whole lot less theoretical. So the guy looked at me with sad and weary eyes and directed me back to the office of the Department of Disgruntlement where I would begin the claim process. When I got there the room was completely empty but for the people behind the counter. They all looked like they'd just survived the entire six-month long Siege at Khe Sanh within a two hour timespan. I went in joking with them understanding that there was nothing they could do to get my bag in my hand before I left the airport and probably not before the new year. So why get freaked out and add to their hard night?

The woman I dealt with took pity and broke the rules skipping the five day waiting period required to file a claim. As she was filling out even more paperwork, the

guy I'd been dealing with down at the unclaimed baggage office came in with the white baggage claim tag that was placed on the bag when I checked in at the Vegas airport. He looked at me with apologetic eyes and simply said, "It's been stolen." He knew this because he went and looked around the baggage claim area and found the tag on the floor next to the carousel my bag came in on.

At this point I got really angry, but it wasn't the fault of the people I was dealing with. I wished them all a Merry Christmas, grabbed my paperwork and headed for my car. The bag contained the usual assortment of undergarments, toiletries, shirts, sweater, jeans, and a pretty expensive pair of dress shoes my wife had given me for our wedding day. In light of the truly tragic things going on in the world or the real difficulties that Carolyn and I face (as all families do), the loss of these things was nothing earthshaking. But it was still a violation and that had the idealistic child in me asking "WHY?!" I wasn't asking "Why me?!" Just "why" in general. They were the most comfortable shoes I'd ever owned. The bag was a nice Eddie Bauer bag and I hate having to shop for luggage almost as bad as I hate shopping for shoes.

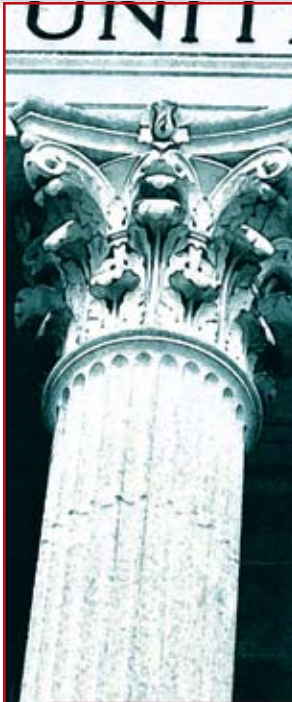
Because it was now 1:30 a.m. I didn't want to call Carolyn and wake her up, but I wanted to talk about it. I knew that Robbie was just getting home from a gig so I gave her a call. When she heard about it she said, "Michael, if someone told me this story and asked me to guess who it happened to I would have said your name." We both laughed and rejoiced in the fact that in a half hour I would be home with my good wife and things would start to get better. In an odd way I felt a little better. When I got home Carolyn was waiting up for me and we talked about it for a while and finally fell off to sleep around 3:00 a.m. The last thing I was thinking about before I fell asleep was the fact that I would rather go to sleep having been robbed than to have to try to sleep knowing I'd robbed someone.

The next day I had a full day getting the stuff I needed to cook the meal on Christmas and replacing the things I absolutely needed that were lost in the bag and preparing to play in church that night. You see, I teach a nine-year-old boy mandolin and his first public performance would be in front of his church on Christmas Eve. Everything fell into place and the kid nailed the songs in church and I was feeling great. Then as I was getting into my car after the service my

phone rang. It was a very kind woman from Delta Airlines excitedly telling me that they'd found my bag in a bathroom and it would be delivered to our house sometime before morning.

I stayed up waiting for the truck to show as if waiting to hear Santa's sleigh but didn't make it. It wasn't so much the anticipation of what I might get when the truck arrived that I wanted to satisfy. I wanted to see the guys driving that truck. Finally they called and suggested I hit the sack and asked that I leave a note on the door authorizing them to leave the bag at our front door. I left an envelope in the wreath on the front door with a note and the remaining money from my per diem for the guys who'd spent Christmas Eve playing Santa Claus. Then I fell asleep around 4:30 a.m.

I got a late start on the turkey and that put everything else behind for the rest of the day. I'd harangued my brother about not being late (like last year) and they all showed up right on time. But no one cared that dinner was late when they heard the cool story of how I'd gotten ripped off and woke on Christmas Day feeling okay about it. \*



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# Daniel John Lee

## — IN MEMORIAM

BY MICHAEL A. BECK

On September 10 Backstreet Boys played the last show of a multi-night stand in Boston's Fleet Center. There was going to be some down time before the next show in Toronto. This gave set carpenter Danny Lee time to go home and be with his wife as she had their second child. During the load out Danny asked stage manager Troy Vollhoffer for permission to leave early once all the truck were loaded up so he could get some sleep before the long day ahead. Vollhoffer had no problem with that and the plan was set in stone.

Vollhoffer recalls Danny's departure. "I'll never forget it. As he was leaving he looked over his shoulder and yelled, 'See ya suckers.' And he walked out that door. I'll never forget that a long as I live."

Danny wasn't the only one flying out the next day. Stephen "Creech" Anderson who is currently an account manager for Premier Global Production Co. Inc. was the lighting crew chief on the tour. Creech was flying out to Dallas to do advance work for another show. The next morning Danny and Creech rode to Logan Airport together and arrived at 5:00 a.m. "We got there just as the place was opening and we wondered around for an hour trying to find some coffee," Creech recalls.

When the time to leave came Danny boarded first and 15 minutes later Creech's plane pushed. Around this same time Troy Vollhoffer was sound asleep in his bus headed for the Canadian border. Suddenly he was shaken from his sleep by lighting electrician Carlos Oldigs telling him to check out what was happening on TV. He explained what occurred next. "The door to the front lounge was open so I crammed



my head out just in time to see the live shot of a jet flying into the World Trade Center. It was so incomprehensible that I figured it was a movie and rolled back over. Then Carlos came back and said 'You have to get out here man. Something's really wrong.'"

He pulled himself out of the bunk and sat in the front lounge dumbfounded like the rest of us as the tragedy that would forever be ironically labeled 9/11 unfolded before the whole world. However, there was a dynamic on that bus that didn't exist for the majority of the rest of us that came in the form of a anxious phone call.

"I turned the TV up because I'd just woken up and as we were watching all of this our travel agent, Nancy Rosenblatt called in and said, 'Danny was on American flight 11.

I didn't make the connection. I asked what that meant and she explained that we just witnessed the *second* plane fly into the World Trade Center and not the first one. And that was that."

While all of this was happening Creech was on his way to Dallas. Immediately upon landing the news broke. "We were sitting on the tarmac for a long time when the pilot came on and explain that all flights in the US were now grounded," he recalled. "But by now phones were going ringing all through the plane and the whole thing was buzzing. My wife called me frantically wanting to know where I was."

By this time the Pentagon had been hit and there was no doubt as to what was going on. But back on the north bound coach of Troy Vollhoffer there was much to be considered. "Our mood was much like the rest of the country in that we just couldn't believe this could be happening. But also we just couldn't wrap our heads around the fact that Danny was gone. And *where's Creech?! We were trying to be optimistic.* Within an hour of the second crash CNN

was already crawling names of the passengers across the reader board and there was no mention of Danny or Creech."

While most of us were viewing this day from the stationary confines of homes or workplaces, Vollhoffer and his crewmates were in a very fluid situation as they approached the Canadian border. "It was really spooky," he remembered. "We were on the production bus which meant that all of the trucks were behind us and they just waved us through the border. They didn't check passports or anything. They just said hurry it up, we're closing the border down."

By the time they got into their hotel in Toronto it was around 3:00 p.m. Now it was confirmed that Danny was on the plane and several crew members went to the bar to watch the news when they saw Danny's name finally show up among the list of passengers on American Flight 11. With that information finally and tragically confirmed there was still the worrisome question of where Creech might be.

"I stopped by my house to see my wife for a minute before I had to get to the meeting," Creech explained. "At that point I still didn't know that Danny's plane was involved. As I was trying to get out to my meeting, my wife said 'watch this.' I told her that I really didn't have time and that it would be all over the news so I would see it later. Then she told me that the first plane to hit the building was the first flight to L. A. out of Boston. That's when I knew it was Danny Lee."

Around 6:00 p.m. confirmation came in that Creech was safe. Once that concern was put to rest there was the next issue to be addressed. Should the band play the next show in Toronto? The decision was made to go through with the performance on the basis that the tour would not be deterred by an act of terrorism. Added to that was the fact that the tour had lost a



industry just didn't exist back then. If you wanted truss you had to design it. Since my dad was an engineer I knew better than to not get it certified. If I could not find the tubing that I needed or the alloy I was looking for I'd call Alcoa and find out minimum production runs and lead times. We were having tube made in alloys that weren't standard for the day for certain dies. There were all kinds of things like that were going on back then because we were building an industry and there just wasn't a business in place like today to support production companies.

**It's been said that Mozart never played the classics because he was too busy writing them. Were you aware at the time that you were on the front end of building an industry that would at some point be what it is today or were you too busy just keeping your head above water?**

I think that when you're doing stuff like that you don't have the luxury of having the perspective of time to judge any of it. It was more a question of being in a business trying to create an entity and I was too busy solving problems. Were that I'd had an accounting degree too. At least I got that to rub off on one of my daughters. It was all new territory. Unlike today when lighting is kind of a commodity

the equipment was specific to the companies. Everyone had their own tweak on their gear. There was the See Factor and the stuff that Tom Fields or Bill McMannus was doing. This was back when Mike Tait still had a lighting company and he was building scenery out of an old church and doing some pretty cool stuff. This was at a point when you'd see Gene and Roy Clair on tour all the time. The first time I saw an S-4 system was also the first time it dawned on me that truck bodies are all the same size. I needed to build trusses that fit truck bodies. So we built truss sections that we could spin in a truck. And you know from working with me about the layering of cases and all of that stuff. It was a straight lighting adapta-

tion of what Clair had come up with in the S-4's and all their stuff. I was just doing it with lighting gear. That's why all my truss sections were an odd size because I was thinking about truck bodies and not eight foot increments. Consequentially, that comes to when we were loading 500 par cans in a single truck and no one thought I could do it and I said "watch me".

Yeah, you said that a lot back then.

To be continued... ❁

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