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Robe Gets intoxicated with Helene Fischer

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It's been a busy year so far for lighting designer Tim Routledge, including crafting a stunning production lighting design for Helene Fischer's audacious new 'LIVE 2023' arena tour collaboration with Cirque du Soleil, which is playing to sold out audiences across Germany, Austria, and Switzerland until the autumn, presenting an energetic collage of a 360-degree production, seat-edge acrobatics, and superlative musical performance.

Cirque's creative team led by Marie-Helen Delage approached Tim to work alongside show director Genevieve Dorion-Coupal and set designer Bruce Rodgers on this ambitious production.

The lighting rig utilises 56 x Robe iFORTES, nine running on RoboSpot systems plus 116 x Robe Spiider LED wash beam moving lights, together with many other luminaires, all supplied by Solotech out of the UK.

Lighting director on the road for this unique fusion of circus, theatre and rock concert aesthetics is Dave Wolstenholme.

The show embraces a selection of Helene Fischer's greatest hits plus songs from her eighth number-one studio album, Rausch (Intoxication), and one of many SFX is a large circular rain curtain that sets the scene for a dramatic straps act section.

This dictated that all downstage lighting fixtures on the diamond shaped stage had to be IP rated. Twenty-four of the iFORTES positioned on the floor are used for powerful and dramatic back light beams during this intense piece of performance art which also includes CO2 jets and lasers.

The other 32 iFORTES are rigged in the grid above on the side trusses, and used for all the key lighting so their role is right at the essence of the performance. These side iFORTES create comprehensive full-scale washes for the show's epic production numbers when the stage is filled with up to 30 dancers and acrobats.

Dave is particularly impressed with the side washes from the iFORTES with plenty of intensity even in the darker and moodier colours.

The further upstage iFORTES are used for the bulk of the lighting work for performers in front of the band platforms and the three stage lifts which come up from the floor. Dave appreciates their "power and great quality of output". These upstage iFORTES also back light all the acrobats and are in all the cues where "consistency, flat beam characteristics and evenness are vital," explained Dave.

On top of that, they help create some of the massive audience fill and textured gobo immersive moments, allowing all in the room to be enveloped with light and further drawn into the show.

For key lighting the artist, the quality of the iFORTE beam and the consistency of the whites is perfect for both Dave and live video director Justin Murphy.

All nine of the show's follow spots are iFORTES, running on a 9-way RoboSpot system, and at any time Helene Fischer will have at least four on her.

Fourteen of the Spiiders are rigged on the back of the video wall truss, used for band key lighting. Dave again notes the "good quality" of the light and compactness of the fixtures.

Most of the rest are on deployed on 14 vertical ladders, 6 Spiiders per ladder, which fills the whole video wall area downstage of the band.

For a couple of songs, disguise (video playback) programmer and operator Dan Bond sends Dave's grandMA3 console a combination of RGB and dimmer / intensity info which is mapped onto the Spiiders producing some cool, fluid kinetic looks.

"The Spiiders give us a lot of range," elucidates Dave, "from individual pixel and pinpoint looks to massive big-rock-show scenes." For some numbers they use just the inner two rings of LEDs for effects almost adding another type of luminaire to the rig!

The final 16 Spiiders are attached to the outside of the video wall rigged via special snap-on brackets, used to reinforce many of the big fly-out looks and define the side framing scenes, showing off the elegant curvature of the video wall.

Wlcreations designed, engineered, and fabricated a complete special flown grid structure that sits above the stage and houses all the acrobatic and stunt equipment including performer winches plus some automated scenery, integrated access walkways and assorted technical areas required for

everything to work smoothly. The grid includes special flying positions for some of the lighting allowing exact positions onstage to be reached.

The grid is constructed and flown in four sections to make up the diamond shape, mirroring the floor below, and all the lighting kit mounted on it had to be IP rated, sealed and above all reliable ... as swapping anything out once it's in the air is challenging.

The band plays behind the upstage video wall so they can be revealed and highlighted or concealed as needed, adding a further flourish of mystery to the show, and the two band platforms also track on and offstage.

The stage has three lifts, one in front of the video wall, one in front of a central set staircase and another downstage of this and there is a substantial pool centre stage where all the rain curtain water collects and is pumped. Under the stage are fans, v-Drums and a series of quick-change rooms.

The full-tilt show rips through multiple hits with gags in every number ensuring that nothing is ever static, and the entertainment, exhilaration and WOWs keep coming from the first power chords to the last gasps of amazement and applause.

Tim Routledge comments, "This show was a year in the making and followed a long process of workshopping and discussions to make all of the acrobatic requirements within the constraints of touring to multiple different sized venues with varying weight loading restrictions.

"Creatively it is a mix of the worlds of pop music and circus, and of establishing the right balance between the two. Making a show that is contemporary and had the ability to light the huge dynamic range of performance unfolding in a 270-degree stage filled with water effects, flying and fire was the real driver of the show's direction. Audiences have danced and been thrilled by the spectacle in equal measure, and that harmony between music and acrobatics is what has really worked here!"

The light show was programmed by Tom Young assisted during the extended rehearsal period by Alex Passmore onsite. A six-week production, technical and creative rehearsal period took place at AED studios in Belgium ahead of the first show and the lighting crew chief for this time and the first gig was Keith Johnson.

On the road, Dave is working with a lighting crew of seven chiefed by Craig Ralph, and the 32-truck tour is being production managed for Live Nation by David Salt.

The show entails a lot of day-to-day collaboration with all disciplines and departments working together, which everyone is enjoying as Helene Fischer LIVE 2023 continues to create positive energy

and receive rave reviews wherever it goes.

Photo credit: Sandra Ludewig





