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Classics is Groot

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Classic is Groot is a vibrant and spectacular annual production created by Coleske Artists with a glittering line up of South African stars showcasing a series of global classic pop and rock songs presented in an orchestral style. It has become a regular event inspired by Coleske's hugely popular "Afrikaans is Groot" phenomenon in South Africa, and for the last four years has been staged at the Sun Arena in Pretoria.

Since the "Classics" show spinoff started in 2015, it's been lit by Joshua Cutts, and, as in previous years, the 2019 event included a lot of Robe moving lights.

Lighting and all technical services and disciplines for the Sun Arena venue is supplied by Johannesburg-based rental company MGG. The house lighting rig contains substantial quantities of Robe fixtures which were at Josh's disposal for the three show days, together with some selected extras.

Josh worked closely with, the show's artistic director Barry Pretorius, the choreographer Hayley Bennett-Freidin, production manager Ian Vos and set designer Corne Roodt ensuring that everything ran smoothly on site and in preparation.

The wide stage and set incorporated an orchestra, a rhythm section, a choir for certain numbers plus dancers and some elaborate props - including a life-size steam train with wagons which chugged across the stage at the top of the show.

The 'classic' popular songs were picked from multiple genres and eras - from Elvis to Les Misérables, with one show-stopping rendition after another making up the two and a half hours show delighting audiences and impressing critics!

With all this in mind, 'diversity' was the starting point for Josh's lighting.

Having worked with Barry and the Coleske team on several projects, there is a great creative dialogue in place, and he has a proper feel and, together with the initial notes, he has a good understanding of the style and look they are going for in each case.

"The Sun Arena house rig with all the Robes provides really good building blocks for any show," comments Josh, explaining that Barry always brings plenty of ideas for the show to the table, and following initial meetings with him and Corne, the stage aesthetics start to evolve, then he starts building his lighting design.

This year's theme referenced a classic railway station – arrivals, departures, journeys – with a double-tiered set of upper and lower platforms, and a set of five arches upstage all filled with LED screen. Exclusive content for each artist was created by the Coleske Artist's video team. With a large and busy stage, Josh approached lighting it simply and straightforwardly, "It's all about clean lines and big impacts," he explained.

He also looked out for any potential gaps / holes onstage – it was also recorded for DVD / streaming – and immediately filled the space between the five screens with 6 banks of 10 x single cell blinders which complemented the architecture.

Six vertical columns of light punctuated the arches, made up from a total of 36 x Robe Pointes and these provided striking upstage beam work.

Downstage each side were two side grids both with 12 x LEDBeam 150s in a 4 x 3 Pattern to assist with cross lighting the dancers plus the band on stage right and orchestra on stage left. Josh commented that these very small fixtures are fabulously punchy, and the excellent zoom makes them perfects for a side light.

Twenty-nine Robe Spiider LED wash beams were rigged in the roof trusses together with 17 x BMFL WashBeams and nine BMFL Spots in between offering a nice selection of beams from overhead.

Thirty-six Spikies were positioned along the front of the stage footlights-style and along the upstage edge of the stage deck, in front of the band / orchestra risers, used for a bit of sparkle.

At the front, along the edge of the pros, Josh added 20 MegaPointes which illuminated the ceiling and the forestage together with alternating 15 x CycFX 8s.

The audience was also lit, an important part of the brief to help involve them in the action and ensure they felt the energy coming offstage. Rigged on two U-shaped audience trusses were 21 x LEDWash 1200s and 24 x LEDBeam 100s. On the same U-shaped trusses were 18 x BMFL Blades for all the main key lighting.

For blasting through a big block of light when the mid-stage set doors opened, Josh placed a bank of six Robe ColorStrobes.

All of these plus some other lights were combined to produce an impressive range of visual treatments that kept the show pumping and grooving for the whole performance

A show of this complexity benefits from good planning, and as the music tracks and their associated video content were created in advance by the Coleske team, Josh scheduled a reasonable amount of time in his pre-vis studio which gave him the chance of constructing the lighting building blocks.

All of this was needed because onsite time was extremely tight with less than 24 hours between the get in and the lights needed to be ready of the first rehearsal on the Thursday followed by two sold-out and much-anticipated public show days.

"We get as ready possible in advance, so the main task on site is all the positioning and fine-tuning," says Josh, adding quickly that no matter how much prep is done ... it's only when

you have the dancers, musicians, singers and technical parameters like the screen onstage in front of you ... can you fully assess the scenario!

So that 24 hours was an absolutely intense period!

Josh and his associate on this show, Marius Coetzee, were assisted in the pre-programming by Andre Siebrits.

They programmed and ran the show on a grandMA2 full size with a light for backup. The pixel fixtures including Spiiders, LEDWashes, Spikies and others were all mapped in an MA VPU, which allowed Josh to create a further selection of different layers for each bank of fixtures.

Working under pressure is not new to Josh in these days of time margins being eternally squeezed. "Knowing I had these Robes on the rig gave the confidence to know we could get a great result. It was a pleasure working in the Sun Arena again and with the highly talented Coleske crew who are great fun. It was also an amazing chance to light some fantastic music!"

Photo Credit: Louise Stickland







