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Robe Has a Good Laugh with Anders Matthesen

Eleven trucks of production equipment is a lot for one stand-up comedian, but delivering the nuances of live comedy in an arena format is a fine art which needs a delicate balance of style and production values ... and for Denmark's leading comedian, Anders "Anden" (the Duck) Matthesen, this happened to be a 25th anniversary tour, so he wanted to make a BIG impact!

Peter Fisker has been Matthesen's lighting designer since 2006 and in that time, the funny-man known for his multiple crazy, off-beat and appealing characters - has toured regularly as well as producing movies, DVDs and books. This particular tour was shorter than usual - the seven shows were played in Denmark's two largest arenas - five the Royal Arena in Copenhagen and two in the Jyske Bank Boxen Arena in Herning - reaching around 86,000 fans!

Peter proudly took up some of that truck-space with Robe moving lights, specifying 26 x MegaPointes, 33 x BMFL Spots and another three BMFL Spots utilized as a RoboSpot follow spotting system complete with one MotionCamera and one BaseStation.

These were delivered, together with rest of the lighting equipment, by Copenhagen based rental specialist, Comtech.

Arena comedy has some very specific lighting requirements. The artist must be well and clearly lit for both camera and stage, for audiences at the back watching on the IMAG screens as well as those closer to the action.

The facial expressions as he delivers his punch lines are mission-critical to the whole audience experience and their full appreciation of the humour.

There is also the need - albeit in a vast arena - to create the ambience of intimacy, so Matthesen can feel he's right close up and personal to every person in the room, as if he were performing in an atmospheric smoky, pokey little club ... a task in which lighting also plays a huge role.

Then there was Matthesen's own brief for this tour ... which was to make the show big, bold and ballsy - Las Vegas style - to capture the 25th anniversary spirit, and it was this that Peter took as his creative starting point.

"We had actually been talking about doing this show for around 10 years" explained Peter. Normally on tour they will play venue capacities of between 1000 and 3000.

Set designer Palle Christensen produced a design based on a clean modern look, with two large IMAG screens left and right, a series of multi-level risers, a semi-transparent cloth backdrop which included a massive scenic duck set flat outlined in LED to reinforce the nick-name! There was a long winding runway out into the audience which enabled him to get in amongst a vast amount of the audience.

Before the start of the tour, there was a month-long rehearsal period, and this is where most of the lighting cues evolved, just as the show, the material, the sketches and several songs developed. It included one side-splitting skit where Matthesen is 'controlling' the lighting rig from his cell phone!

“It was a very organic process as opposed to something that you could ‘dry’ visualize” stated Peter, who also enjoyed the improvisational nature of the work.

He needed a load of LED wash light for the base colours, and BMFL Spots were selected as the show’s profile fixture ... for their power, functionality and “big eye” of a front lens. While there was haze and smoke at strategic moments, for most of the show he needed the beams to be potent enough without any atmospheric enhancement.

Having already seen the RoboSpot in action on some touring productions, right from the start Peter decided to use it on this tour, adding three more BMFL Spots as his back-follow spots, which were operated via one RoboSpot BaseStation positioned backstage.

This gave him the option of picking any of the three BMFL RoboSpots best positioned to highlight Matthesen according to where he was on the stage or runway. They worked in conjunction with two manually operated Robert Juliat Lancelot 4Ks in the FOH positions.

Utilizing a RoboSpot system meant that the camera shots picking up Matthesen and pointing down the catwalk towards the stage always had clean, clear views without follow spot chairs and operators dangling down in the sightlines!

They also helped him cover the many different stage positions used by Matthesen during the show. Peter operated the intensity from his ChamSys lighting control console while the RoboSpot operator took care of the pan / tilt, zoom and focus.

It also meant that the onstage spots blended exceptionally well with all the BMFLs on the rig, helping to create a more integrated bigger picture, and it was that ‘bigger picture’ that was constantly in Peter’s thoughts when lighting the show.

The MegaPointes he describes as his “new best friend” ... five were rigged on vertical trusses just behind each of the screens, so they appeared from behind, blasting across the stage creating structural patterns. At times they moved out and skimmed across the audience.

“They are so intense and powerful, and I love the variance in beam angle, from the very narrow to the super wide - either looking equally good - as well as the small size, which is just fantastic” he enthused.

Another four were under each screen, creating excellent ACL style looks with six on the floor upstage and two at the centre entranceway mid-way along the onstage staircase.

Also on the rig were 48 x 2-lite blinders dotted around and on top of the drapes to add to the excitement and pump up the action during the songs which featured an array of Matthesen’s zany alter-egos. Three Swoboda’s were used for the opening sequence as Matthesen entered dressed as a king!

The Duck’s LED outline added another 487 x 4-channel RGBW LED fixtures and 1948 DMX channels to the MQ500 lighting desk ... and looked super cool!

Peter is a freelance LD based in Aarhus and he’s been using Robe products for the last year on the road with Eurodance band Aqua (of phenomenal 1997 hit “Barbie Girl” fame). Also in the last year he’s visited the Robe factory in Valašské Meziříčí where he was impressed with the detail and value of how each product is hand crafted and finished.

“You can really feel the love that goes into the making of all of those fixtures’ he concluded.

Photo Credit: Louise Stickland













Theatre