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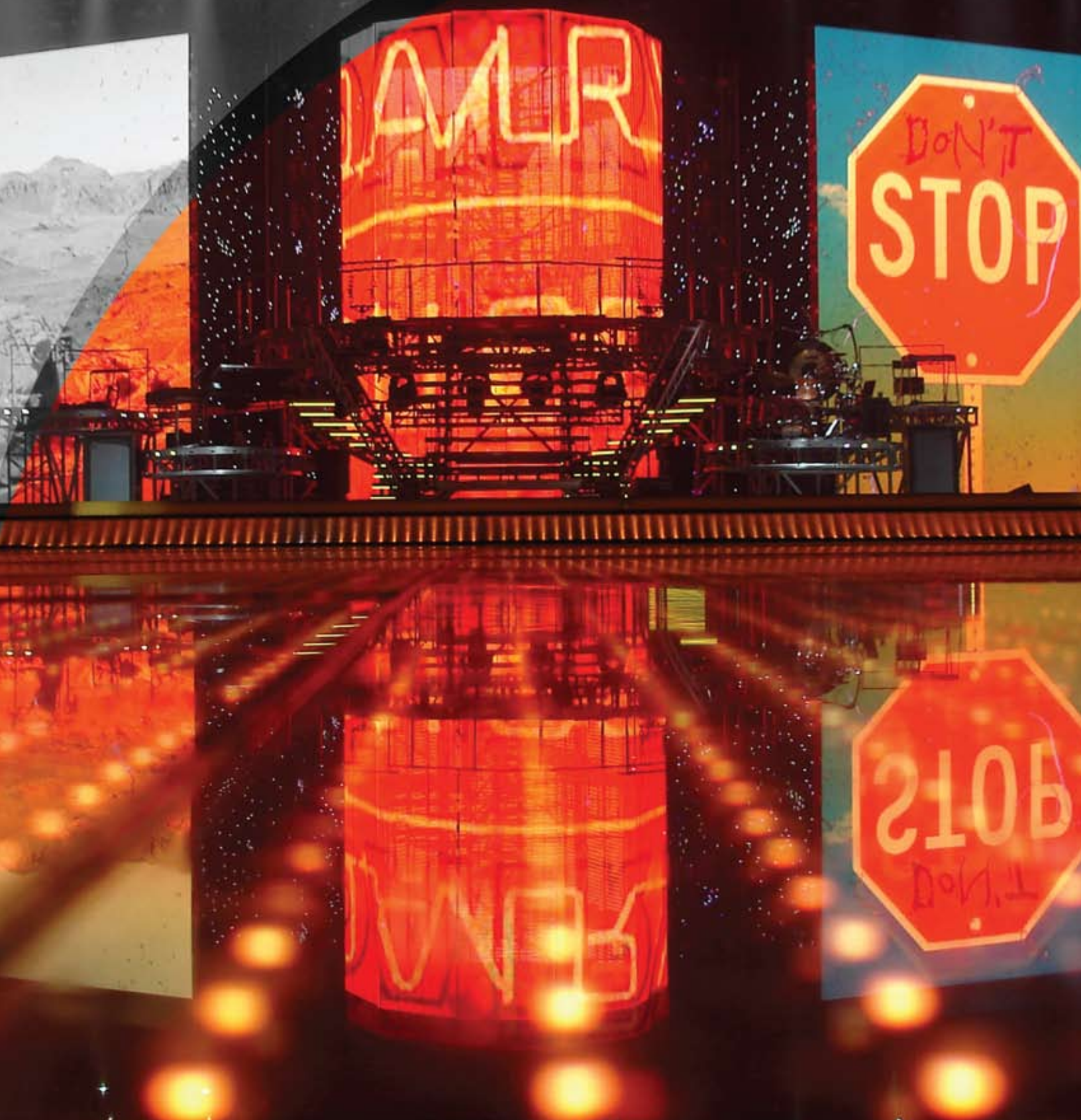
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FROM THE *Publisher*



With the summer concert season in full swing, we profile Josh Groban's *Straight To You* world tour. Groban is one of a handful of relatively new acts that are doing consistently high volume the world over. The entire crew speaks highly of this tour and with good reason. After all, a positive work environment makes the day to day drudgery of touring easier for all involved.

Along with our discussion of the production elements that make up Groban's first tour in four years, we also feature some of the wonderful vendors that make this tour the huge success that it is. Maryland Sound (MSI), Five Points Production Services, Upstaging, Knifedge and S.O.R.D. International all help to keep this thing on the road and share their insights as to what makes this production unique.

Upstaging's John Huddleston spoke to us about the recent stage collapse at the Ottawa Bluesfest and gives a few ideas on how to get a dialog started to keep these (far too common) incidents from happening in the future.

We also talked to the handsome and talented Tim LaValley about his video content company Battlecruiser and the process he uses to get the artists' vision realized.

Other features include a look at the Best Buy Theater in NYC and our new "In The News" section giving readers a quick glance at some of the recent happenings affecting our industry.

See you all next month with our coverage of Rush's *Time Machine* tour and our look at the E3 Electronic Entertainment Expo.

Larry Smith



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Catering

EAT TO THE BEAT LOOKING FORWARD TO A GREAT SUMMER!

Eat To The Beat America, (ETTBA), continue with their U.S. tour catering schedule and are preparing for the busiest season yet backstage at the Merriweather Post Pavilion in Maryland, where they have commenced their fourth season as in-house caterers.

Having just finished the hugely popular Lady Gaga Monster Ball Tour in America, the Festival season has kicked off at Merriweather with the first two gigs; Sweetlife Festival, (a fusion of music, food and thoughtful living), and M3 Rocks, which has now grown into a two day event.

ETTBA have further solidified their position in the U.S. market place, recently exhibiting at the Event Live Expo at the Los Angeles Convention Center, attending and being nominated for the Tour Link Conference Top Dog Awards and being nominated for the Catersource International ACE Awards. The company were also presented with their 8th Total Production International: Favourite Caterer Award, for their outstanding work in the event and entertainment industries.

With their mobile flight-cased kitchen equipment and international crew working all across America, ETTBA are finalizing contracts with a number of live events ranging from major music festivals, concert tours, entertainment shows, automotive roadshows and sporting events.

ETTBA's Vice President of Operations, Susanne Howell, said, "There has been a real upturn in all the markets we operate in and although the economy is still affecting our clients budgets we



have seen a definite increase in demand for our value added services."

Eat To The Beat America is part of the Global Infusion Group, one of the largest location catering and live event support companies in the world. With overseas offices in Europe the Middle East and China they can provide a consistent quality of food and service across the continents and have worked with Shakira and Justin Beiber in Europe, Usher and Walking with Dinosaurs in China and even for the Tribeca Film Festival organizers in Doha, Qatar. eattothebeat.com

Hardware

PENN GUARD NOW AVAILABLE IN SMALLER PACKAGES

Penn-Elcom launches its new Penn Guard polyurea spray coating for speaker cabinets in two conveniently sized packages, ensuring that speaker manufacturers of all sizes will be able to benefit from its use, in addition to the larger manufacturers, many of whom have been using the finish as a standard for some time.

Penn Guard is a 2-part spray, and is now available in two different sizes to suit all customer needs - 55 gallon drums and 5 gallon pails.

Application of the spray offers a smart black textured finish, which looks great and also provides

protection for the cabinet against scratching and abrasion - so ideal for touring systems and those which are constantly being moved.

It is stronger, more durable, more practical and cost-effective than other methods of speaker covering like vinyl or carpet.

Special equipment is required to mix the 2 components (the polyurea and the activator). Penn offers several choices of application equipment for both high or low volume outputs.

The extremely quick cure time of between 4 and 12 seconds is a boost to productivity and there are no Volatile Organic Compound (VOC) emissions.

Penn Guard's now increased accessibility dovetails perfectly into Penn-Elcom's range of speaker cabinet grills, hardware, accessories and Fane component speakers. penn-elcom.com



Rigging

SAPSIS RIGGING PROVIDES RIGGING PACKAGE FOR THIRD ANNUAL CASTLETON FESTIVAL

Sapsis Rigging designed and installed a self-climbing truss rig for the third annual Castleton Festival, which is being held in Castleton, Virginia from June 25 - July 24.

SRI installed a truss rig inside the festival tent to facilitate proper staging of the numerous concerts and opera performances to be held there. The rig, measuring 27 feet high, 53 feet wide and 46 feet deep, included seven tower legs placed strategically to accommodate lighting and scenery needs as well as weight load considerations. The tent's unique frame offered additional weight load capacity at mid-span which SRI used to help support the six 50 foot long cross trusses.

Mike Sapsis, SRI supervisor for the event, commented, "The rig was custom designed to fit perfectly inside the tent which will greatly aid technicians during changeovers and production."

The Castleton Festival evolved from the Castleton Residency program for young artists run by The Chateauville Foundation, established in 1997 by Lorin and Dietlinde Maazel. The Festival brings together young talent with experienced professionals to present performances of opera, theater, symphonic concerts, and cabaret. Lorin Maazel was the Music Director of the New York Philharmonic from 2002 to 2009. Castleton Farms, the main festival site, is Maazel's 550 acre estate located in rural Virginia at the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. sapsis-rigging.com castletonfestival.org



Sound

L-ACOUSTICS SELLS FIRST KARA SYSTEM TO SLOVENIA

Akustika Bahun is pleased to announce that it has purchased the first L-ACOUSTICS KARA WST® line source system in Slovenia.

The system's first job was a corporate event in Slovenia's largest and most acoustically challenging arena, Ljubljana's 15,000-seat Stožice, which has a nine second reverberation time when empty. The complete FOH/front-fill system consisted of 36 KARA cabinets configured 12 per side as left/right arrays plus 12 as a delay line, eight SB28 subwoofers in cardioid mode, two 108P and two 112P coaxials, and 12 115XT HiQ active stage monitors. All units were driven with LA8 amplified controllers.

"We'd like to thank the complete team for their technical support during this event," says Akustika Bahun's Miha Bahun. "This includes Slaven Tahirbegovic from Croatian distributor Dicroic

who supplied us with the system, Wilhelm&Willhalm for equipment support, KSS for trussing and rigging, sound engineer Boris Kutin and, most of all, David Brooks from L-ACOUSTICS."

AKUSTIKA BAHUN: bahun.si
DICROIC: dicroic.com

RAT SOUND PACKS RODENT-SIZED L-ACOUSTICS KIVA-KILO SYSTEM

Rat Sound Systems, Inc. of Oxnard, California has now further expanded its significant L-ACOUSTICS inventory with the addition of 12 KIVA and four KILO enclosures, four SB28 subs and an LA8-equipped LA-RAK touring rack. This acquisition follows the company's recent purchase of 18 KARA enclosures earlier this year.

According to Dave Rat, "We currently have six KIVA and four KILO out on the Bluebird Cafe Stage of Willie Nelson's Country Throwdown tour and, despite their tiny size,

they're proving to be surprisingly loud and clear. We anticipate that they'll come in handy for use as stage lip fills, VIP area fills, portable small-format standalone systems and more."

With an arsenal of well over 200 L-ACOUSTICS enclosures--"enough to simultaneously accommodate at least five full-scale arena tours," Rat points out--the new KIVA and KILO systems are filling yet another niche for the L-ACOUSTICS US Certified Provider as it seeks to grow its smaller and mid-scale client base.

"We now own the whole K spectrum--from the small KIVA and KARA up to the much larger KUDO and K1. And even though they're all very different boxes, we've always been able to depend on the sonic continuity and reliability throughout the entire L-ACOUSTICS product line," Rat adds. ratsound.com



Staging

PRECISE CORPORATE STAGING EXPANDS L-ACOUSTICS INVENTORY FOR SUMMER FESTIVAL SEASON

PCS adds KUDO, SB28 and LA-RAK for new Entertainment Division

Precise Corporate Staging (PCS) of Tempe, Arizona upped its L-ACOUSTICS product count in late-May with the addition of 24 KUDO enclosures, 24 SB28 subs and six LA-RAK touring amplifier racks. The systems were purchased, in part, to accommodate the busy summer festival schedule of PCS' new Entertainment Division, which this year deploys systems and staging for Country USA and Rock USA in Oshkosh, Wisconsin and the legendary week-long Buffalo Chip in Sturgis, South Dakota.

"With 30 V-DOSC already in our inventory, we had enough boxes to do main PA hangs for most outdoor shows but previously had to cross-rent additional V-DOSC for

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In the News

outfill,” says PCS President David Stern. “This year we’ve switched over to KUDO for outfill, beefed up our subs to SB28, and gotten into LA8 amplified controllers for digital distribution as well as improved processing and control.”

In addition to being ideal for outdoor festivals and large arenas, KUDO also enables PCS to offer a system that is well suited to serve as a main PA for smaller venues. “We’re doing a lot of shows for casinos like Talking Stick here in Tempe and V-DOSC was simply too large and heavy for the room,” Stern notes. “We’ve flown six KUDO per side there for Los Lonely Boys, Sylvia Browne and Dwight Yoakam in the past few weeks and they worked great – plenty of horsepower and a nice flat EQ right from the start.”

MORE INFO:
Precise Corporate Staging /
new PCS Entertainment Division:
pcstaging.com

Transportation

AIR CHARTER SERVICE CONTINUES GLOBAL EXPANSION

Air Charter Service, the leading aircraft charter specialists, continues its global expansion as it opens its second US office in Los Angeles – to complement its established operation in New York.

The company already handles many charters on the west coast, and felt that a presence in California was essential to further growth. Tony Bauckham, Managing Director of ACS, commented: “Our New York office is

our most established outer operation and had its best ever year in 2010. We have been planning on opening an office here in LA for some time now, and have been training local personnel in both our London and New York offices for months in preparation. I am delighted to see our plans finally come to fruition – California has the 8th largest economy in the world [on a par with Spain and Italy] and there is a massive charter market here. We already deal with clients here on a regular basis, and I’m sure the team will build an even larger client base now that we are in situ.

Bauckham added, “As with all of our offices this will be a significant set-up with a firm infrastructure, bringing in both internal ACS transfers and hiring experienced staff locally. We do not believe in hiring people to work from home and listing it as one of our offices, as some companies do. We believe that this doesn’t offer sufficient backup – one person cannot support the round-the-clock operations and high service levels that we offer our clients.”

Bauckham also revealed that Air Charter Service has plans to open two further offices this year to bring the total number of its operations to sixteen, spanning five continents. aircharter.co.uk

BEAT THE STREET LAUNCHES NEW GROUND TRANSPORT VENTURE

Austrian bussing company Beat The Street (BTS) is to add Beat The Street ground transport to its offer.



The UK arm of BTS has purchased a fleet of Mercedes Benz cars and people carriers to complement its bussing operation. These vehicles will be based in the UK with more to follow in Europe. In addition, the company will also be working with a network of local service partners across its territory.

The new ground fleet will cover airport transfers, hotel pick ups or a full tour if required.

Jörg Philipp, owner of BTS said: “We have persuaded Ian Massey, who had 12 years experience of touring as one of our top drivers (but who left recently to be home-based), to rejoin the team to co-ordinate this new service. He is already well-known to many of our tour managers and understands perfectly what they, and the drivers, require. Reaction from our clients to date has been excellent, and we’re excited about our new venture and being able to offer a more complete service!”

MORE INFO:
new service contact: Ian Massey
call: +44 (0)7976 244018
email: ian@beatthestreet.net

Video

PRG ACQUIRES NOCTURNE PRODUCTIONS

Production Resource Group, L.L.C. (PRG), the world’s leading supplier of entertainment and event technology headquartered in New York, has acquired Nocturne Productions, Inc., the leading concert touring video production service company, through PRG’s wholly owned subsidiary, PRG Nocturne Productions Inc. The announcement was made jointly by PRG Chairman & CEO Jeremiah “Jere” Harris, PRG Chief Operating Officer Kevin Baxley, and Nocturne Productions co-CEO Bob Brigham.

PRG Nocturne Productions will continue to serve Nocturne’s cli-

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Gray Matter Entertainment delivers video design for Nicki Minaj's Live Tour with Britney Spears

ents from Nocturne's existing location, as well as from PRG's depots throughout the world. Effective immediately, Nocturne will begin operating under the name PRG Nocturne Productions Inc. with Bob Brigham and Ron Proescl as Co-Presidents and with Paul Becher continuing in his present leadership role as Executive Vice President.

Nocturne is the world's premiere concert touring video service company with clients such as Paul McCartney, Lady Gaga, Bon Jovi, Madonna, Eagles, Van Halen, Metallica, KISS, Britney Spears, Bruno Mars, Ricky Martin, Janet Jackson, Elton John, Tim McGraw, Radiohead, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Nickelback, Kid Rock, NKOTBSB, James Taylor, Sting, Nine Inch Nails, Carrie Underwood, Def Leppard, Linkin Park, Alice in Chains, Blue Man Group, Michael Bublé, Glee Live!, Journey, Earth, Wind & Fire and many others. "PRG and Nocturne share a core philosophy of offering the highest level of customer support combined with providing the latest cutting edge technology. Our companies have been on the same tours and

shared clients for years, so combining forces is a logical next step," said Bob Brigham. "PRG has been growing our video offerings, primarily in the corporate and large event markets and with Nocturne, we will be able to offer our concert touring clients access to the highest

quality video and LED equipment and the best crews," said Baxley. "Many of our clients want a single source solution with experts knowledgeable across the market sectors and so we will continue to offer both bundled and individual services." "Over the years, we've admired Nocturne's strong leadership and their truly innovative production solutions and we feel very fortunate to have Bob, Ron and Paul join our management team," said Harris.

GRAY MATTER ENTERTAINMENT DELIVERS VIDEO DESIGN FOR NICKI MINAJ'S LIVE TOUR WITH BRITNEY SPEARS

Gray Matter Entertainment of Boston, MA has successfully completed full video design work for Nicki Minaj on her live concert tour with Britney Spears. The tour titled "Femme Fatales", began it's run on June 16th, 2011 in Sacramento, CA at the Power Pavilion Arena.

Gray Matter Entertainment's designers created custom graphics and animations for the LED video walls that augment the lighting design visuals of Nicki Minaj's performance. Video graphics designers were on site at rehearsals and the initial tour date performances to create and enhance the video elements.

Forty-five minutes of video content roll during the show telling the story of the battle between Nicki and her rival, Nemesis, culminating in a no-holds-barred match of strength at the end of the set. Epic planetary landscapes, turbulent lighting storms and explosions make up just a few sections of the video.

Work was executed in Cinema 4D, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe After Effects and Apple Final Cut Pro.

Principal and Director of Production for Gray Matter Entertainment, Peter Moll, stated "Gray Matter Entertainment is proud and excited to help Nicki Minaj and her tour make this the best possible experience for her fans. Video continues to be an excellent tool for delivering exciting live music events."

Principal and Director of Post Production for Gray Matter Entertainment, David Bigelow states "The video looks great and Nicki Minaj delivers an exceptionally exciting show for the fans. We've never delivered such incredible content in such a short amount of time."

Gray Matter Entertainment has developed video content for artists Elton John, Van Halen,

Godsmack, Stone Temple Pilots, Daughtry, James Taylor, Guns N Roses, Velvet Revolver and ZZ Top. matter.tv



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A large advertisement for X-Streamers.com. The top half is filled with a shower of colorful confetti. The bottom half shows a crowd of people at a concert. The text 'X-Streamers.com' is at the top. Below it, 'We're the OTHER Confetti Company!' is written in a stylized font. To the right, there are three sections: 'Customers Like The Blue Man Group, Taylor Swift, KC & The Sunshine Band & many others love us because:', 'We're Affordable: Our Prices are always Competitive! Check Out Our Exclusive "Industry First" "Free Rental Gear" Program! Many Tours Quality!', and 'We're Reliable: We have over 30 years experience in the touring industry! We understand you and your special needs cause we've been there!'. Below that is 'We have the Best Gear: We scour the planet for the most reliable, road worthy, lightest gear. Our equipment works from the first dress rehearsal to the final curtain call!'. At the bottom, it says 'FOR MORE INFO: Call us now (203) 925-7699 Mention this ad! (We love our Tour Guide Clients!) Or go to X-Streamers.com/tg You may very well qualify for our "Free Rental Gear Program"!'.



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BATTLECRUISER

Backs Up the Best

BY HANK BORDOWITZ

When it comes to concert production these days, behind every great performer is ... an LED video display! While the displays amplify what's happening on the stage with cameras on the performers putting their 20-foot-high faces in front of the audience, they also have other content. When put to its best use, these images also work in concert with the show, amplifying a song's lyrics, the musical idiom, or the artist's persona. Take for example, the Zac Brown Band's performance on the 2010 Grammy Awards.

"For their collaboration with Leon Russell on his 'Dixie Lullaby,' we wanted to evoke a train journey through the Old South," recalls Tim LaValley. "With that in mind, we shot a series of original photographs down at Union Station with the project's producer in full period costume. We complemented that with some licensed vintage train footage and blended everything with some Southern imagery and an animated map of the region. It was pretty cool."

This was the first piece of stage content LaValley put together as the principal designer, director and owner of Battlecruiser. The LA based company has since developed video content for the BET Awards, the Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards, and the NAACP Image Awards. Battlecruiser's images have played behind performances by artists ranging from Diddy to Placido Domingo, from Jennifer Hudson to Santana, and from Christine Aguilera to Esperanza Spalding, to name but a few.

The company name itself has a dual meaning as LaValley explains. "American clients seem to like its association with efficiency and effectiveness. British clients like that it hints at fun and relaxation – in London. Battlecruiser is rhyming slang for boozier, i.e. a pub. I chose the



company name for both American and British reasons. I'm British, but a California resident since 1997. I wanted to let people know that we're effective and precise. I have a degree in motion picture production, in addition to the usual creative experience. I'm very committed to efficient workflows, but we're also pretty relaxed about it."

As LED screens become a more ubiquitous part of the touring gestalt, the demand for content obviously becomes greater as well. In the year and a half they've been in business, Battlecruiser has supplied dozens of tours and shows. In the process, LaValley has slowly

started to redefine the parameters of this content and how artists interact with it. An example of this is the set and content he is in the process of developing for Steve Aoki's Dim Mak Records' stage on this year's Identity Festival tour. "The LED screens there will be very interesting," says LaValley. "We're also looking at developing hand-held technology that would allow Steve to affect and interact with the content."

"On Shinedown's *Carnival of Madness* tour last year, Ken Delvo and Scott Allee had designed



a really cool set made up of five thin screens scattered across the upstage wall," he adds. "It gave me the opportunity to create content – syringes, liquids, and so on – to fit perfectly within those shapes, so that they appeared to be floating above the stage."

As with most things in the mobile production profession, creating the LED content is a collaborative venture. "In the larger touring world, lighting directors like Justin Collie have a vast ship to steer, and we're happy to help keep everything on course," LaValley says. "Every artist likes to have their input too, and



they have a right to since they're laying themselves on the line night after night. The best artists to work with are those who know exactly what they want. It's also great to work with artists who are confident enough to let us just do our thing. On Shinedown, for example, [lead vocalist] Brent [Smith] waited until we'd got a few rehearsals under our belt to let the content adapt organically before saying anything. He then helped to nudge the content in the right direction until at the final rehearsal, he led a standing ovation for the content and gave me a bear hug. I love that kind of organic partnership, where the artist naturally assumes the content's going to be great and allows you the time and space to do it."

In some cases this is simpler than others, because what the show demands is less complicated.

A full length concert tour like Shinedown requires somewhere between 90 to 120 minutes worth of content. A single song on an award show obviously requires less content and less effort unless it turns out as elaborate as the short film created for the Zac Brown Band.

"The personal nature of the content for Jeff Beck's tribute to Les Paul at the 2010 Grammy's demanded the use of historical imagery," LaValley cites as another example. "So we used a lot of photographs from Les' life and spent a day shooting stills of a Gibson Les Paul. By compositing the historical imagery into the shots of the guitar, it looked like Les Paul himself was burnished into the surface. A very fitting tribute, I think. On the other hand, Janelle Monae's performance of 'Let's Go Crazy' at the BET Awards last year needed to reference Prince without having him overshadow her performance. We simply created a 3D version of his symbol and had hundreds of them floating and tumbling on the screens."

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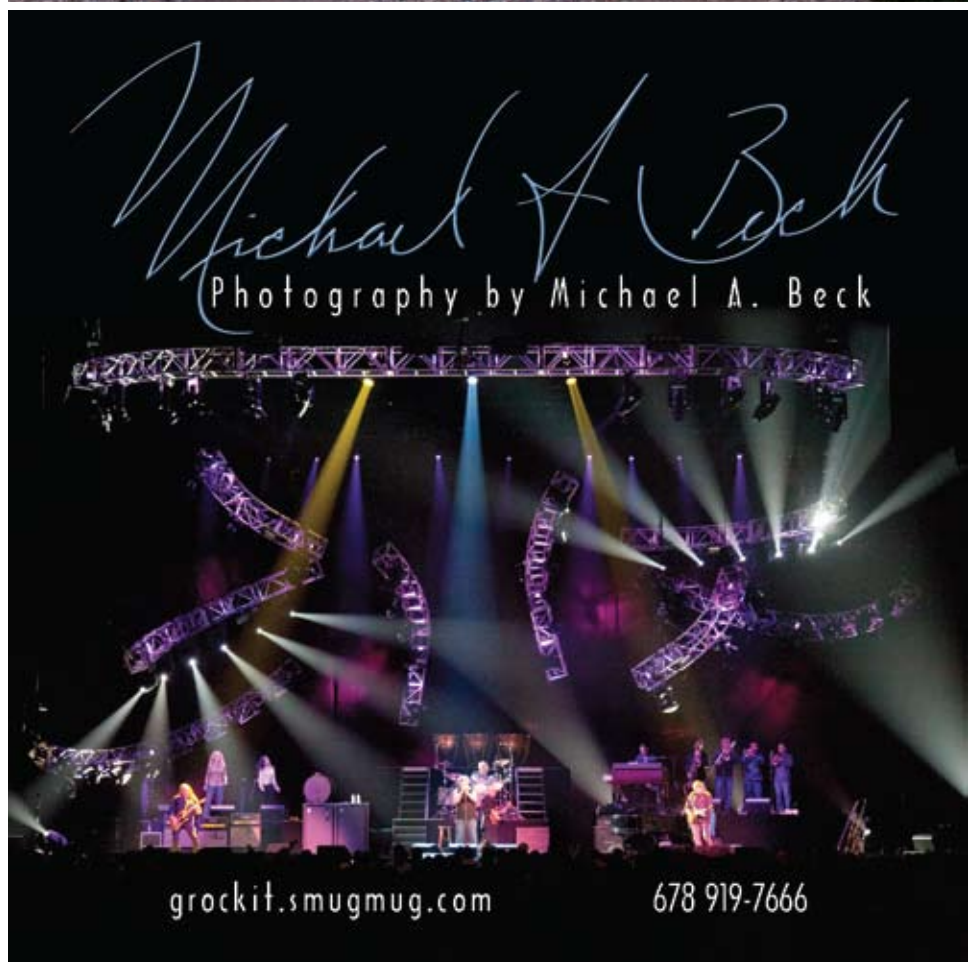


photo courtesy of
Rahav Segev

BEST BUY THEATER

The Venue Under The Crossroads of the World

BY HANK BORDOWITZ

“I’ll put this room up against any room,” proclaims Jeff Young, production director at the Best Buy Theater, a major concert venue in the heart of Times Square, at the crossroads of the world. It is a gorgeous room, seating about 2500, but flexible at that. And while its location offers entertainment in the very bosom of the live entertainment hub of the world, it also faces some special problems endemic to the location.

Two stories under an office building that also houses a theater, Viacom and MTV, the space once housed the largest single screen movie theater in New York City. AEG Live spent several years and a lot of money turning it into a world class venue. The room is very flexible. It can be an auditorium with raked seats offering wonderful visibility. With a dual level dance floor, it becomes a dance club, or with tables and chairs the dance floor becomes the site of a corporate dinner with superstar entertainment or a television up-front, both with the auditorium chairs hidden behind a thick black curtain. It scales down from 2150 to 1500 seats. The 40 x 30 x 4 stage can be similarly divided for shows that require less room, such as comedy tours.

However, the location makes loading in and out challenging, as 44th and Broadway is one of the busiest traffic corners (for cars and pedestrians) on the planet. The building they’re in (well, under) houses Viacom, the corporate home of MTV, which also has offices and sound stages in the building (TRL used to be shot in a space with a window out on Times Square). The six bays the Best Buy uses to load-in and load-out were built for mail trucks, not semis.

Part of the answer lies in the good relationship they maintain with the midtown police force. They work hard not to block traffic, and they get the equipment out of the trucks and into the bays quickly, then down to the stage area via freight elevators. They have to work pretty much a truck at a time. Then the trucks lay up at a yard by the Javits Center on 11th Avenue and 36th. All this is made clear in the Venue Rider every tour manager playing the Best Buy gets:

For trucks that are bigger than 28’, street unloading requires ramp off truck and ramp up onto dock. PLEASE NOTE: Due to our location, your load in/out requires your utmost cooperation and professionalism as we share our loading dock and freight elevators with the balance of the tenants who reside in 1515 Broadway... Unfortunately, parking at the venue is not an option. IT IS DROP AND GO FOR ALL VEHICLES. Sorry!

Now this might seem like a tough way to run a venue, until you read further into that rider and realize how well equipped the Best Buy is. For many touring acts, minimal (or no) lights and sound have to come off of the truck, because the house has it going on. All of the trusses are on chain motors. Lighting is

controlled with an Avolite Pearl Console with two 17” monitors and an IPC/Road Hog. Additionally, there are 975 amps of power, and 400 of them are available for whatever else the band wants to bring in.

“As far as rock tours, we have what most of them need: Two control groups, front of house control, onstage monitor control, monitor package – we have a very, very state of the industry package,” says Young.

They can provide two available fog machines and Clair monitors. The PA features a JBL Vertec line array, six per side. The mixing board is a Midas 44/4, but there’s room for another board in the sound pit. There are 48 amplifiers that put out 300,000 watts of power. A lot of bands tour with less.

“We have 48 boxes in the room,” Young says, as he points out all the speakers in the room. “This room is acoustically designed. We designed the shit out of this room. We have boxes here you’re not going to find unless you look for them. We have coverage everywhere in the venue. It’s a tight room. Really good visiting engineers love this place. They get to use their effects units for what they were designed for, like reverb for reverb, not trying to mask a standing wave from a column. There was a lot of thought that went into building this room.”

An example of that kind of thought involves another one of the Best Buy’s fellow tenants at 1515 Broadway, *The Lion King*. “We’re two floors below grade,” Young says. “The lobby for *The Lion King* is at street level, but the actual theatre is two flights up. So, there are four



photos courtesy of
arcadiamedia.com
bestbuytheater.com

(but no humidors – there’s no smoking in any public building in New York City!) and a refrigerator full of Red Bull.

“The first time through, people are a little reticent,” Young acknowledges. “I can understand why. I’ve been on tour. Your bunk is your world. The people who know us, who are return clients, are like, ‘You know what? The dressing rooms are totally chill.’ We’ve got big screen TVs, nice couches. It’s basically a hotel suite. We make it as comfortable as possible, knowing their vehicles will have to leave the premises. Besides which, this is the heart of New York! If you were here, do you think you’d want to hang out in this cave? Everything is here, and if it’s a nice day, they’ve got to go out and look around!”



floors of separation, but it still means we had to hang a floating ceiling. It’s all on uni-struts, a spring mounted suspension system, and they’re all acoustical panels. Before we opened, I had to do a pink noise test. I blew 120 db of pink noise. I had to wear a pair of gun mufflers. I went up to *The Lion King*, sat in the second row. Silencio.”

So, that helps ease the truck traffic up 44th for equipment load-ins and load-outs. The next issue they had to deal with was the human load-ins and load-outs. For many artists, their busses are their sanctuaries, and often serve as

dressing rooms. Face it, at many venues, the dressing rooms are an after-thought. In a no parking zone, however, nice dressing rooms are a necessity. The busses are going to be three-quarters of a mile away from the venue, at best. Fortunately, the Best Buy offers dressing rooms with better accommodations than some of the hotels. In addition to whatever food the rider requires, the dressing rooms are carpeted, nicely appointed, have comfortable, stylish chairs and sofas, a huge bathroom with a shower, a vanity and full length mirror, clothing steamers, iron and ironing board, wireless internet, a huge flat-screen TV, a humidifier

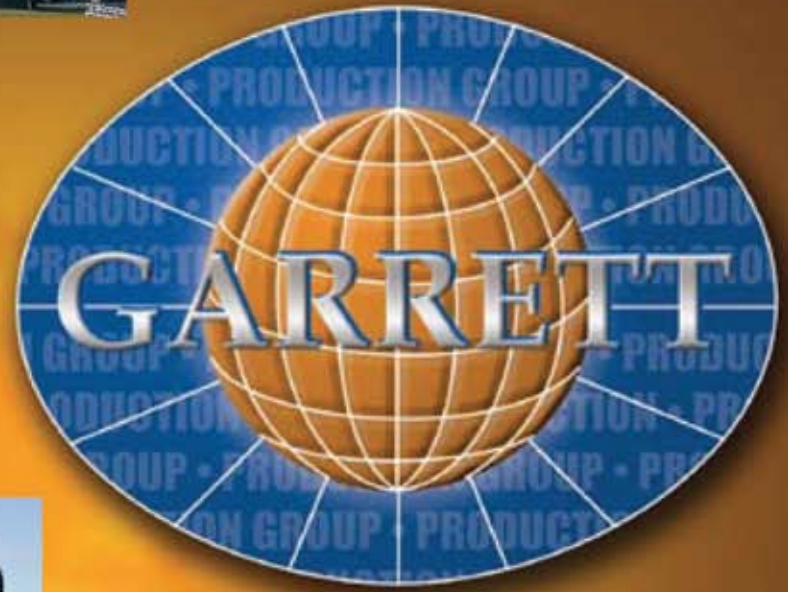
“But my motto is, ‘You are a guest in our house. I want you to be comfortable. ‘People ask me, ‘How’s your day going, Jeff?’ I tell them, ‘My day goes like your day. If you’re having a good day, I’m having a good day. If you’re having a bad day, it’s my job to make it better.’ The band is comfortable; the crowd gets a better show. We all come out winners. ‘You can’t park, but you still can rock!’” *

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JOSH GROBAN

STRAIGHT TO YOU TOUR 2011

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL A. BECK

Music Director/Guitar: Tariq Akoni
Drums: Gary Novak
Pianos/Keyboards: Mark Stephens
Bass: Andre Manga
Percussion: Tim Curle
Trumpet: Johnny Britt
Trombone: Claire Courchene
French Horn: Tawnee Lillo
Viola: Jeanie Lim
Violin: Lisa Liu
Cello: Mary "Ginger" Murphy
Danielle Ondarza—French Horn
Violin: Amy Wickman

BAND





BY MICHAEL A. BECK

JOSH GROBAN SHRINKS ARENAS TO THE SIZE OF A THEATER

WHEN THE TIME CAME FOR JOSH GROBAN TO HIT THE ROAD AFTER A FOUR YEAR LAYOFF, IT WAS DECIDED THAT HE WOULD DO SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR HIS FANS. THIS SOMETHING SPECIAL WAS A SERIES OF VERY INTIMATE EVENTS CALLED BEFORE WE BEGIN (BWB) SHOWS THAT TOOK PLACE IN 1,000 TO 2,000 SEAT THEATERS. THE IDEA WAS TO TAKE A NO-FRILLS PRODUCTION INTO A SMALL ROOM BACKED ONLY BY MUSIC DIRECTOR/GUITAR PLAYER TARIQH AKONI, PIANIST/KEYBOARDIST MARK STEPHENS. WHEN ONE THINKS IN TERMS OF "FRILLS" IN THE PRODUCTION WORLD, THE FEATURES THAT COME TO MIND ARE HUGE LIGHTING SYSTEMS, VIDEO WALLS AND A 13-PIECE BAND WITH ALL ITS BACKLINE GEAR. IN THIS CASE THE PRIMARY FRILL MISSING (APART FROM ALL THE OTHERS LISTED) WAS DISTANCE FROM THE AUDIENCE.

In the BWB shows the main idea of the format was to remove anything that would separate Groban from his audience. He came out and delivered his music in its most basic shape. He joked with his fans, allowed them to ask questions, and he didn't back away from them. This style of performing was perfectly suited for Groban's personality and would set the tone of the tour when it moved into arenas. The word of the day would be *intimate*. However, knowing that the main body of the tour would play to crowds as much as 15 and possibly even 20 times the size of those in the BWB gigs, the primary challenge would be to take the cavernous expanse of Madison Square Garden and shrink it down to the size of Town Hall Theatre some 12 blocks away. While this was done primarily through the unbelievable persona and performance skills of Groban himself, production technique did indeed have a hand in the game.

The idea for the set and content design started when Groban's Manager Peter Mensch was reading a magazine and came upon a story about a theatrical production of *Sunday in the Park with George* and the technology used to take the audience to any location the production required. Mensch didn't know what to do with this technology or where to go to access it, but he knew it was what Groban's *Straight to You* tour was looking for. He followed the production trail to London where he found Knifedge, which is, among many other things, a company that applies moving images to theatrical productions to enhance

or even create the contextual atmosphere through which the players (thus audiences) of the event will travel. According to Knifedge's website the company is careful to avoid using moving image as a theatrical gimmick or "cheap set" device, but to enhance the storytelling in ways which no other medium can.

Once everything was agreed upon and Knifedge was officially part of the team, Creative Director Timothy Bird sat down with David Farley and Knifedge Managing Director Jonathan Bridgen and began coming up with an idea. The first task was to figure out what the video content would be projected upon. What they came up with was a big statuesque structure that looks like the dilapidated ruins of an old theater. It was inspired by the strong desire to keep the show intimate in nature (if not in scale) coupled with imagery in Groban's "You Raise Me Up" music video clip.

In its naked state it's a white edifice with the texture of a brick wall. About one-third of the way in from the stage left side an ornate arch extends downstage from the wall toward the center of the stage at a (roughly) 60° angle. Viewed straight on this puts the apex of the arch directly at the center point of the stage. At a point on the downstage end of the arch it is broken off as if the rest of a once proud proscenium had fallen down in decay.

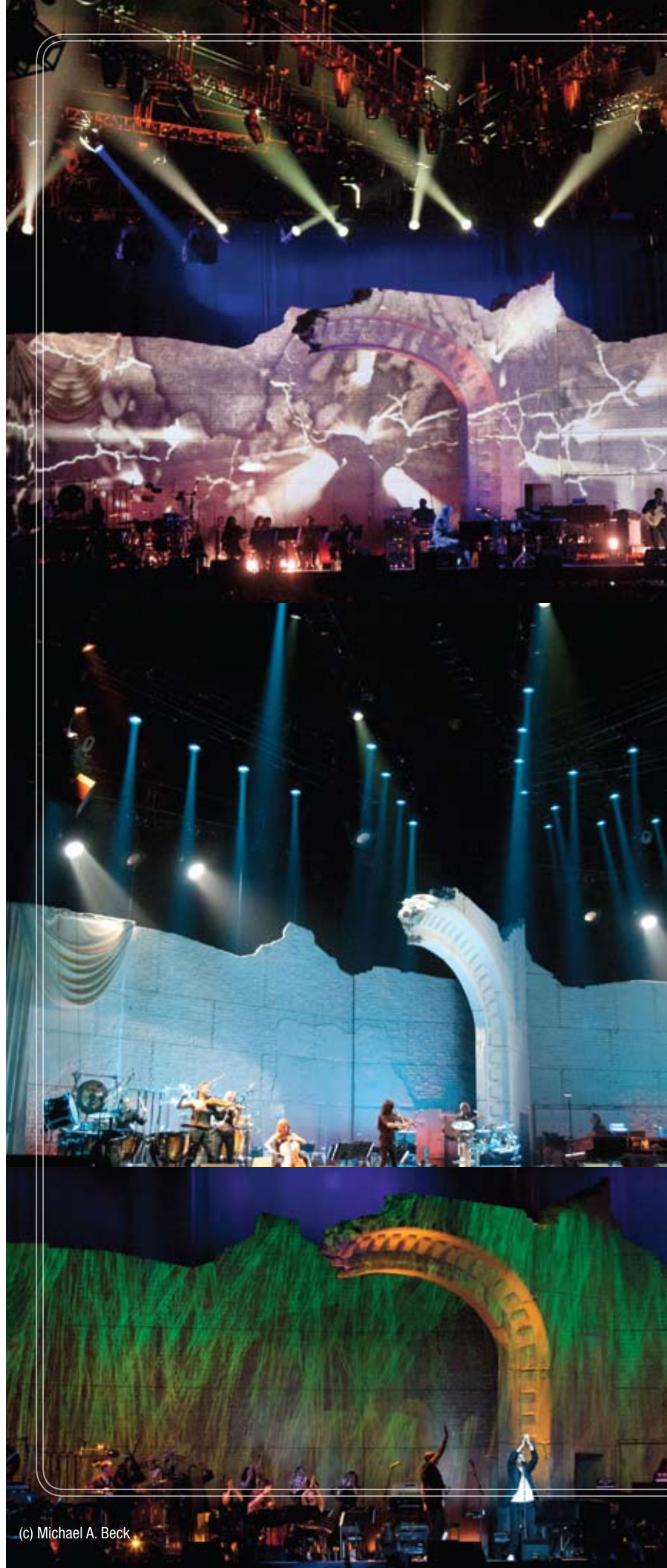
Built by Tait Towers, the set is 58' wide x 24' tall and composed of several interlocking flat panels that are 10' and 8' wide and 5' tall. Except for the arch and the simulated drape that seems to bow off the stage right end of the set, the panels have the look of a brick wall. Once the backing panel was constructed, the bricks were individually attached to the panel by hand. When the bricks were attached, artisans then came back through touching each one of them up and creating grout lines. Finally the panel was painted and hard-coated. From the time this project came to the doorstep of Tait Towers to the time it was ready for load-in, the whole process took two months. This includes bouncing ideas back and forth with all the parties involved on such matters as pattern, texture, finish and every other imaginable detail.

When the show was finally ready for full rehearsal in Bossier City, Louisiana, it could be built with two crew members. It's assembled in three sections. Each section is flown off its own stick of truss and lifted with truss-mounted cable winches. Two cars begin working at the same time from either end putting it together like an LED video wall. The panels are light enough that two stagehands can lift them off the cart and into position for assembly. As one level of the wall is completed, it's flown up to make room for the next line. When the wall sections have been completed all effort is concentrated on the arch section, which is built in the same way.

The system goes up with lightning speed. When the set is down and packed, it takes up one entire truck.

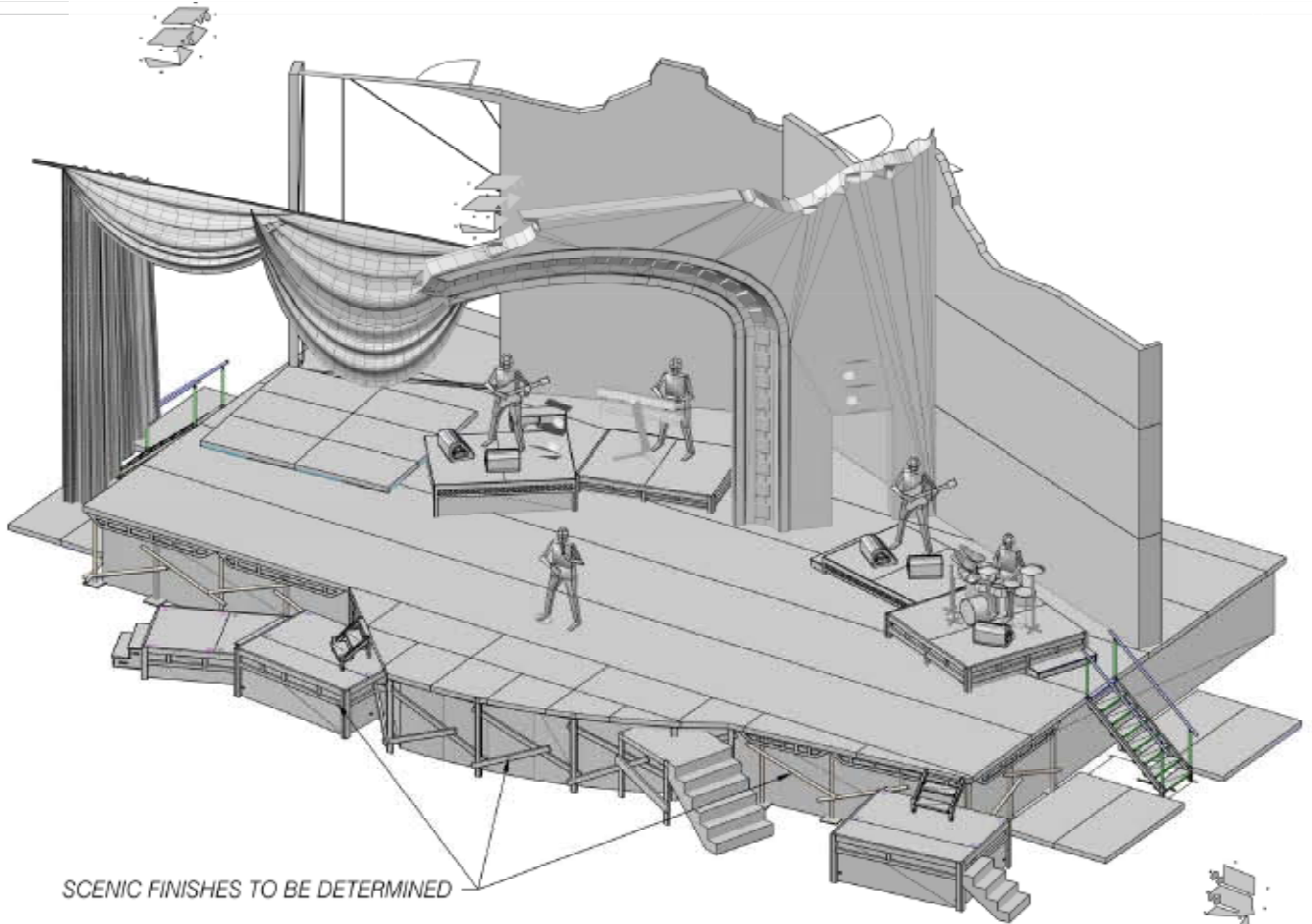
The reason for putting the wall up in three parts is primarily a rigging consideration so that if all the rigging isn't up for the entire wall, construction doesn't get held up. Production Manger Rodney Johnson was in agreement with everyone else on the outcome of the set piece of the wall. "The design idea was implemented because we needed a surface for video projection that didn't look generic. It turned out really well, and we're all happy with the way it looks, how it packs, and how it travels," said Johnson.

As was stated earlier, video content was designed by London based Knifedge. That task was made much easier by the fact that Knifedge also designed the surface upon which the content would be presented. It didn't hurt that the British wizards were brought into the project earlier in the game than is ever the norm for their company. Joint Managing Director Jonathan

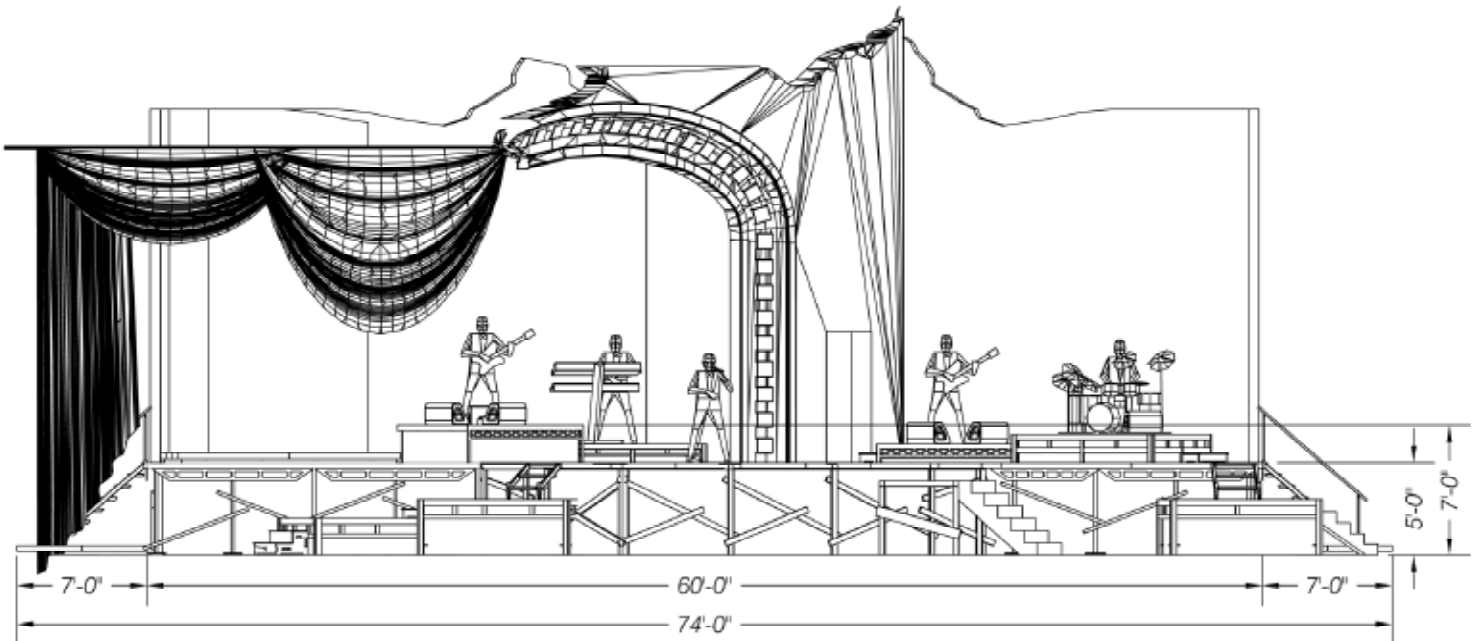


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Brigden explained, "Quite often we've come into projects rather late and much of the budget has already been spent on everything else. On this one, we were able to convince Josh and his management that this is the way to go. That gave us a great opportunity to integrate the set and video content from the beginning which is really the only way to do this level of work."

Another aspect of the design process Brigden was grateful for was that they were able to convince the overall team that there needed to be separation between lighting and video. "The temptation is always to whack the lights up and hit the stage with incredible amounts of light," Brigden said. "The projection has to have enough room to breathe. As John Broderick says, 'When one thing comes on, something else has to go off.' You can't just be blasting everything all the time."

A large part of the visual success of this show was in the hands of the rigging department. Video Crew Chief Steve Burkholder was very clear about that. "The riggers are probably the most important part of my set up as a projectionist. I need them to do the same thing every day with as little deviation as possible. If there's going to be a change even as small as a foot in any direction, I need them to come and tell me as soon in the day as they can," said Burkholder.

The reason for this tight precision is the amount of masking and image blending that is going on in this show. One could easily say so what, big deal?, especially in view of the size and scale of the projection issues that are happening out on Roger Waters' *The Wall* tour. There is certainly merit in that position except for one issue. On *The Wall* tour all the masking was taking place in precise but standard geometric shapes. The masking was based upon the shape of the bricks. The elegance of that gig was in the amazing timing involved.

On this show there is a whole other and equally challenging aspect. Apart from the vertical edges on the offstage ends of the set there are very few straight lines. That's an important fact because the set had to be hit from four directions with projection, and placement of the projectors was dictated by the arch in the set. Burkholder explained, "The biggest part of my





job on this tour was coming up with positions for my projectors to avoid creating shadows from the arch, and from there I had to figure out how to make it work.”

From the projectionists perspective the set is divided into four areas: far stage left, arch, area behind the arch, and far stage right. There was a stack of two Barco R22+ projectors assigned to hit each sector of the set. The set had to be hit top to bottom with absolute precision all the way across. Burkholder could not color outside the lines, and given the number of jagged edges on the set, the masking had to be based on a computerized model of the set. Once that was established the next task was to ascertain the placement of the projectors. Because distance was an issue, Burkholder chose to cross-shoot the stacks.

This means while the projectors were lined across the room as to be able to hit the wall straight on, the offstage left wall was addressed by the onstage left stack and the offstage left projectors hit the face of the arch. Likewise the offstage right portion of the wall was hit by the onstage right stack and the areal behind the arch was assigned to the offstage right stack.

AT ONE POINT DURING THE SHOW, HE BRINGS FOUR PEOPLE ONTO THE STAGE, SERVES THEM WINE (OR MILK, DEPENDING UPON THEIR AGE), THEN SINGS TO THEM.

The area behind the arch was the touchiest location of all because the image was being applied at such a sharp angle that focal variance from right to left was enormous. At one point the measuring gear had to be put away and Burkholder had to do it the old fashioned way. “You can only do so much with a lens calculator,” he explained. “Then it comes down to experience and what you can pull off.”

Once all the projectors were placed and aligned, they also now had to be blended as the video that hit the wall was one contiguous image all the way across, in front of and behind the arch. All of this is done in the corporate projection world on a regular basis. What makes this a stand-out challenge is the fact that they have a lot more time to set up than Burkholder and his crew do. Tick tock, tick tock; soundcheck at 5 p.m., doors at 6 p.m. every day. It is worth noting that the video element of this show runs off of a Catalyst media server and controlled with a Hog III controller. This work was so delicate and time critical that Catalyst creator Richard Bleasdale was brought into Bossier City to partially rewrite his software for the purposes of this gig. Another time related fix was that Burkholder built custom cages for the projectors to fly in so that they went up the very same way every day.

The result of all of this was nothing short of breathtaking. One young man who had never been to a concert in his life walked into the room during the day when video was being run and the first thing he remarked (within seconds) was that there was no shadow behind the arch. Be assured that the simple lack of shadow in that area was a noteworthy thing to see to even the most seasoned production veterans. Although this could not have compared to the amount of gear and attention being applied to *The Wall*, it was certainly comparable in terms of the sheer beauty and elegance of the finished look.

There were a lot more elements to this show than expected. There is a B stage upon which Groban opens the show and then comes back out and does an acoustic set with Tariq Akoni, playing mandolin and acoustic guitar, and Pro Tools Operator Rich

Spillberg, also on guitar and mandolin. Groban comes out into the house and interacts with the audience in one way or another eight times throughout the show.

All of this action needed to be blocked theatrically, and while Groban is definitely his own man in these affairs, he wanted to bring someone in who could take care of the show's traffic flow so that he could ultimately lean most heavily into the music. Enter the legendary John Broderick who was hired as lighting designer and show director.

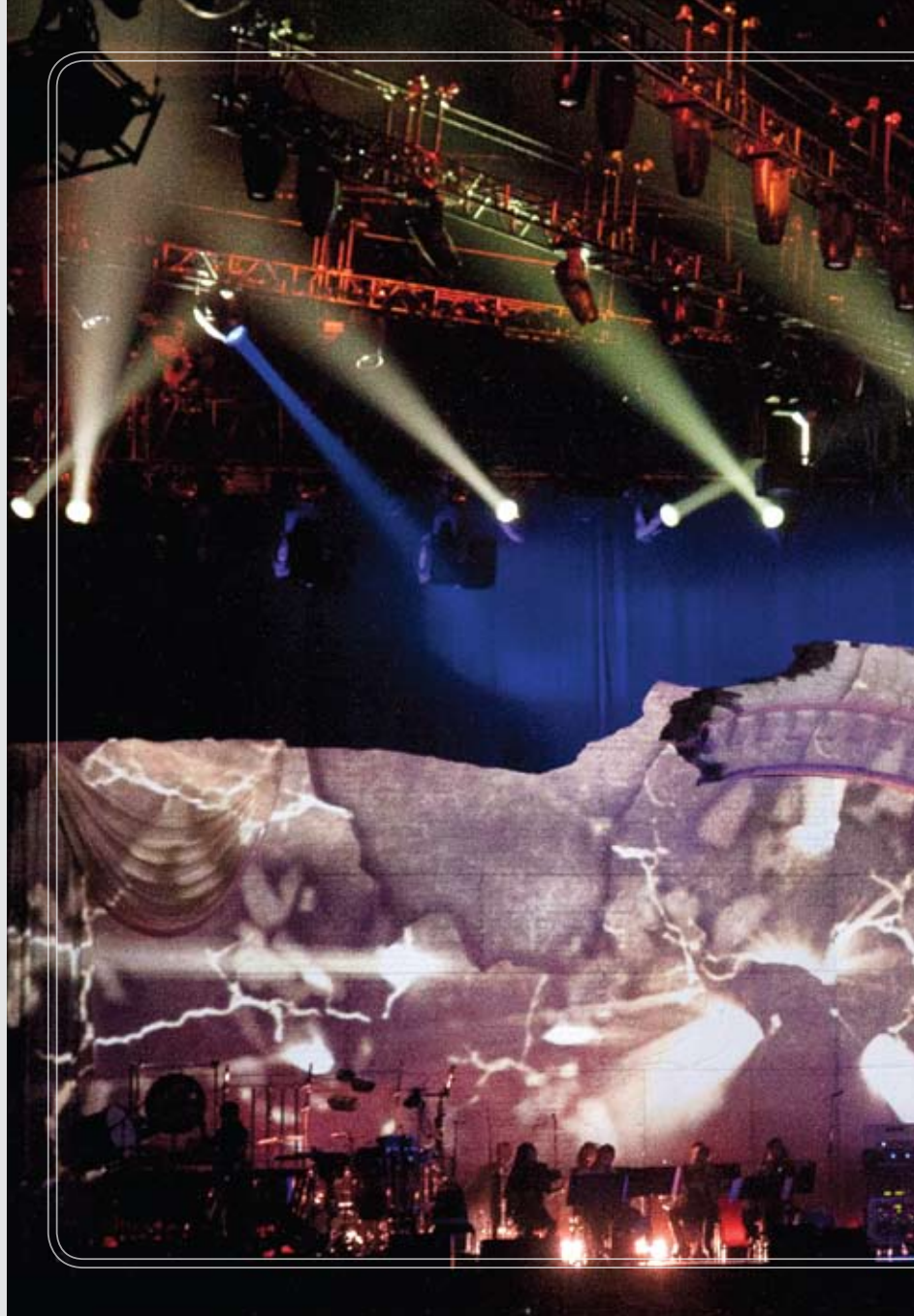
Groban's interaction with the audience was not the only blocking direction that was needed in the creation of this production. Although the video aspects of the show were well impressive to be sure, lighting played an equally important albeit subtle role in the visual impact of the production. However Broderick had a humble approach to his position on the team. He said, "Being the show director means you're the conductor, but a conductor is no good without a great orchestra."

One of the many places where Broderick's direction was indispensable was lighting design. There are times when the worlds of video and lighting collide and lighting comes away playing a subservient, almost ancillary role to the panache of video. Such is not the case here. Because there is no I-MAG on this show for which lighting has to be corrected, lighting actually has the odd role of taking the lead. Yes, there is no doubting the visual prominence of the projection in this show and, yes, there are times when lighting backs completely out. However, rather than seizing control of the eye all night, the video portion of the show exists (for the most part) to be the environment through which the show travels. Because of Broderick's artful lighting design, outstanding programming of Troy Eckerman, and the skillful timing of ubiquitous Lighting Director Mac Mosier, the *live* action on stage (in the name of Josh Groban) is never lost by contrast to the *virtual* action projected upon the set. Lighting and video come together seamlessly to slingshot what Groban is doing deeper into the experience of the night.

This organic alchemy is best seen in the times during the show when you look up and realize that what you've been looking at for the last minute or so on the wall isn't video at all, it's Eckerman doing his programming thing. There are some sensational video displays on the road but few feather into lighting with such fluidity as this.

All of this feathering and blending is done in the name of subtlety and the lighting package put forth by Upstaging did a great job. At times the show gently moves from one visual milieu to another with such gentle nuance as to be barely noticed. However, in a bizarre paradox one part of this subtlety is the gigantic presence of eight Syncrolite SX-Ls. When one thinks of a show of this nature, it's hard to immediately picture a light so powerful that it could light the pyramids being appropriate to the design. But when the task is to show the audience what a voice so powerful that it could move the pyramids looks like, the SX-Ls painted the picture with perfect clarity.

The rule of thumb in lighting has always been "light the money," and never let it be said that a designer at this level would ignore this first commandment. On the other hand, Broderick periodically did some beautiful work with side and back lighting on Groban that brought incredible texture to the artist without hitting him with key light. Broderick explained, "I hate perpendicular lighting that hits from straight on. I much prefer to come in from an angle because it models a body or a face with a lot more definition through the shadows it presents." He went on to add, "There is another side of that though. There were times when Josh would come up into the seats and watch with



me and say, 'When it's all about the video, I don't care if I'm not lit.' I would remind him that we have to balance that for the paying audience up here in the high seats. That's why we would go sometimes for an entire verse with him being lit from the side or behind."

At one point during the show Groban took questions from the audience. The way it worked was an announcement was made on the LED ribbon banner in the arena that Groban would be answering audience questions during the show and they should text their questions to the text address given in the announcement along with their name, section, row and seat number. All of this was done before the show during walk-in. Then during the set change Groban's personal assistant Stephanie Reed would select three questions with a fourth in reserve and the seating information would be handed to Mac Mosier who would task a light to each seating position. So when Groban spoke the name of the audience member that person would be well lit for the chat to transpire.

With all this talk of lighting and video, it's easy to skip past the audio portion of this show. Maryland Sound International's audio team on this show has significant challenges of its own. The system is built out to accommodate 140 channels, and FOH Engineer Mickey Beck says that they're using roughly 130 of those lines with 100 making it to the PA. There are 14 people on stage including Groban, which translates into a massive amount of audio activity. The keyboard rig takes up 10



THE BIGGEST PART OF MY JOB ON THIS TOUR WAS COMING UP WITH POSITIONS FOR MY PROJECTORS TO AVOID CREATING SHADOWS FROM THE ARCH, AND FROM THERE I HAD TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO MAKE IT WORK. ~ Steve Burkholder

channels and the piano chews up eight between mics and pickups, but the grand champion channel hog is, as one might expect, the ever growing percussion rig. While we never got to just how many lines are used for percussion, Beck did discuss an interesting triggering system. “We’ve got triggers on all the timpanis that control the gate. That way the gates aren’t controlled by the actual sound of the drum. They’re opened and closed by the triggers. We’re doing the same thing on the drum kit as well,” said Beck.

One would think with all of Groban’s movement out in the house there might be some concern about feeding back into the system, but Beck

seems unaffected by the issue. “It’s not that big of a deal. We have a lot of power behind this system and that gives us so much head room that we don’t have to worry about it. The thing that scares me is that we have front fills on the stage, and he comes running right by those things several times a night. That’s when I get nervous, but he’s really good about keeping an eye out for them, and it’s never been a problem,” said Beck.

Beck spoke to another matter that is a little more realistic as difficult situations go. “When Josh is playing on the B Stage, he’s directly in front of where I am, which puts him between me and the main system. These days he uses a one ear monitor and stage wedges. That means I’m hearing his monitor mix over mine, which makes it tough. What makes it more difficult is that I’m hearing the monitor mix about 100 milliseconds *before* I get what’s coming out of the mains because the PA is 100 feet away.”

The other side of that equation is Monitor Engineer Will Miller who has been working for Josh Groban for eight years. He explained how that longevity figures into the task of wrangling a stage with this many people on it. “I’m asked about this all the time. If I hadn’t been working for Josh this long this would be a two man job because of everything that’s going on up there with their ears and wedges. That’s complicated by the fact that Josh is using wedges for the first time in addition to one ear. So now we have wedges all over the place and that makes for a completely new environment.” Miller also can’t see the B stage when Groban is on it. Also there are a huge number of RF frequencies to deal with on a daily basis. Combine all of

this and you have several moderate challenges adding up to a day that keeps Miller on his toes.

One of the areas of touring that we rarely talk about is security. Security requirements differ from tour to tour depending on a long list of variables. This show lacks a security barricade because it would inhibit Groban’s ability to move freely through the crowd. There are three sets of stairs on the front of the stage leading down into the house. At first blush one would see these areas as security risks, and in the strictest possible context they are. Security Director Darren Norris takes the situation as seriously as any other making sure that security personnel are stationed at key locations to restrain any possible access to the stage. He admits that there has never been a problem with this crowd given that it isn’t exactly the demographic of concert goers who are likely to rush the stage.

The biggest security head press of any given day occurs during the show when Groban is moving through the crowd. Norris described how it works, “Every day Rodney Johnson and I put together a loose game plan for the way it’s going to go. I say *loose* game plan because once Josh gets out on the floor we don’t have any idea where he’s going to go,

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1



2



3



6



7



8



10



11



13



14



Production

Tour Manager: Dennis Brennan
 Road Manager: Janet Taylor
 Show Director: John Broderick
 Tour Accountant: Bob "Bd" Davis
 Production Mgr: Rodney Johnson
 Lighting Designer/Show Director: John Broderick
 Prod. Coordinator: Misty Roberts
 Band Assistant/Wardrobe: Yvette Romano
 Vip Coordinator: Uma Patel
 Stage Manager: Donnie Floyd
 Office Assistant: Brandon Suleski
 Personal Assistant to Josh Groban: Stephanie Reed

Security

Venue Security: Darren Norris

Backline

Guitar/Bass Tech: David "Pops" Clements
 Keyboard Tech: Mike Klvana
 Drum/Percussion Tech: Steve Rinkov

Audio

FOH Engineer: Mickey Beck
 Pro Tools Operator: Rich Spillberg
 Monitor Engineer: Will Miller
 System Engineer: Sven Giersmann
 Audio Techs: Kurt Springer, Travis White, Rares Balanean, Deven Villery

Lighting

LD: Calvin "Mac" Mosier
 Lighting Programmer: Troy Eckerman
 Lighting Crew Chief: Ron Schilling
 Dimmers: Jessica Quinn, Wade Cotten
 Lighting Techs: Josh Barnes, Benji Meserole, Mark Weil
 Syncro Lite Tech: Bob Slayton

Video

Projectionist: Chris Small
 Video Crew Chief: Steve Burkholder
 Catalyst Operator: Chris Nathan

Riggers

Head Rigger: Ken Mitchell
 2nd Rigger: Jeremy Caldwell

Carpenters

Head Carpenter: Josh Smith
 Carpenters: Mike Colucci, Albert Bermudez, David "Shuu" Guidish

Live Nation

Live Nation Tour Director: Blaine Brinton

Merchandise

Lead Merch Road Rep: Jeff Condon

Truck Drivers

Drivers: Gary Nall (Lead), Randy Rhoton, Tyler Rhoton, Bill Phillips, Russ Imperiale, Chad Holste, Hans Smith, Ray Niles, Randy Ennis, Steve Wilcoxson, Charles Hunt

Bus Drivers

Star Drivers: Leon Phillips, Geoff O'Connell
 Band Drivers: Bennie Johnson, Raymond Jacobs
 Crew Drivers: Danny Crum, Kerry Wittig, Brian Waldon, Eric Sewell

Pictured Left

1. Bob "Bd" Davis - Tour Accountant
2. Dennis Brennan - Tour Mgr, Janet Taylor - Road Mgr
3. Blaine Brinton - Live Nation Tour Dir.
4. David Romano - Groban's Voice Coach
5. Rich Spillberg - Pro Tools Operator/Guitar and Mandolin Player during show
6. Brandon Suleski - Office Assistant, Rodney Johnson - Production Mgr, Misty Roberts - Production Coordinator
7. Darren Norris - Venue Security
8. Stephanie Reed - Personal Assistant to Josh Groban
9. Donnie Floyd - Stage Mgr, Hazel Bol - Donnie's [very proud] Mom, Elaine Sosebee - Donnie's Sister
10. Deven Villery - System Tech, Rares Balanean - System Tech, Will Miller - Monitor Engineer, Kurt Springer - System Tech, Travis White - System Tech, Mickey Beck - FOH Engineer
11. Rich Spillberg - Guitar/Mandolin Player/Pro Tools Operator, David "Pops" Clements - Bass Tech, Michael Klvana - Backline Crew Chief/Keyboard Tech, Zak Klvana - Keyboard/Piano/Guitar Tech
12. Embrey Ardis, Jeremy Caldwell - 2nd Rigger, Austin Mitchell - Cool Guy, Ken Mitchell - Head Rigger
13. Jessica Quinn - Dimmer Tech, Calvin "Mac" Mosier - LD, Benji Meserole - Lighting Tech, Mark Weil - Lighting Tech, Wade Cotten - Dimmer Tech, Bob Slayton - Syncro Lite Tech, Ron Schilling - Lighting Crew Chief
14. Rick Berger - Carpenter, Albert Bermudez - Carpenter, David "Shuu" Guidish - Carpenter, Josh Smith - Head Carpenter
15. Steve Burkholder - Video Crew Chief, Chris Nathan - Catalyst Operator, Chris Small - Projectionist

HOW MANY POINTS DOES IT TAKE TO RIG A SHOW? JUST FIVE POINTS!

BY BILL ROBISON



JOHN FLETCHER AND BOBBY SAVAGE FORMED FIVE POINTS PRODUCTION SERVICES ALMOST OUT OF FRUSTRATION. BOTH WERE SEASONED VETERANS OF THE TOURING BUSINESS AND HAD BEEN RIGGING SHOWS FOR AS MANY YEARS AS THEY CAN REMEMBER. HOWEVER, AS TECHNOLOGY EVOLVED AND PRODUCTIONS BECAME INCREASINGLY SOPHISTICATED, FLETCHER BECAME DISSATISFIED WITH THE SERVICES OFFERED BY EXISTING RIGGING PROVIDERS. HE AND SAVAGE THUS CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THEY SHOULD BUY EQUIPMENT TO PROVIDE THE HIGHER LEVEL OF SERVICE THEY WERE UNABLE TO FIND ELSEWHERE. IN NOVEMBER OF 2001, FIVE POINTS PRODUCTION SERVICES WAS BORN IN FIVE POINTS, GEORGIA AND LATER MOVED TO NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.

We recently spoke to Fletcher on a Friday night as he made the 3.5 hour commute from Nashville to his home in Atlanta. We asked him what the process was to put together a workable rigging package for a show. He starts with the designs for sound, lighting, video and sometimes staging. Fletcher says these elements never fit together easily. Perhaps the sound designer must have his line array columns positioned in the same spot the lighting trusses need to be, or weight limitations force rigging points to be moved. His many years of experience as a master rigger have given him the insight needed to coordinate the elements into a workable package.

Once the rigging design is complete, equipment is packaged and sent out for the tour or event, it is important that a skilled team is with the production to implement the rigging design. Currently Five Points is supporting the Josh Groban tour. While not their largest package out, it is among the

most intricate. Video images emanating from eight projectors stacked in twos and shooting from four positions onto a very sophisticated set that requires its own rigging are only part of the story wherein sound and lighting require that rigging places equipment in the precise locations it is needed. Installing the Groban show into assorted venues is the job of Lead Rigger Ken Mitchell and Production Manager Rodney Johnson. Fletcher has a long-term working relationship with both and knows they have the skills to make the show present as the designers intended and give the audience a memorable experience.

Supporting some of the biggest names in entertainment, Five Points plays an important role in leaving audiences with a lasting impression. In addition to Groban, Five Points currently has rigging packages out with Rush, Taylor Swift, and U2. Its roster of clients past and present include: Walking With Dinosaurs, Metallica, Coldplay, The Red Hot Chili Peppers, The Rolling Stones, The Billboard Latin Music Awards, Victoria's Secret Fashion Show and many more. With a list like that you had better be on top of your game. And Five Points is.

The tools of the trade play an all important role in the services Five Points provides. Fletcher tells us they exclusively use Tour Lift motors distributed by Show Design. When Five Points started, these hoists were less expensive than the competition. Furthermore they were lighter and had an important safety feature, a dual brake. While touring Europe a number years ago Fletcher remembers productions were required to put safeties on all rigging including motors. In safety conscious Germany he noticed "these little square motors" that didn't have safety cables. He asked why and was told they have a dual brake. Ever since then his preference has been to use Tour Lift motors.

Safety is of paramount importance in the rigging business and Five Points makes it a high priority. When equipment returns to the shop from a tour, one off, or any other

function it is thoroughly inspected. Motors are load tested and chains greased at regular intervals more frequently than the manufacturer recommends. Wire rope is checked for kinks and fraying and discarded when problems are found. When asked about shackles Fletcher asks, "Have you ever seen the machine that forms shackles?" He tells us the many tons of force used in hammering out a new shackle is far greater than any abuse our industry is capable of subjecting them to. The biggest problem he has with shackles is they seem to disappear all by themselves.

While on the subject of safety we asked Fletcher his thoughts on certifying riggers. He said he welcomes standards that ensure all riggers are experienced and follow industry standard practices. While classrooms and books may offer the basics, he emphasizes that there is no substitute for on the job experience. He also believes the entertainment industry has a very good track record in terms of safety. Fletcher is confident that when our tiny industry is compared to manufacturing and construction our incidence of injury rate is very low.

Five Points is a very busy place given the number of rigging packages on the road and upcoming shows in the planning stages. We asked if the recent floods in Nashville had caused them any damage. Fletcher told us their shop had been full of water but because most of their equipment was up on racks, the damage was minimal. There was destruction but it was nothing when compared to the devastation many of our industry associates suffered. Five Points has since moved to a new shop location still in Nashville.

We asked him what rigging design he considered most memorable and after a pause he said Metallica. He seemed very pleased with that work. When asked what job was his biggest challenge, Fletcher's reply probably mirrors a lot of small business owners in the event production industry. Five Points clearly has the connections to attract an

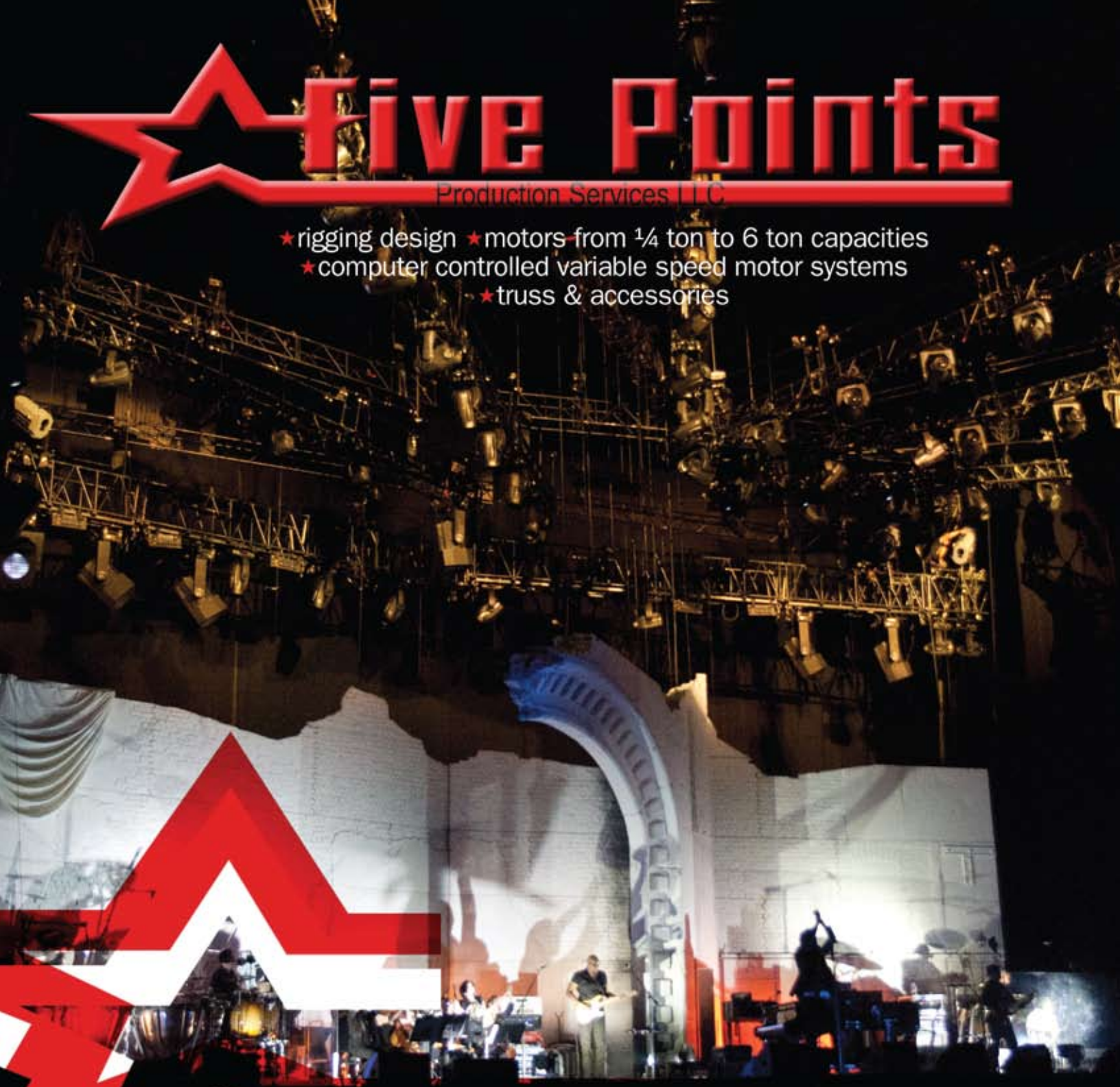
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MARYLAND SOUND INC.

A STEALTHY COMPANY WITH A BIG FAT SOUND

BY EVAN WILLIAMS



“IF I TOLD YOU I WOULD HAVE TO KILL YOU.”

IT IS SUCH A CLICHE THAT IT IS HARD TO EVEN TRACK DOWN THE PHRASE’S SOURCE IN THAT REPOSITORY OF ALL KNOWLEDGE – GOOGLE. SOME CITE CLASSIC LITERATURE AND OTHERS BAD 80S MOVIES BUT IN THE CASE OF BOB GOLDSTEIN AND MARYLAND SOUND IT JUST MAY BE TRUE.

“Touring is a very difficult market,” he says. “We do a lot of touring but we engage in some other activities as well. Some that people know about and some that people don’t.”

On the “Stuff People Know About” list would be things like being a “go-to” company for a number of audio gear makers looking for input on product development, making some of their own very cool stuff including wedges that can take pretty much anything the elements can throw at them and high profile gigs that would make a lot of sound companies do the old “run away with their tail between their legs” trick. The big one is New Years Eve in Times Square but we made the mistake of trying to start our interview two days before another big one -July 4th on the National Mall in Washington DC. (A bad move that we will spend years living down but we were shown mercy and got some time on the phone a couple of days after that big event.)

On the touring side of the of the “Stuff People Know About” equation is a list of clients that is notable both for their marquee value and for their loyalty to MSI. From Neil Diamond to Daryl Hall and John Oates to Josh Groban, MSI clients tend to stick around for a while.

Groban is currently out with MSI on a tour that is scheduled to go through the end of the year. The specs? Mickey Beck at front of house. Will Miller in monitor world. JBL

VerTec. Studer Vista5SR out front and a pair of Yamaha PM1Ds backstage. JH Audio in-ears. Shure IEM packs and 38 channels of wireless. (!?!?) Plus 24 wedges (a new addition on this tour). And a “small fortune” in DPA string mics.

“The band is a core rhythm/rock band with supplemental strings and horns,” said Miller. “In the “main band” we have drums, percussion, bass, keys, and guitar. In addition, we have a string quartet, two French horns, trumpet and trombone. Each is close mic’d (DPA 4099 for the strings, Sennheiser 908B for the horns) and each uses an RF transmitter. They move around throughout the show, so they needed be done this way.”

Out front, Beck mans the Studer which is running 120+ inputs at 96 kHz, fully redundant. Goldstein is a big fan of the Studer desk having personally put it up directly against most of the other contenders in direct shoot-outs.

“It sounds amazing,” Goldstein said. “We have done a bunch of demos/shoot-outs, and we do it right. Same band, same inputs in multiple consoles and people can hear the difference right away.

“We have had so many conversations with so many engineers about problems. ‘My singer has a strange voice and I have to do all this stuff’ to fix it’, but we get them on the Studer - set flat - and the issues evaporate. It sounds great right out of the box.”

As big a fan as he is, Goldstein was surprised at the difference in sound quality when they switched to 96 kHz. “We thought it sounded phenomenal at 48,” he said. “Almost instantly when we switched to 96K, it was amazing how audible the difference is. Amazing difference with an emphasis on ‘clear.’”

Back in monitor world, Will still has his hands full.

“I’m still using a pair of PM1Ds to mix monitors,” Miller says. “In terms of speed,

I’m faster on Yamahas than anything else and very few consoles have enough mix buses to handle what this gig requires. Plus, the double surfaces give me a lot of faders to grab, which is very important when things have to move fast.”

The wireless count includes all of those wireless mics on the strings and horns plus a ton of in-ears. “Everyone in the band is on JH Audio molds, either JH5s or JH13s. The JH stuff is simply amazing,” Miller reported. “The high end goes way higher than the molds we used to be on and you can actually feel the lows. It’s a little hard to describe.”

But even with all of those IEMs, Miller has to deal with wedges, too.

“Josh is VERY particular about his monitors, but after working with him for eight years I’ve got a pretty good handle on how to translate his requests into technical changes,” Miller said. “The hardest part this time has been transitioning to wedges, something he’s never used before. Literally never. He didn’t work his way up through clubs, he started his career with TV stuff and then transitioned right into pretty serious touring. As a consequence, there were some things to learn about mic technique when you’ve got wedges and what they’re going to do to the overall sound, but these wedges actually alleviate a lot of those issue, so he STILL doesn’t know how bad crappy club wedges can sound.”

The wedges are a mixture of MSI proprietary HEX-12s and HEX-15s which Miller calls “fantastic” and says the coverage pattern “has to be heard to be believed.”

“Most people assume Groban’s stage would be fairly quiet,” Miller said. “But I can tell you it’s actually pretty loud up there! Between the wedges and our drummer Gary Novak (Alanis Morissette, Chick Corea) it’s plenty vibrant. But I can get good level without doing much chopping. The goal is to get great sound out of the wedges that’s

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Josh, thank you for setting the bar so high.
And inspiring us to jump over it every night.



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KNIFEDGE AT THE CUTTING EDGE OF CONTENT CREATION

IT'S PERHAPS NO SURPRISE THAT THE COMPANY BEHIND THE EXTRAORDINARY PRODUCTION DESIGN OF JOSH GROBAN'S TOUR IS, IN ITSELF, A PRETTY EXTRAORDINARY CREATIVE AGENCY.



Based to the north of London's Soho district, Knifedge has been carving a niche for itself in creative media content for live events, broadcast and digital platforms since 2003.

The agency is headed up by three highly passionate and creative individuals – joint managing directors Jonathan Bridgen and Matthew Freeman, and creative director Timothy Bird. Bridgen and Freeman both hail from music backgrounds; Bird is a former broadcast design director for the BBC, a set designer and an expert in moving image creativity.

Altogether, Knifedge employs around 13 people, from film-makers to animators, designers to projection specialists, producers to project managers. It's this eclectic mix of specialists and a culture of creative collaboration which Bird believes sets the agency apart from its peers.

"I think the big difference with Knifedge is the sheer diversity of work we like to do," explains Bird. "One month we might be working on a rock tour, the next it might be a Broadway show, a charity film, a corporate website, a TV channel identity or a global sports event. It's when you start to combine skills from all these creative disciplines in new ways that really exciting things start to happen."

Bird himself is living proof of the effectiveness of this kind of controlled creative chemistry. Having worked extensively in broadcast design across on and off-channel branding, scenic design, animations, titles and promo films, he was convinced there was potential to transfer these skills and techniques into live environments using creative video and projection design.

His big break came when he was commissioned with David Farley to work on the design for Sunday in the Park with George in 2005, a theatrical production about the life of painter George Seurat. The extraordinary projections which resulted – where Seurat's paintings came to life in front of audiences' eyes and actors interacted with live projections – saw the play win a string of top awards for set design. After transferring from the Fringe to the West

End & Broadway, Bird and Farley won an Olivier Award for Best Set Design and narrowly missed out on a Tony. Knifedge's reputation soared.

Projection and video design remain key strengths of Knifedge's offering, and top projection designer Nina Dunn has been part of the Knifedge family for around four years. In the last 2 years alone, the agency has master-minded projection design for a host of high profile live events – from the World Indoor Athletics Championships in Doha, to UK comedy tours for British acts Armstrong & Miller and Katy Brand, to Paris-based fashion events for P&G and Hermes and, of course, the Josh Groban tour. Earlier this year, the agency created one of the UK's largest ever human-powered projection stunts, with 60 cyclists powering a giant film on the side of London's Royal Albert Hall to mark Earth Hour for the World Wildlife Fund.

"We love projects where we can push the creative boundaries and mix elements of projection, animation, scenic design and lighting," says Bird. "I'm a great believer in creative collaboration. I know some creatives can be very protective about their work and their intellectual property but at Knifedge, I'd like to think we're very open-minded about working with other people and companies to produce something truly extraordinary for our clients."

In fact, collaborative working was what brought the three Knifedge directors together in the first place. All ended up sharing an office, but working independently, in the late 1990s. At the time, Bridgen was working as a music session fixer, tour manager and arts consultant. His clients included the likes of Sir Paul McCartney, Siouxsie Sioux, Guy Chambers, Elbow, Suede and Placebo. Freeman had been Head of Classical Music for Sony in Australia, then A&R Director at Naxos and Head of Media at The Music Sales Group.

As friendships grew, each spotted one another's complementary skills, and they started working collaboratively on projects. Knifedge was born

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JOHN HUDDLESTON ISSUES A CALL TO A HIGHER STANDARD OF SAFETY

BY MICHAEL A. BECK

FROM TIME TO TIME MOBILE PRODUCTION MONTHLY WRITES STORIES THAT PROFILE VARIOUS COMPANIES THAT SERVICE THE NEEDS OF THE PRODUCTION INDUSTRY. SUCH WAS THE CASE WHEN WE CALLED UPSTAGING'S MANAGING DIRECTOR OF LIGHTING SERVICES JOHN HUDDLESTON.

THE INTENTION WAS TO TALK ABOUT JOSH GROBAN'S CURRENT STRAIGHT TO YOU TOUR, PAUL MCCARTNEY, RIHANNA, KATY PERRY AND ALL THE OTHER GREAT TOURS THEY HAVE OUT THIS SUMMER.

ON ANY OTHER DAY THAT IS EXACTLY HOW IT WOULD HAVE GONE.

Unfortunately, on this day Huddleston was a little busy replacing lighting equipment and trucks Upstaging lost when the [promoter supplied] roof collapsed in the already famous incident at the Ottawa Bluesfest on July 18, 2011. Therefore, he wasn't in the mood to have a "blue skies" chat about how good things are, despite the fact that things are going quite well for the company in general. But that didn't mean he didn't want to talk. He just had a different topic in mind.

"Can you imagine getting a call that a loved one was harmed or killed in a stage collapse?" he asked. "You can't just leave it at being a horrible news story on the other



I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE TRUCK OR THE EQUIPMENT. I REALLY DON'T. THE INSURANCE COMPANIES WILL SORT ALL THAT OUT. I'M A LOT MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FACT THAT OUR DRIVER GOT INJURED AND OTHERS WERE LUCKY NOT TO BE KILLED." ~ John Huddleston

side of a TV screen or a story on the internet. We're talking about a fan, stagehand, crew member, band member, mother, son, daughter or father."

It would be one thing if this were an isolated once in a decade phenomenon, but such is not the case, which is at the heart of Huddleston's consternation. "Stages collapse every year. Just look it up on YouTube or Google, 'stage collapse' and several photos and stories come up! When these things happen everyone in the industry just passes the stories around shakes their head at how bad it was or could have been, but nothing gets done. Who's doing something about it?"

One thing that Huddleston is careful to make clear is that he's not trying to engage circular firing squad of finger pointing

"I don't know the reason it happens. I'm not blaming anyone. I'm just asking, as an industry what are we willing to do better to make sure this doesn't happen? How are we keeping our shows safe? I always hear that at the last second people are pulled off the stage and they run from the disaster 'just in time.'"

According to Huddleston there were several people directly behind the stage when the roof fell back directly over them. Had it not come to rest on one of Upstaging's trucks parked nearby there would have been a much different story to tell. But he is not concerned about the damage to the truck or the lighting system that was lost. There are bigger issues to be dealt with. "I don't care about the truck or the equipment. I really don't. The insurance companies will sort all that out. I'm a lot more

concerned about the fact that our driver got injured and others were lucky not to be killed.”

With all of this being said, Huddleston is not one to complain without offering solutions. “What I think should happen immediately on a gig like this is when a production manager or a department head rolls off the bus they should meet with a site safety officer who will say ‘here’s how we’re working today’. This should happen even before going to the rigger and marking the floor. This person would have all of the data regarding weather forecast, stage evacuation and all the other information needed for this environment. It’s not right for a production manager to have to become an engineer or a meteorologist for the day.”

Huddleston admits that there are standards in place for outdoor show sites but questions how strictly they are being enforced by the industry. He also wonders if they go far enough. However, he does identify one area where much, if not all, of this can be clearly laid out and sternly imposed. “Bands have a lot of power to request all kinds of things such as catering, security, dressing room sofas, etc. How about adding temporary structure requirements to the rider?”

He laid out a rough sketch of such a rider addendum regarding the aforementioned morning meeting with the venue safety officer which would outline the following:

- Stage engineering certificates and safety procedures / statements
- Break-away weather / wind protection (stage curtains are in place and fastened with proper hold downs that will release)
- On-site weather station monitoring wind speed, lightning and direction of storms
- Connection to local emergency departments for weather warnings
- On-site emergency personnel and fire watch
- The presence of a on-standby show electrician that can turn off power and show you how the power was run that day
- Evacuation plan for venue and stage with battery operated lighting for pathways
- Storm shelters?

“These are things that come from the top of my head,” Huddleston admits. “I’m sure there are many more suggestions out there regarding steps we can take to try and keep people safe. Maybe at the next Tour Link Conference, instead of talking about how we designed the latest mega-show, we can talk about ways to make sure everyone comes home from that mega-show.”

The recent stage collapse in Ottawa was really a close call, the latest of far too many. If the stage would have fallen forward on the audience, lots of families would have gotten “the call”. As it was, had the stage *not* landed on top of a semi parked backstage there would have surely been several deaths related to this incident. So everyone walks away saying, “We sure were lucky on that one...” AGAIN.

But in the absence of preparation all that’s left is luck. So what is there in the absence of luck?

We’ll see you at Tour Link. And we will find time to discuss... *

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S.O.R.D. INTERNATIONAL SECURITY IS MORE THAN YOU THINK

BY MICHAEL A. BECK

THE FACE OF A SECURITY DETAIL CAN CHANGE FROM ONE CLIENT TO THE NEXT DEPENDING ON A WIDE VARIETY OF CIRCUMSTANCES. THE PRECAUTIONS TAKEN FOR JOSH GROBAN, TAYLOR SWIFT, JANET JACKSON OR METALLICA ARE ALL GOING TO BE MUCH DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER. THIS REQUIRES THAT THE PEOPLE MANAGING THE SECURITY EFFORT IN ANY GIVEN ENVIRONMENT ARE ABLE TO FUNCTION IN STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL MINDSETS WITH EQUAL AND MAXIMUM EFFECTIVENESS.

THAT MEANS SERIOUS TRAINING. AT SOME POINT IN TIME "ROADIES" GREW UP AND BECAME HIGHLY SOPHISTICATED ENGINEERS AND TECHNICIANS RATHER THAN SOMEONE WHO COULD LIFT HEAVY STUFF AND SCORE CHICKS FOR THE BAND. THE SAME EVOLUTION TOOK PLACE IN THE SECURITY ASPECT OF TOURING. GONE ARE THE DAYS (IN MOST CASES) WHEN SECURITY FOR A CONCERT TOUR IS HANDLED BY THE LIFELONG BUDDY OF THE ARTIST WHO JUST HAPPENED TO BE THE TOUGHEST GUY IN THEIR NEIGHBORHOOD GROWING UP.



Darren Norris is the Vice President of Special Operations Research and Development International (S.O.R.D.) and is responsible for coordinating and managing the day to day operations of the company's Tactical Training, Security Services, Corporate Training and Product Divisions. He has lectured on law



enforcement and military tactics, security operations and corporate management both domestically and abroad. He is internationally recognized as a specialist in both the training and operational disciplines of tactical operations, security assessments and as an accredited educator in corporate training and security procedures.

S.O.R.D. was created in 1996 by Darren and his wife Tracey who is a veteran of the United States Army's Judge Advocate General's Corps and the president of the company. Darren explained how the company began, "We started the company just doing basic tactical training for law enforcement and military. It involved topics such as advanced shooting and close quarters defensive tactics courses. Then we started instructing a full tactical curriculum which ranges from protective security courses to S.W.A.T. schools, 'we' being the guys that I'd worked with on S.W.A.T. the past."

As odd as it may sound, by this time the company was more of an avocation than a proper enterprise. But as time passed and business picked up, and the company was being called to facilitate courses not just around the country but around the world, the need arose to become more formal in its approach to operations. So in 2004 the venture came on line fulltime under the masthead of S.O.R.D. as an established training business offering instruction in a broad array of areas including protective services, explosive breaching and sniper schools.

While words like explosive breaching and

sniper school can have a pretty harsh ring to them, when you find a loved one in the hands of the bad guys for no other reason than the simple act of walking into a bank, these are most assuredly the people you want on the job.

Around the same time S.O.R.D. became a full-time concern another world opened up to the company. "A friend that I'd taught S.W.A.T. schools with called me up from Los Angeles about working the 2006 Grammy's with him," Norris recalled. "So I went and I did security for Linkin Park the day before the show and the day of. Shortly after that the same company got me out working with System of a Down. After that I decided to branch out on my own."

The first tour that Norris did under the umbrella of S.O.R.D. was Evanescence with whom a relationship is still maintained. Among the list of entertainment clients on S.O.R.D.'s roster is Josh Groban currently out on his Straight to You tour. We asked about the challenges of this tour and as one might expect Norris was not able to go into great detail of the security precautions he takes, although he was able to shed some interesting general information concerning one aspect of this particular gig.

The tour is frequently visited by high profile personalities such as foreign dignitaries or government officials who require their own security details that have to dovetail into the tour's security effort. Because of Norris's heavy military and law enforce-



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ment background the blending of forces usually happens pretty smoothly.

On one recent occasion the governor of Virginia came out to a show and such a security merge took place. "You have to understand there are a lot of alpha male personalities on these teams," he confesses. "When we all come together there is a lot of eyeing each other and territorial sizing up, so I just break the ice and let them know about my position on the tour and my law enforcement background. Once that happens we are able to get down to the specifics of situation at hand."

The biggest issue to be addressed with the visiting security detail is to ascertain if there are any immediate threats facing the visiting dignitary. "I like to meet with the detail leader directly to make sure that our individual security plans do not conflict with each other's," Norris says. "What I'm also doing is a last minute threat assessment because this person is there. Have there been any current threats to the governor that I have to know about? That affects how I operate."

Norris establishes what are called "immediate action plans" for every show. For logical reasons he wouldn't go into detail of how these plans roll out, however, in general terms the arrangements cover such circumstances as fires, natural disaster and even bombings. "I have a react plan in place for all of those things so that I'm not scrambling in the event that something comes up," Norris explains. "I have pre-planned routes. I always have a safe haven in the event there is an active shooter in the building. There

are security guys out there with similar backgrounds and I really hope they're taking the time to plan the same contingencies. Having been involved with two work place shooting incidents as well as other tactical situations with S.W.A.T. I know that stuff can take off at any minute."

While planning for the possible eventually of a bombing in this particular work environment may have seemed a bit much eleven years ago, such is not the case today. While in the Philippines in recent years a bomb went off in a shopping mall across from the band's hotel. While Josh Groban had left the day before, members of the tour were still there. During the ensuing confusion all those traveling with Josh Groban's team were able to navigate the situation with minimal difficulty.

It would be wonderful to correctly assume this world to be totally inhabited by good hearted, well-meaning, logically minded people who think their way through all 24 hours of every day and live those days without causing pain to the person next to them. Unfortunately that simply isn't true. The tragic reality is that there are bad people in the world who wish to cause pain either one on one or indiscriminately in the largest numbers possible. There are good people who just don't think about the consequences of their actions and wind up causing harm to themselves and those around them. And yes, there are people who have emotional and psychological imbalances who can also be at the heart of significant crisis. People in all of these groups and many others are (for the most part) free to move through society unnoticed and their effect on any given situation is only rarely ever foretold.

It is for that reason that we can be glad that a company like S.O.R.D. International is there not only providing a security blanket for concerts and other special events, but also training military and law enforcement

personnel around the country and the world to do the same in a myriad of situations that come up in life.

Darren Norris' career in public service began in 1986 when he joined the United States Navy. While in the Navy he served as a propulsion engineer on the USS Kirk and later as a member of the Navy's security forces assigned to the 7th Fleet. After leaving the Navy and completing college he became a law enforcement officer in South Carolina. As a former Division Commander of Special Operations with a Sheriff's Office in South Carolina he has been involved with S.W.A.T. operations for over 16 years and has served in various capacities ranging from entry team member to Special Team Commander, narcotics/vice investigations and various patrol management positions. He is an accredited police instructor through the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy and is certified to instruct in patrol, firearms, combatives and tactical operations. He has been involved in and commanded numerous tactical operations including drug raids, barricaded subjects, hostage rescue, witness and dignitary protection as well as the 1997 R.E. Phelon incident in South Carolina. S.O.R.D. also conducts a five week protective security program that is accredited through various government agencies and well as the University of South Carolina.

Today with providing security for several tours as well as the ongoing training operations, S.O.R.D. International seems to have its a full plate. When asked how he is able to successfully serve the two masters of tour security and law enforcement training Norris laughed heartily and humbly said, "No, no, no. There is a third and much greater master. I have a wife and kids."

This guy is truly squared away. ★



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All this goes to show that much more goes into the video content of a show than just a couple of guys on stage with a camera and some fixed cameras on-stage. Certainly it's cool to see an artist's guitar emblazoned on a 30-foot-tall screen, but the more subtle images help make the concert.

"The balance between live video like I-MAG and prepared content has varied with every artist I've every worked with," LaValley says. "I'd guess that we supply about two-thirds of a show, with the rest coming from the LD and camera departments as live video or lighting-only looks. We're also developing ideas that go beyond the traditional distinction between 'live' content from a camera and 'prerecorded' content like video and graphics. We've started to work more closely with the vendors to enable the music, or indeed the artist, to influence – live – what the graphics are doing on the screens."

All this makes LaValley a very happy camper. He feels like this is the work he was meant to do. "I'm very fortunate in that I love what I do. When I was a kid growing up in northern England in the 80s, the six things that thrilled me were music, photography, design, architecture, film and California. Somehow 20 years later, either by accident or design, I've combined all those things. I have no complaints," concludes LaValley. *

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enviable client base. Rigging they know how to do. Learning to run the business is the newest and most difficult job facing him. Paperwork and conforming to all the rules and regulations is a new ballgame. However with almost 10 years of operations under their belt, Bobby Savage and John Fletcher are likely to be around for a long time as Five Points Production Services. *

also loud, not either/or. This is especially challenging with Josh on a custom 5200/KK105 microphone, which is still the most real sounding wireless handheld mic out there today."

Anyone touring knows that wireless gets more difficult seemingly by the day and with so many transmitters on stage, it makes for a "fun" set up.

"It's f&*ing tough! I'd be sunk without my tech, Travis White, who's great with RE. He does the plotting, I do the programming, and we try to do the daily testing together. The hardest part is finding the time to do all the channels (38!) We have a five-man crew, including Mickey and I, plus an A and a B stage. There are a LOT of tasks that need to get done everyday, and you'll never end up with more time than you need for wireless."

Back to Bob... He still goes out to a lot of shows but he knows Groban's act and needs more intimately than many soundco owners know some of their clients having "un-retired" from the road in 2002 to mix house for Groban, handing the job off to Mickey Beck in 2005. And it is not an easy job, but Goldstein is used to demanding clients.

"When I first started out, I did Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons. I was with them 18 years and Frankie is a driver. He's not tough today at all, but was back then..." Goldstein remembered. "There were monitors, but Frankie cued off FOH and if it was not right he knew it.

"Frankie had one rule: Make it just loud enough to be little uncomfortable. Just keep the crowd a little bit out of their seats. Josh is similar. He is picky but picky in a free way. He lets you do your job. All he wants is big, fat, clear sound with good comments from the audience. He wants it pumping but not offending. If there are a few people who walk out because they think it is too loud, but the rest of the crowd is going crazy, he is OK with it. Yes, he's a classic singer but this is not an 'easy listening' show. It rocks." *

when they formally joined forces in 2003, but entrepreneurial enthusiasm still exists in abundance in the agency's culture.

Bridgen and Freeman's music and arts background has certainly helped give Knifedge credibility in the market, and a recognition of the balance needed between visual creativity and performer prominence. These days, both have moved away from artist management. Instead, through Knifedge, they are focusing exclusively on branding, marketing, and creative work for the music industry, as well as for charities, corporates, theatres and broadcasters.

"We do so many different kinds of creative projects that it's sometimes challenging to define ourselves," says Bridgen. "But ultimately, everything we do is about creating powerful media content that makes audiences stop and think 'wow'. Content which goes way beyond people's expectations, touches them emotionally and prompts extraordinary reactions."

Those reactions take many forms. In the music and theatre worlds, Knifedge's projection and video design work has left many audiences spellbound, and won warm praise from critics, press and award judges alike. It's notable that much of the agency's work to date has come from word of mouth recommendations or positive press coverage – including the call from Groban's manager Peter Mensch after reading about the groundbreaking work behind Sunday in the Park with George, in the New York Times.

But Knifedge's work is also having a very direct impact for many British charities. Last Christmas, the agency enlisted the support of a range of top British comedians, and filmed them popping out of a Christmas cracker for a corporate e-Christmas card campaign. So successful was the project that it raised £650,000 for Crisis, the homeless charity, and has since won several top digital marketing awards.

Likewise, two years ago, Knifedge created a series powerful animated viral films depicting famous hate crimes in the style of video games to drive awareness of Holocaust Memorial Day amongst younger audiences. The films caused a huge stir online, generating 1.6 million hits in the first 2 weeks and the campaign was featured on the media pages of several national newspapers in Britain.

"We want to make a real difference to anything and anyone we work with," concludes Brigden. "Creativity only works if it blends seamlessly with a project and lifts it to a higher level. Once it starts trying to be clever for the sake of it, things fall flat. You've got to integrate creative ideas with the essence of a show or a brand. And when it all comes together, it's magic." *

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so we have to read the play and get someone out in front of where we think he's heading. I have it easy because I'm always directly behind him."

Before each foray into the house Norris sends a few security people out to clear the isles. Depending on the mood and behavior of the crowd the timing of this action will precede Groban's move by anywhere from 30 seconds to as much as two or even three minutes. The obvious object of this is to make sure that Groban can get through the crowd comfortably to where he's going. Although any physical threat is certainly on everyone's mind, the more immediate danger is technological. Because fans are reaching out to touch Groban (with all the sensitivity of a TSA screener) as he passes, the fear is that they could disable one or both of his wireless transmitters.

When Groban was traveling with two other musicians doing the BWB shows to tiny crowds of devoted fans, it's hard to say if anyone knew it would become what it has especially after a four year absence. When walking into an arena and the set, it's hard to believe someone this big could have done something that small. Yet comparing the two formats there are as many similarities as there are differences. For the 1,500 people who caught his performance at NYC's Town Hall Theatre the trade off of big production for a tiny room with Josh Groban was well worth it. On the other hand the size of the crowd and the distance from Groban in The Arena At Gwinnett Center in Duluth, Georgia was insignificant because of the way he personally brings the show to everyone in the house.

This guy is without a doubt the most entertaining and engaging performer this writer has ever seen. He works a room with the poise and mastery of someone twice his age or more but with the heart of a child who is being paid to have as much fun in one night as humanly possible. That being said, by all accounts he handles the other side of the business with stunning acumen.

His confidence creates an atmosphere wherein everyone in the organization is equally assured that no challenge is so big as to hold this thing back. It feeds on itself. A perfect example of that is found in the difficulty we had in finding anyone who would take credit for the design of this show. Knifedge gave credit to Chaos Visual Productions, John Broderick, Q Prime and Dennis Brennan. Dennis Brennan and John Broderick gave credit to *everyone* up and down the line.

Stage Manager Donnie Floyd was just thrilled to be on gig with this level of organization. "The first week was real challenging," said Floyd, "Just getting that wall up and getting everybody moving, but after that things got real smooth. We've moved the load in back to 9 a.m., and we're done with everything in four hours. We're getting out in just under two

hours. It's like we've been doing this for 100 years. It helps that we've got a great crew on this,"

"I'm perfectly happy to take credit and toot my own horn, but on this one it really started with Josh Groban," said Broderick. "We would go up into the seats, and he would say, 'Why don't you do this with the lights and make that one over there do that.' I would just be firing into my radio down to Troy Eckerman who is the best programmer in the world, and he would get it done. Josh Groban, Dennis Brennan who is the uber-conductor of this thing, Rodney Johnson, Troy Eckerman, Upstaging, Chaos,

Knifedge, MSI and every other company on the tour all had a hand in making this what it is."

"Josh is truly one of the smartest guys I know," says Tour Manager Dennis Brennan of his boss. "Every day I wake up and tell the Man Upstairs, 'Thank you for putting me in a spot like this where I can work with Josh and this amazing team.' Even though you know you're good at what you do, you still think to yourself, 'What did I do to deserve this gig?'"

If that's the way it works, it must have been something real good. *

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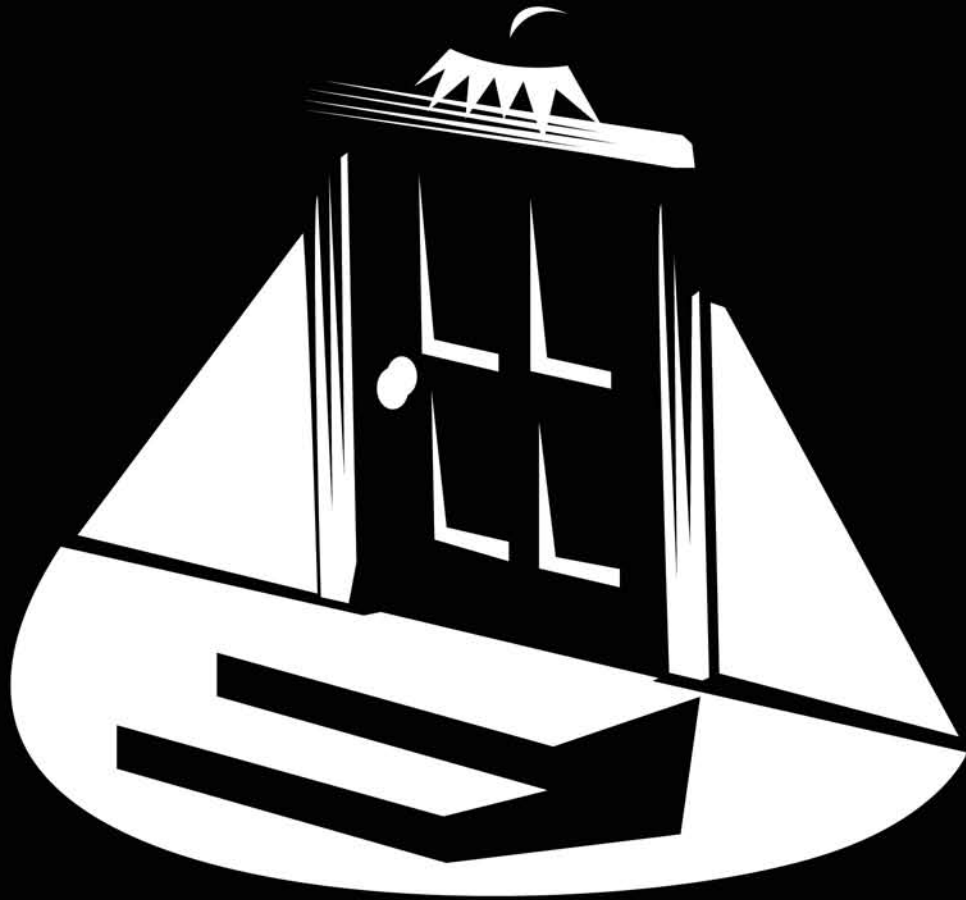
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