

The show goes on with AJR and Heartfelt Arena



Eugene Pienaar from Heartfelt Arena with Altus Janse van Rensburg, owner of AJR Audio.

Heartfelt Arena, a 4 500-seater venue in Pretoria, and technical supplier AJR Audio have stood together in protest by hosting events, without making a profit, to prove how shows can safely continue during the Covid-19 pandemic.

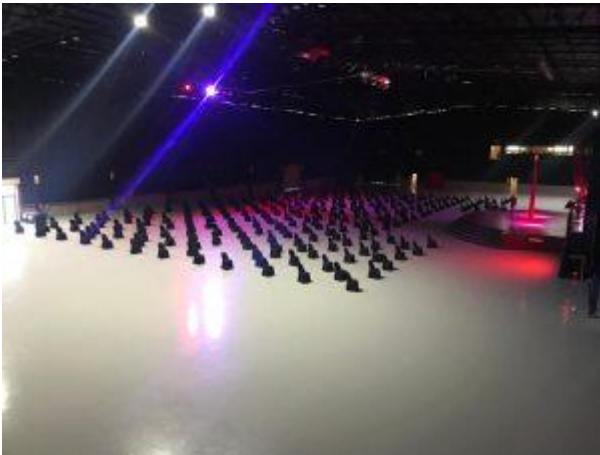
In July, Eugene Pienaar from Heartfelt Arena and Altus Janse van Rensburg, owner of AJR and the venue's in-house technical supplier, hosted a drive-in church service which saw 210 cars attending the event.



Squares marked / taped out on the venue's floor.

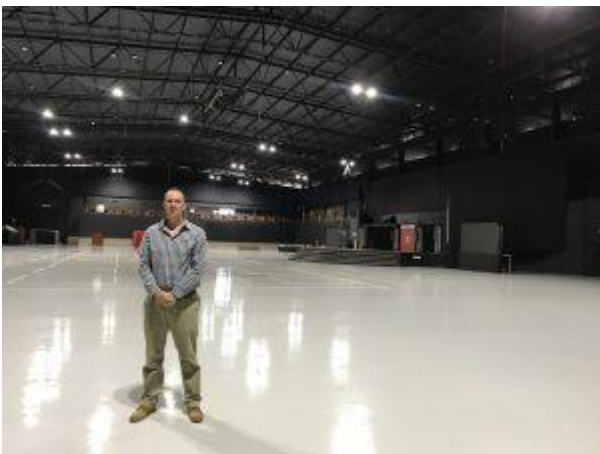
In August, the team took it further. They applied tape on the venue's floor to mark out blocks and walkways. A table with chairs was placed within each block. Each block would host a family. They then held five sold-out shows for Neverland Circus, a unique circus that combines the traditional Brazilian, South African and a few international circus acts, also known for reaching out to less privileged communities and charities across South Africa like orphanages, old age homes, informal settlements, hospitals and homes for people with physical and

mental disabilities. At the end of each show the performers, who live by the saying, 'Anything can happen if you just believe,' spend time with the audience sharing their dreams and stories and inspiring people to dream big and believe that they can achieve anything.



Social Distancing for a seated audience.

Well, Eugene and Altus, must have taken this to heart, because in September they took action again. This time using cinema-style seating in complying with social distancing regulations, they hosted two live music concerts proving that events can be held responsibly. Bookings for the performances were made on-line, and on arrival, guests completed a register, had their temperatures taken, sanitized, and participated in a Survey App to gather information on how safe they felt while attending the show. The feedback was positive.



"We created the events during the strict gatherings act as a protest," said Altus. "It was not a political move but rather to stand up for our industry. Our industry has really taken a hammering. When I think of the casual crew we normally hire, now without work, it's heartbreaking. There has been such a ripple effect because suddenly there is no income. We built a company for the past ten years, and financially we were in a position to keep it running for two to three months, but now, almost seven months later, the banks are not helping. They are good enough to call us but want to help with more loans. We don't want a loan to pay a loan."

The relationship between Heartfelt Arena and AJR started in 2015 when Altus was appointed as the venue's in-house technical supplier. The large arena has supporting venues such as a conference room, rehearsal studio, an artist holding room and VIP lounge. When a fire severely damaged the Heartfelt Arena in September 2018, it was purposefully rebuilt, and Altus was consulted to ensure the new space would be technically sound from a fibre infrastructure to creating a professional stage that can be demonstrated to clients with a touch of a button. The world-class equipment on the audio side includes L-Acoustics AARCS WiFo and X12 (for monitoring and out fills), while the lighting comprises of Robe miniPointes, Robe LEDWash 600s, Robe LEDBeam 150s, Robe LEDBeam 100s, Phoneix Bars and ETC Source Fours. The venue was also kitted out with quality sports flooring, making it ideal for sporting events as well as concerts, gala evenings and corporate occasions.



Indoor Hockey played in the Heartfelt Arena

With Covid-19, Heartfelt Event offers virtual and hybrid solutions, but as anyone in the live events industry can testify, the income generated from these events is a drop in the ocean and will not sustain livelihoods.

“The general public has been isolated for so long and they have an incredible spirit of wanting to do things the right way,” said Eugene Pienaar from Heartfelt Arena. “Putting economics aside, we need events for people, it’s so obvious that people long to be with other people. When we put on the circus show, applying social distancing and letting families sit together in their box or square, it got so emotional for some people. The clown brought out laughter and there were also tears. It was so beautiful because people were coming together again. We are not making money right now and we have an understanding that for the next season we are just there to serve the public. If we can serve well, we know that something great would have been created and hopefully we can ensure that a few more people hold onto their jobs.”

