

## 2 designers + 2 grandMA2s = Starlight Classics with Josh and Chris



For the RMB Starlight Classics, hosted at The Country Club Johannesburg, Lighting Designers Joshua Cutts from Visual Frontier and Christopher Bolton from Keystone Productions worked in unison as they used two grandMA2 Lite consoles for multi-user programming – not an everyday practice in South Africa. Photos by Duncan Riley.



The staging, lighting and set with the back LED was provided by Gearhouse South Africa, the Dome stage was by In2structures, and the side LED screens by AV Systems. The amazing girls from JAM Events, Sam McGrath and Joanne Jaques, ensured another smooth running event with an emphasis to detail as they have done for the past 17 years. Audio was supplied and operated by one of South Africa's finest sound engineers, Marius Marais from Audio Logic.



The rig incorporated 25 Robin 600 LEDWash, 24 Robe Pointes, 16 Robe Red Wash 3.192, Robe 2500 Washes, 24 Martin MAC Vipers, a bucket load of parcans and 48 Longmans.



"It was a good experience," commented Joshua Cutts. This was the third year he had worked on the annual show, which is held in Cape Town in February and in Johannesburg at the beginning of September. This time round, as Josh had a busy work schedule including work on The Voice, South African Idols and programming for the new SABC sport studio, he decided to get Chris Bolton on board and work as a team. "It took the workload off me," said Josh.



It was the first time that he and Christopher worked together on Starlight. "It's a great show to do," said Josh. "The music changes slightly between Cape Town and Joburg, but we tend to keep a similar look and feel and readapt it to the music. When we go back to Cape Town next year, we will build a new design and then repeat the process."



With a large orchestra on stage, the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra with cadet players from the Johannesburg Youth Orchestra Company, there is a restriction to what one can do on stage. "Generally it lands up with the orchestra at the back, the vocalists in the front and redesigning a lighting rig above them," said Joshua. "You can't really change it too much because you need similar light in similar places."



Adds Chris, "The biggest challenge for us, with both Joshua and I being pretty much rock and roll, is no sweeping through the audience. You are not allowed to take any beams from stage and point them up through the crowd at any stage, ever!"



Preparations for Starlight, which is an outside event, this year saw a particularly cold Johannesburg. “We did some prep work in the visualizer before, and when we got to site it was freezing cold,” Chris. “You don’t understand how freezing cold it was! We had a mushroom gas heater between us. We were programming outdoors on site for the first two nights and then on the third night, Thursday, we had sideways rain.” Shownights were on Saturday and Sunday.

With the first part of the show programmed, the rain came down. The show was saved onto memory sticks and the team left for the Keystone studios, where they plugged it in and programmed the second part of the show off-line.



Having not seen it live, it was taking information from the first half that they knew was right and using it in the second half, making it up as they went along. “One follows the stack and watches the show while the other guy is fixing because you can go into what is called Blind Mode and input information into the console while the show is running,” explained Josh.



So while Chris operated the show, Josh would see that the orchestra lights had to come up in six cues but they had not yet been programmed. “So I’d go into Blind Mode, store the orchestra lights six cues ahead of him and then come back out,” said Josh. “And when he’d go into orchestra they’d be there. We worked on the consoles at the same time.”



They had never done this, to this extent, before. “But it works and you get a lot of information into the consoles quicker,” said Chris.



The MA 2 platform made it possible because of the connectivity of the two units in the same network. “It allows you full access on the rig for both operators so you have to trust each other,” said Josh. “I had to know he was working on this and I was working on that, so don’t go grabbing his stuff because it’s going to break.” In such extreme environment it’s important to know each other’s styles well in order not to clash.



Starlight is designed around the Dome structure supplied by In2 Structures. Technically it’s quite an undertaking.



"I recommend that we do not use truss inside the dome because it's already there as part of the structure," said Josh, who does not want straight pieces of truss in the curved shaped dome. "The poor crew have to put up every piece of lighting individually in the roof and hang it off the structure because it keeps with the shape and the form of the roof and you use the architecture of the structure as part of your the design. Gearhouse do this for me and I'm very grateful."



The roof structure is a full week of set up, the technical side takes eight full days and generally by the time the lighting designers get to site everything is ready for them.



It's great music; it's an orchestra, which brings classical with an African twist to the platform. Rand Merchant Bank who are the sponsors of this client entertainment evening call this brand Afro-Symphonic. The show programme is a collective effort put together by a team from RMB, Richard Cock Music Enterprises, Jam Events and Darren Hayward.



“The Show Director was Darren Hayward who was part of the show for the first time and he was excellent,” said Josh. “He was nice to work with, along with the rest of the team, Sam McGrath and Joanne Jacques, and Camera Director for the shoot, Eugene Naidoo.

The conductor, Richard Cock is exceptional. “The show is generally about Richard Cock presenting all this music to the audience,” said Josh. “But he is such a colourful character and just adds to the show. He gets the audience involved and makes them understand the music they are listening to. It’s a great part of the event, it’s fantastic.”



For Joshua, Starlight has always been an event he has wanted to do. “The Cape Town part is particularly wonderful because you get to spend a week on the wine estate, Vergelegen, amongst the oak trees. It’s a tough job and you’re there for a week,” he smiles. “In the day you don’t do much. That’s the one cool part. You can’t work in the day.

“Yes, this is the biggest problem we have,” adds Chris. “We can only really start our job once everyone leaves the room. Because then you can sit and break the music down piece by piece and analyse what’s going on. Otherwise you have venue lights on, people talking, it’s just a nightmare.”



Home time for everyone else is one of Joshua's favourite times. "The quiet time is my best time. The best time in the industry is when I programme the venue lights, having that time alone with the rig."

Colours and design for Starlight Johannesburg was based on the music with the stage layout under Darren Hayward's direction. There were only two songs that they were specific about and wanted colours in, one of them being the Star Wars Music Medley. The video contact was done by 9mm Films and CI Nation. Stefan van der Walt from CI Nation teamed up with Peter Heaney from 9mm films to create the amazing graphics on the back LED wall. It was essential for the lighting to compliment the graphics.



A big part of the show was the MA VPUs. "We use them to pixel map the venue, it's becoming standard on our shows now," said Josh. "So we get to run video over that whole roof and if you lay it out properly it looks like the entire roof has got a fluid motion."

Says Chris, "This is what added a twinkle in the roof, the video motion moving through the fixtures."

Starlight Classics was started by RMB as a client entertainment evening in 1998 and has been attended year

after year by an audience who enjoy light classical music as they picnic with friends under the Jozi sky.