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Robe works up a Sweat for Nathaniel Rateliff show

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Popular Americana and R 'n B singer songwriter Nathaniel Rateliff and his band The Night Sweats played their show-stopping, sold-out annual homecoming holiday concert at the Ball Arena in Denver, Colorado, in December.

It was the second time the annual event - which has been running for some years - was staged at this venue, after moving to the larger space in 2022.

The lighting was crafted by Jeremy Roth, who has been Nathaniel's production designer since 2017. He utilized over 100 Robe moving lights - FORTES, Spiiders and MegaPointes plus a RoboSpot system - to help make it look spectacular and memorable.

Jeremy programmed and operated lights for this seasonal holiday performance himself, working alongside lighting director Adam Waguespack who often takes the show on the road for him. At Ball Arena, Adam took on the vital role of coordinating the follow spots and RoboSpot system.

Additional video came in for the hometown production in the form of three large upstage screens, with the department overseen by Mike Grant (Black Keys), who is another talented LD in his own right.

The production design saw both lighting and video technologies share the stage, based on a scaled-up version of their current "The Future" tour which hit the road in April 2023, and an augmented package used for another high-profile set of sold-out local shows at Red Rocks last summer.

The video screens, which were framed by single LED blinders, were one of Jeremy's creative starting points for the Ball Arena show, with the overhead lighting rig like the touring version populated across six trusses. Two mid stage trusses were flown one above the other, arranged in gentle U-shapes to boost the depth, with a straight front truss over the stage apron at the front and a reverse U-shaped advanced truss.

The back truss was rigged with 12 x FORTES, picked for their intense power and impact to project textures on the red velour drape behind the video wall, with another 13 x FORTES on the front truss,

working with four more on the advance truss. These last four FORTES were all running on a 4-way RoboSpot system.

The production started touring the RoboSpot system after encountering ongoing challenges with other remote follow spotting systems, and since that time, they have “never looked back.”

He further elucidated that follow spots were an issue, especially when touring, as venues tend to have mixed experience and ability follow spotting teams. However, using RoboSpot takes the pressure off them, meaning they are free to focus just on the movement, as all the other parameters can be run through the console.

“It’s simply fantastic knowing they are all going to black out at the same time or bump colors absolutely together and on cue, so the spots simply blend into the show, work their magic but are never otherwise noticed.”

The high CRI of the FORTES enables that distinctive tungsten soft styling that Jeremy really likes and that looks so complementary on faces and on camera. On this tour, they are replacing the BMFL Spots used on the previous tours’ RoboSpots systems, which Jeremy also really loved for their carbon arc characteristics and color rendering.

However, Jeremy and Adam are equally as enthusiastic about FORTES in the role!

They were both excited when Nathaniel Rateliff’s long-term lighting, video and audio vendor Brown Note Productions invested in FORTES ahead of the tour in April 2023, enabling them to transition from the BMFLs used in previous years!

“FORTES have been absolutely rock solid for us,” Jeremy noted.

Initially, LEDBeam 350s were on the rig, but these were eventually swapped out for the 33 x Spiiders boosting the output and the wash coverage. Spiiders have also been a favorite of Jeremy’s since first using them on a Sheryl Crow tour. “The colors are excellent, and the flower effect is an ingenious idea that projects a nice impression of speckled light onto the floor or other surfaces. That and the wide zoom range really increase the fixture’s overall flexibility,” he commented.

Having a wash beam fixture on the rig enables him to pivot between the two modes and effectively have another set of fixtures up in the rig. He has even used them as pseudo-PAR cans at times like on a Wilco Sleater-Kinney double bill tour which featured 72 Spiiders in double hung rows.

Robe's popular effects luminaire, MegaPointe, has been omnipresent on Nathaniel Rateliff's lighting schemes ever since Jeremy's been onboard with "The Face Down in The Moment" singer in 2017, initially as part of the floor lighting package. They have featured in every design since!

At Ball Arena, 11 x MegaPointes were positioned on the deck, and ten on the advanced truss.

Jeremy loves the MegaPointe for many reasons, including the beam width, and the super-cool looks that can be built popping in a prism or two when zoomed right out.

"It is an excellent back profile lighting fixture that is very vibey and can be used to shoot through the band from upstage without blinding the audience," he remarks, adding that he does not use them in 'beam' mode at all for the distinctive throwback retro soul sounds of Nathaniel Rateliff.

"Robe will always be on my list for profile and wash fixtures," noted Jeremy, and he also regularly uses the manufacturer's linear Tetra2 and TetraX LED battens.

He confirms that multiple ambers and color temperature whites are used extensively in lighting this artist, and he finds colors, the color ranges, dimming curves and the CRI of the Robe products "consistently good and reliable - I know what I am getting with Robe," he confirms; adding that contemporary stage lighting should look great in multiple scenarios - for the live audience, on fans' social channels and whenever shows are streamed or otherwise broadcast. Lighting designers must think from all these different angles.

Jeremy, Adam, and Mike engaged in 3 days of pre-vizing at Brown Note's Studio in Denver ahead of the Ball Arena show, then 3 days of technical rehearsal at Denver Coliseum before loading in on the morning of the actual gig.

Lighting was programmed on a grandMA3 console running in 2 mode.

Ball Arena was a lot of fun. It reunited a tight and loyal touring family who spend serious time together as the band are constantly on the road, and this seasonal one-off show has also become a bit of a local steamroller event, so it was exciting for all involved to present the largest version yet!

The touring schedule restarts in the spring with new music, and the lighting design for parts of this new touring cycle will be an evolution of the Ball Arena extravaganza.

Photo Credits: Tobin Voggesser, Jeremy Roth





