15.11.2024

From Rock to Opera at Saaremaa 2024

Products Involved

LEDBeam 350™   LEDWash 800X™   ParFect 100™

Kuressaare Castle on the island of Saaremaa, Estonia, provided a magical backdrop and a beautiful setting for the 2024 Saaremaa Opera Festival, staged in a 68-metre-long 29-metre-wide 2000-capacity temporary arena elegantly butted up to the Castle.
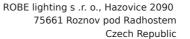
This year's host company, Fundació Òpera Catalunya (The Catalan Opera) from Spain produced a week of special back-to-back opera shows and related events, with lighting equipment and crew supplied by Tallinn-based rental specialist E&T, comprising almost all Robe luminaires.

The Robe moving lights included 8 x MMX Blades, 23 x LEDWash 800s, 16 x MMX Spots and 4 x LEDBeam 350s, joined by 24 x ParFect 100 SWs, all rigged and tech'd by a crew of five led by Andres Sarv working closely with the Catalan Opera's lighting designer David Galvez.

Catalan Opera's technical manager Raul Vilasis was also integral to the mix, together with the festival's organisers Eesti Kontsert, whose production team was led by Arno Jevgrafov.

The critically acclaimed festival is the largest such event in the Baltic region and its ambitious rock 'n' roll style schedule – a format developed by Eesti Kontsert CEO Kertu Orro and her team – is delivered by a different company each year. This year, the five full scale operas over 5 days were Puccini's Tosca and Manon Lescaut; a flamenco ballet version of Bizet's Carmen, Verdi's Il trovatore, plus a gala evening featuring popular Catalan and Spanish pieces as well as a series of late night opera after-parties … and a children's opera production.

E&T has supplied the event for the last 9 years and again won the tender for lighting. As their inventory includes many Robe moving lights, David's lighting scheme was based around these … which he was delighted about as he is a big Robe advocate.

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He regularly specs and uses Robe for his work, which is mainly music based, together with some television, broadcast and corporate shows.

The fixtures were all picked for their brightness and features, and were spread out on seven overhead LX bars and either three or four side booms a side depending on the opera, all used extensively throughout the main stage performances.

The lights multitasked and worked hard for a variety of tasks from key lighting to specials, front and back lighting to stage and set washing.

The four LEDBeam 350s were on LX bar 4 where they were perfect for working the mid-stage area as a wash – thanks to the zoom – and a beam.

Everything over the stage was Robe apart from two fixtures, and while just over 50 moving lights was not a huge rig for the complexity of each production, the features and functionality meant there was plenty of scope to achieve everything David needed to create the requisite dynamics for the different performances.
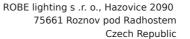
"Robe has been my reference and go-to brand for some time, mainly as the kit is very reliable and the fixtures are excellent and have beautiful colours," he commented.

The biggest design challenges were creating a lighting plot to cover a very diverse selection of shows, on which David had started work several months previously. He initially produced 3D visualizations and worked closely with set designer Jordi Galobart, also communicating with the different production directors throughout.

Once onsite, several elements had to be modified and everything needed finessing, with time extremely tight for David and his lighting assistant Arnau Sala who programmed furiously against the clock, like a standard music festival set up, but with all the massive expectation of an opera audience to satisfy!

The 8-metre trim height above the stage was a reasonable height for a tented venue, and there were some LED screen elements that were used very subtly for visual enhancement.

Time was also easily the biggest challenge for Andres and his team, with lighting getting in only two days before opening night. In addition to the stage lighting, the E&T crew were responsible for an amount of architectural and environmental lighting around the site, including the illumination show cars from Mercedes, one of the main sponsors, for which they also used Robe ParFects 100s.

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On top of this, there were overnight re-rigs to get everything in place for the different productions, again very similar to a rock 'n' roll style music festival.

If anyone has an illusion that opera has a slower and more decorous pace, that's out the window when it comes to this production!

Kertu recalls that some opera companies simply say that there's no way they can work to that schedule with this many different shows in a week, and due to the pace and pressure, she is on the lookout for exceptional companies who can think laterally and "out of the box" in terms of staging.

Production values have always been high on the agenda since Eesti Kontsert took over organising the event in 2008, and Kertu notes - with a big smile - that they have "the very best technical production partners" involved in delivering this event to truly world class standards.

As production director, Arno has his work cut out keeping everything co-ordinated on site and onstage - from the toilets to the green rooms, from the stage to the quick-change areas, from the scaffolding to the seating together with around 60 crew over the week! He has worked for Eesti Kontsert for 19 years – and runs the four venues that they manage across Estonia, with SOF being one of his favourite events each year.

"Finding solid and dependable partners and suppliers is essential," he noted, adding that the long-term relationship with E&T is "excellent" and Andres – who also works as head of lighting at Vanemuine Theatre in Tartu, Estonia's largest theatre – "fully understands the needs and nuances of opera."

"Together with these Robe lights which are so flexible and reliable, it's a great combination," Arno concludes.

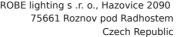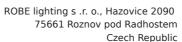Photo Credits: Louise Stickland, Gunnar Laak

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