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Robe Shakes Shoulders with Arsenal

Lighting designer Wouter Verbeke chose Robe fixtures to be at the core of his cool and interesting lighting design for a high impact gig by Belgian band Arsenal at Antwerp's famous Lotto Arena.

With their roots in electric dance, the band now embrace a lively mix of genres from African and Latin American rhythms to pop, hip hop, and indie rock. They are midway through a campaign for their sixth studio album, *The Rush of Shaking Shoulders* which was launched earlier in the year with a gig in Antwerp's Old Post Office venue.

Wouter had used Robe on that occasion too, and for many other shows in between, so it was a natural choice for this show, with lighting equipment supplied by rental specialist Splendit.

The Robe count included 28 x MegaPointes, 24 x Spikies, 28 x Spiiders, 22 x LEDBeam 150s and 8 x Pointes.

The starting point for the lighting was that band leader Hendrik Willemyns wanted a sun which rose at the start of the show, playing a strong visual role throughout their performance and then descending towards the end. The latest single is set in Africa, and so they wanted to accentuate the idea of the big skies, dramatic sunrises and awesome sunsets that characterise different countries across continent.

The other element was that Hendrik loves trees, plants and greenery, so as with the album launch, the stage set was provided by the installation of a forest of lush foliage and exotic plants.

The 4-metre diameter 'sun' was created using LED screen panels attached to a circular truss and artist Akiko Nakayama created all the content through "Alive Painting", a technique she's developed - not dissimilar to the liquid oil artists of the 1960s - which depicts the resonance between shapes and textures using different liquids and paints each with unique characteristics.

Wouter and the band have worked with Akiko before on key gigs, and prior to this show they discussed the colour themes and lighting for different songs so she could co-ordinate. Her workspace was set up at FOH and the results were fed via an overhead camera system to the screen. This beautifully organic approach to video was something refreshing and different.

Wouter wanted some small, lightweight punchy beamy lights around the sun, and 24x Spikies provided a perfect solution. The intensity of their beams was really impressive in the cavernous roof of the Lotto Arena.

In addition to this, Wouter wanted lights all around the stage from every angle. The Splendit crew installed a curved truss immediately above the tree line that formed an arch circumnavigating the band, which was rigged with 20 x MegaPointes.

These were used prominently throughout the show for effects, beams, spots and all the other numerous looks that they "are brilliant at creating", as Wouter said, adding that MegaPointes are his favourite fixture right now.

He first used them a year ago, shortly after the product was launched... and has spec'd them on almost every project since!

In addition to these MegaPointes on the arch, all the other major effects lighting was positioned on the floor and side-stage in front of the trees.

The front light was provided by 16 x Spiiders on the front truss and 8 x Pointes on the front truss which were used for gobo-work onto the trees and other funky bits, plus another 8 Spiiders on the floor.

Wouter reckons the Spiider is a brilliant wash light and he used the flower effect on the floor-based units which worked a treat, while he also capitalised on the fatness and quality of the beams on the Spiiders rigged overhead.

He thinks MegaPointes and Spiiders are a perfect compliment to one another and make great 'base elements' for any lighting rig.

The 22 x LEDBeam 150s were behind the trees, where they worked hard to blast through the dense foliage producing decorative and atmospheric effects, especially when the sun was up. Wouter loves the fact that they are small, easy to use and have a great zoom.

Wouter programmed and ran the show on a ChamSys console. He did some pre-vis, but basically, they had only one programming day beforehand at Splendit with only part of the set - and no trees - in place. The first time he saw the stage with all the trees in situ was on the day of the show - the foliage arrived in five climate-controlled trucks - and only then could he assess what did and didn't work!

The band didn't decide on the set list until the evening of the gig, so that meant he needed to be prepared for some improvisation. It was an "exciting but stressful" way to work he stated.

Luckily experience and creativity enabled him to produce a fabulous show with lots of stylistic diversity to match the breadth and dynamics of the music... and without damaging the plants by over-lighting!

Other lighting on the rig included some other profile moving fixtures, LED blinders, LED PARs focused on the trees, and a quantity of floods.

Splendit supplied all the lighting equipment, video and crew as well as - via Gravity Design - the automation which lifted the sun up and down, operated by Rik Uyttersprot.

The sold-out gig was a huge success.

Photo Credit: Louise Stickland

















Stage