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Robe in A World of Its Own with Westlife

Products Involved

BMFL™ WashBeam MegaPointe® RoboSpot™

Westlife – arguably the most enduringly popular and successful boy band on the planet – are back with a massive BANG after a seven-and-a-half-year hiatus, with a brand-new production for “The 20 Tour” ahead of their much-anticipated new album, Spectrum. They are looking good, sounding great and have been entertaining sold out crowds everywhere with their solid and superlative blend of harmonic foot-tappingly catchy pop!

One hundred and forty-eight Robe MegaPointes were prominent on the touring lighting rig – specified by lighting designer Tom Sutherland.

The first leg of the tour culminated in two sold out nights at Dublin’s Croke Park stadium playing to an incredible 170,000 adoring fans. The gig was streamed live to cinemas worldwide in a show of fan-force that proved we all need a bit of Westlife in our lives!

Tom Sutherland of DX7 Design is part of a new and exciting creative team.

He was asked onboard by show producer / director Brian Burke, and the two combined imaginative forces to create the stunning production design that is supporting Nicky Byrne, Kian Egan, Mark Feehily and Shane Filan on the 20 Tour.

The performance space is defined by a large 70ft wide video screen upstage – which splits in two horizontally – and a full video floor, with columns of side and top lighting making up a large and dynamic box. Upstage at the back was a flying platform running the whole stage width, and several of the lighting trusses that also moved.

With musicians stationed just in front of the left and right stage wings, there was a totally clean space for The Boys to use, and the emphasis was all on the four of them, supported by slick video treatments and classy matched lighting looks. The key was to apply this beautifully fluid visuality to enhance-but-never distract from their singing and dance routines. It might sound straightforward, but it’s a very demanding brief.

Tom specified MegaPointes to be the principal hard-edged and effects fixtures, chosen for their brightness and versatility which enabled him to create a series of perfect ‘fun factors’ for the colourful, upbeat extravaganza of movement and texturing.

“MegaPointes are my favourite fixtures right now,” he commented.

They were also running four Robe RoboSpot BaseStations remotely controlling 16 x BMFL WashBeams which were operated by some of the truck drivers.

The total lighting fixture count for the tour was over 700 - including three different types of LED batten - all supplied by Southampton UK based touring lighting rental company, Liteup.

Tom's own career as a lighting professional started off in television where he cut his teeth on high profile fast paced shows like the X-Factor. Now living in LA and working regularly worldwide, his current client list includes major live artists like Keith Urban and Pitbull and he has developed his own distinctive 'televisual' style of lighting, blending creative threads from TV, theatre and arena concerts for a unique and nicely balanced look.

This multi-layered approach was ideal for the Westlife 'BIG' pop show vibe. The production design brief to produce an elegantly playful environment that looked fabulous was completely dynamic and reflected Westlife's maturity today, after an incredible 20-year journey.

The show segued between three 'visual' sections as it gathered pace and energy with the four Boys clearly enjoying being back onstage together.

The first section was video content driven. At Croke Park it was still daylight for this portion of the show. The second was a molten mix of lighting with some super-cool Notch based realtime video rendering effects filling the performance space with animation as the action sped towards a crescendo finale with lighting, video, pyro and automation all stepping up.

Overstage were nine angled trussing 'fingers' all on Kinesys automation, each one loaded with 12 MegaPointes plus strobes and outlined in LED battens. These shifted subtly into different positions throughout the two-and-a-half-hour show changing the architecture of the space.

With so much video, it was vital to have profile lights that absolutely kicked ass - and MegaPointes proved a great solution. The positioning on the pods meant they could light all parts of the stage and forestage, making stunning shapes and geometric patterns.

Another row of MegaPointes upstage at the back punched through when the screen split, with the other 24 underneath the stage lift for beaming across the stage and audience when it rose during the acoustic section.

Both Tom and lighting operator / director on the road Miles Weaver were impressed with the durability of the MegaPointes as they were relentlessly caked in pyro every day, and the four upstage BMFL WashBeams were regularly doused with haze residue.

The RoboSpot system was tech'd by Mike Rothwell, who is also an experienced lighting programmer. Four BMFL WashBeams were rigged on the back truss as back spots - one per band member - with three each per band member, 12 in total ... on the front truss. All 16 units were working with separate motion cameras.

Each operator followed one band member with their three front and one rear spots, and had control over the iris. The zoom and focus were pre-set, and the lights were run with a little bit of frost added to slightly soften the edges.

It was the first time that Mike had used RoboSpots, but he was impressed with its simplicity once the initial line up was completed and with how quickly the truck drivers picked it up and became familiar.

He also liked the adaptability of multi-device control.

Brian Burke and choreographer Liam Lunniss really appreciated the fact that all the followspots opened and blacked out together in unison, and all the pickups were completely synched every time. Liteup also supplied all the rigging, motors and 34 Kinesys points, with the account managed by Gordon Torrington.

Lighting control was all grandMA2, programmed by Tom and Martin Higgins, who also comes from the world of TV lighting. Tom likes Martin's "technical perfectionism" when it comes to programming, for which they completed three weeks of pre-vis in Tom's studio in LA before arriving in Belfast for five hectic, high-pressured days of production rehearsals ahead of the first gig.

The touring camera director was Billy Robinson - IMAG was beamed onto side screens - and Billy still managed to get a few cheeky cuts of Nicky's bottom in the mix to massive roars from the crowd in Dublin!

Many people were involved in the video creation which was co-ordinated by content design producer Sveta Yermolayeva of interactive media production specialists Sila Sveta & Helen Spencer from The Field TV. The Notch and 3D design elements were created and produced by Northhouse Design. Production manager Mark Wade is keeping everything in order on the road and Andy Proudfoot teaming up with Chris Vaughn oversaw the monster of a production into Croke Park.

Tom states: "From meeting the band for the first time I could tell how much this tour meant to them; how truly involved they all were and how excited they were to be going back on the road. That excitement and energy funneled down through the entire production. The creative teams were working 20 hours a day to ensure the show was a great success and I am seriously grateful to everyone who assisted in making it such a spectacle."

The tour continues next in Asia, and Westlife's new album is released on November 8th.

Following the success of the past few months, Westlife are back with vengeance ... and here to stay.

Photo Credit: Louise Stickland







