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Robe for Vinegar Bottle Installation

Auckland, New Zealand-based lighting designer Rachel Marlow of Filament Eleven 11 created an edgy and exciting ambience with 'Who Lived in a Vinegar Bottle', an immersive lighting and audio installation work staged over four days in Auckland Town Hall Concert Chamber.

This was part of the 'Auckland Live Fringe Town' aspect of the city's annual Fringe Festival event, a proudly independent and hugely popular open-access arts festival which took place earlier in the year, just before the Coronavirus pandemic shut down the industry for an indefinite period.

Rachel used the venue's lighting equipment which includes Robe MMX Spots, WashBeams and T1 Profiles to help realise the piece, which was commissioned by Auckland Live programmer, Anders Falstie-Jensen.

Collaborating with Rachel was Bradley Gledhill who assisted in the design, rigging, lighting programming and timecoding; Thomas Press who produced the special 20-minute soundtrack; and dramaturg Benjamin Henson with whom both Rachel and Brad have worked on previous invigorating projects.

Rachel and Brad pitched their initial ideas to Auckland Live midway through 2019, which was followed by lots of discussions and some early renders created in Capture.

Being able to pre-vis the show helped enormously with gaining the commission as it offered the client a clear notion of how it would look.

Combining a dynamic mix of technical disciplines and fusion of ideas, a unique performance concept was developed to unfold Elizabeth Clark's traditional story - a favourite from Rachel's childhood - in a new and engaging medium.

Lighting wise, this included the notion of creating an art installation using what are essentially rock 'n' roll moving lights, plus a few custom elements, and this was one of the key provocations.

The performance area was beneath a box truss in the centre of the room. The four MMX Spots and eight MMX WashBeams were rigged on this, with the single T1 Profile (generously on loan from JANDS NZ, and Auckland Live subsequently purchased a new batch of 5 x T1 fixtures) was positioned right in the centre of the box.

Framing the piece with a narrative storyline structure was fundamental to Rachel's vision of relating the tale 'The Old Woman Who Lived in a Vinegar Bottle' which encompasses many contemporary and relevant themes like complacency, dissatisfaction, entitlement ... and taking life and people for granted!

Another galvanising factor was the room which usually hosts seated musical and theatrical performances but had to work spatially for 'Who Lived in a Vinegar Bottle'. As it turned out people - audiences were limited to 20 per show - stood all around the space and moved as the journey evolved and propelled them through the experience - sound, lighting and imaginations working together to evoke a series of thrilling individual experiences.

The T1 Profile was selected for the centre luminaire because Rachel needed a powerful light source with

framing shutters to keep it in a tight space, and a fixture with a wide range of looks, colours and effects for that central role.

Well familiar with the MMX range as a general lighting tool for her theatre and music work, Rachel knew exactly how to make the fixtures work for this piece. Brad also knows the Robe fixtures very well, which assisted in programming the finer details.

T1 and MMX effects included rapid shutter cut chases that gave the impression of movement and fluidity around the space as the light mimicked the audio image during certain parts.

Having these Robes available "definitely helped facilitate the ideas I wanted to achieve," commented Rachel. "The T1 is a fabulous light to control and it especially had a lot of impact during the louder and more intense moments towards the end."

Moving lights used in a concert context are usually highly visible, however in this scenario, their role was intimate and understated, to draw people into the action rather than impress them when standing back and looking from afar.

At the heart of the installation suspended from the truss were three 'pixel clusters', each comprising multiple lightbulb shaped housings with a single LED tangled together by a spaghetti-knot of transparent cords.

A bespoke item made by Rachel, they caught and refracted the light beautifully adding depth and dimension to the space, as well as providing a focal point for the eye.

Custom LED strips with Perspex covering hung on catenaries from the truss about a metre off the floor ... were also specially made by Rachel and Brad and these echoed the shape of the room and the square of the trussing.

Two projectors rigged on the trussing and pointing vertically downwards were used to project very subtle abstract moving images onto the floorspace immediately below the box.

All the lights were programmed on one of the venue's grandMA2 consoles and ran to timecode for the four evenings that the show ran.

Photo Credit: Louise Stickland

















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