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Robe Hopes for Great Things

Products Involved

BMFL™ WashBeam **BMFL™ FollowSpot** **Spikie®** **RoboSpot™**

Popular rapper and producer MF just finished a massive US leg of his “HOPE” world tour which featured another impressive lighting and production design created by Chris Denholm (also production manager & musical director) and Clay Joiner (also lighting designer & programmer, as well as operator on the European leg).

The pair have worked together for some time, and extol the advantages of having two brains, imaginations and sets of experience – both contrasting and converging – to boost the creative dynamic they bring to the table.

Prominent on the lighting rig was a selection of Robe products including 160 x Robe Spikies, 26 x BMFL WashBeams and two BMFL FollowSpots running on 2 x RoboSpot systems, together with other luminaires.

Chris and Clay had also successfully collaborated on the previous MF tour in 2021. This one played bigger venues reflecting the artists’ continued musical achievement.

After in-depth discussions with the artist and inspired by the new album which dropped earlier in the year, Chris and Clay wanted the design to reflect the simplicity, honesty, and power of the classic psychological juxtaposition of light and dark, and how that tussle can impact anyone’s state of mind.

They decided on a chevron truss design for depth and interest, with a “modern and mean” multi-level stage layout below featuring a series of risers, stairways, four different stage lifts plus a 16ft thrust, with LED covering the many set fasciae, plus a large upstage LED wall.

With all that LED together with lasers, cryo and fog adding to the visual drama and emotion of the show, lighting fixtures were carefully positioned to add maximum impact.

The overhead lights were mainly distributed between LX bars 1 to 5. LX1 was upstage and rigged with 14 of the BMFL WashBeams and the two BMFL WashBeam FollowSpots, which were in the center.

With no front truss, these BMFL WashBeam FollowSpots were workhorse fixtures, heavily used to underline the moody, contrasty highlighting style so significant in setting the tone for this show, with conventional front-of-house follow spots utilized to fill in and eliminate shadows.

The upstage chevron – raked with apex down and the opposite way to LX 1 through 3 – was also loaded with the balance of the BMFL WashBeams, giving Chris and Clay a formidable array of upstage fire power.

LX1, 2 and 3 were pointed towards the audience and all loaded with a double layer of Spikies. The fixtures on the upstage truss chord were dropped about a foot lower than the downstage ones for added depth and separation.

Chris explained why Spikies were such a great choice for this design: “In terms of firepower vs truck space, they are absolutely brilliant as you can squeeze a lot of lights into a small area.”

The Spikies were used to light the full stage area and to shoot pulsing and piercing beams all around it and into the crowds, throwing energy out there and pulling them into the action.

In addition to the top rig, side towers contained vertical lines of LED wash lights and moving LED battens, strobes lined the trusses and the deck, and the 40 x 20ft upstage video screen played a leading role in the action, comprised of Roe CB8 product, so the ‘Spikie chevrons’ were a visually conspicuous element that shaped the top part of the stage.

A B-stage – for the first time on an IF tour – was located to the side of FOH, allowing the artist to get close to his fans which everyone loved. This was lit from a box truss above with 8 Spikies on each side adding another 32 of these punchy little lights to the plot, together with vertical LED bars.

“Here we needed something with serious presence and impact that was also easy to load in / out and rig,” explained Clay, with Spikies again providing a solution.

Clay thinks Spikies are a “brilliant” fixture in several ways. He appreciates the lensing which enables that “beautifully homogenized beam” to come out the front. “It’s small, fast, with a

great zoom, a flower effect and you can physically fit LOADS of them into a design!"

Positioning the Spikies on the chevron trusses gave him and Chris the 'blocks' of light around the rig that they so needed for the style of this tour production design, and they were fundamental to accentuating the dark and light concept.

"We wanted people to notice and feel these blocks of light coming on and off," noted Clay, "it was vital that the light source punched through any and all other visual elements that might also be in play – like video, smoke, lasers, etc." The Spikie layout also facilitated big, bold moments and spectacular fly-outs.

Lighting was programmed and run on a grandMA2 console, operated for the US part of the tour by Dane Kick. The full production technical package – lighting, video, and audio – was supplied by PRG. Stage and set came from Accurate Staging and SFX from Strictly FX.

Challenges included maximizing the budget by getting the most lighting into the least amount of truck space!

With Chris as the multitasking production manager and co-production designer, both he and Clay could work smartly in this context. Staying modular and flexible, the base design concept – as well as fitting into less trucks – could be properly replicated in a variety of different sized rooms and scenarios.

For Clay, this adaptability was one of the most enjoyable parts of evolving this tour, together with the set changes and figuring out practical operational details like how to synchronize these, and make them look slick onstage without interrupting the flow of the show ... whilst allowing enough time for costume changes.

Clay and Chris also wrote treatments for the video, for which content was produced by Luke Schoenhals & Chris Schoenman and included a green screen session with I/F from which footage is woven into the final edit. Video, the color, and general lighting texturing together with musicality were all carefully blended to produce a unique overall aesthetic of which all are proud.

Chris mentions how "seeing the audience just lose themselves in this atmosphere that all of us have helped create each night" is among the most rewarding aspects of being part of the talented team presenting this tour.

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