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Robe BMFLs Show their Cool for Snow Queen Show

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‘The Snow Queen’ premiered at the Nokia Arena in Tampere, Finland, a unique ‘ice ballet’ extravaganza produced by the Tampere Hall & Kantelinen Company, which is as edgy as it is elegant and exciting!

The brainchild of Melissa A. Thompson who has worked as a creative lead for Cirque du Soleil, director / choreographer Reija Wäre, composer Tuomas Kantelinen, costume designer Erika Turunen and set, lighting and projection designer Mikki Kunttu, a talented creative team was involved in the delivery and imagineering of this epic production.

Prominent on Mikki’s lighting rig were 105 x Robe BMFL moving lights, a combination of BMFL Blades and Spots which he used for key lighting, specials and effects throughout this fast moving and highly visual show which finally premiered on 30th December 2022.

Postponed from the previous year due to last minute covid restrictions, the time arrived for ice fans to enjoy five breathtaking performances, with the New Year’s Eve show going out on live television via national broadcaster YLE’s Channel 1.

Mikki’s brief included creating stunning video projections onto the ice and scenic elements, which combined with the lighting to bring the frozen magic and breathtaking sub-zero beauty of Lapland right into Tampere Arena.

This innovative reimaging of Hans Christian Andersen’s classic 1844 fairy-tale set in Lapland but seen from an outsider’s perspective, is a funny, heart-warming, and energising story underlining the importance of friendship. It is aimed at captivating both new and existing audiences and is one of the most ambitious and largest productions staged in Finland to date, uniting many stars and different ice disciplines including ice hockey.

The task of visuals involved reinforcing the narrative, highlighting the various skating skills, and adding drama and depth to the bigger picture, along with perfect key lighting for TV, all of which needed a combination of Mikki’s experiences from multiple lighting genres.

The BMFLs were a core ingredient of Mikki's lighting and were positioned on six trusses. Two were directly above the ice and the other four were in the 'advanced' position on each of the four sides of the auditorium, just off the ice and above the audience.

This way they could be used over the entire performance area.

Mikki has used BMFLs on many projects, and for this one they were picked for their power - with a 20-metre plus thrown down to the ice - and versatility as they had to fulfil many functions throughout the 2-hour show.

They were also picked for their camera-friendly functionality, with the live broadcast in mind.

"The quality of the BMFL light output is still truly impressive and that's why it's become an industry standard," Mikki noted.

His biggest challenge with lighting The Snow Queen was the one day of on-site rehearsal time! Yes, that is correct - one day!

Knowing that on site tech and rehearsal time was extremely tight informed the design which was kept as straightforward as possible to be practical and achievable whilst also offering the vast dynamics needed to cover the essential visual elements.

Working with known fixtures like BMFLs was also a huge advantage for time saving and the lightning quick programming needed.

This much complexity and detail would have been impossible to achieve if not for two three-week pre-viz periods. One was in 2021 when the original show was planned, and a similar pre-viz time was scheduled for 2022, during which they also had to deal with a slightly changed kit list related to availability.

Also instrumental to making the most of that one long rehearsal day at the Nokia Arena were Mikki's two programmers, Alex Hautamäki on lighting and Saku Väänänen who programmed the video, both described by him as "simply fantastic!" They all used the grandMA3 consoles provided, together with all the lighting kit by rental company, Akus Factory Oy.

Mikko Linnavuori created the video content. The design brilliantly evoked the rich, icy chilled atmospherics of Finnish and Lappish landscapes encapsulating the Snow Queen's domain so realistically that you felt cold just looking at the ice stage! "This is something for which we Fins don't need to do much research," Mikki assured me!

The projections were delivered using the Arena's in-house system of six Digital Projection Titan Laser 37 000 WUXGA machines, and apart from the arctic landscapes, projections also set the scene for some of the warmer acts like the rose garden.

Sometimes the visual work was defined solely by lighting with a break in the projections and other times the two media were seamlessly integrated as the story unfolded.

Mikki really enjoyed the teamwork involved in delivering this world class show with such a compressed production schedule, co-ordinated slickly on site by production manager Vesa Sytelä, as well as being part of a unique idea that united all these skating worlds with harmony, contemporary style, and huge entertainment value.

In a similar vein, he combined lighting and visual treatments from theatre, television and large arena show experiences in the quest to enthrall the audiences who packed in to see these five initial performances.

"Each part of the development process gave more than expected and it was a rewarding collective achievement that was great fun to make," he concluded.

Whilst working for Cirque du Soleil in Canada, Mikki first began swapping ideas with the producer about this then-theoretical production around 4 years ago, so it was a very special moment to see it come to fruition.

The Snow Queen capped off an incredibly busy and successful year for Mikki who celebrated his 50th birthday with a 'retrospective' live event, "A Night of Light", in October at the nearby Tampere Hall. Many artists from his diverse career, covering ballet, opera, pop, rock, jazz, contemporary dance and many more areas of entertainment, united for a special gala evening performance attended by production and entertainment industry professionals, VIPs, and influencers from around the world.

Photo Credit: Mikki Kunttu







