

Clash of the Choirs

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Story and photos courtesy Louise Stickland

For the second year running Pretoria South Africa based Blond Productions are supplying full technical production – lighting, video and sound – including Robe moving lights – and design for the popular South African TV talent competition, Clash of The Choirs.

The 10 ‘final’ performance episodes this year involve seven hand-picked choirs performing several different pieces of work each week. The show is being recorded in the Victory Theatre, Orange Grove, Johannesburg and is broadcast twice weekly by Mzansi Magic. It is again expected to be one of the ‘most watched’ series on SA television and highlights the country’s propensity for vocal talent.



Lighting for this year's show is a co-design between Peter Rieck – who did the first series – and Ryan Lombard, both of whom specified the Robe ROBIN MMX Spots and ROBIN LEDBeam 100s.

The Victory Theatre, built in 1929 is a much smaller space than last year's new Soweto Theatre which was not available this time around, and this change of venue is a major challenge for lighting. The majority of the rig is flown on a house bar system which has limited weight-loading and so smaller and lighter fixtures like the MMX Spot and LEDBeam 100 are ideal.



Blond and Dream Sets designed and installed the stage set which is based on last year's very successful creation, but adapted to fit the different space.

Each episode is themed musically - e.g., late Great Musicians, Pop, Choirmasters' Hits and so on - and also visually, with each one receiving its own look, treatment, video, etc. This aesthetic approach is at the essence of the show and this entails an amount of ingenuity with the lighting.

Above the stage are six Robe MMX Spots, 14 x LEDBeam 100s, 10 x 2K fresnels and six beam lights. On the floor are another six MMX Spots, 24 x LEDBeam 100s and another six beam lights.



In addition to these, there are RGB LED panels dotted around the auditorium for both front / back light and camera fill, and either side of the stage at the top of the main steps are two 6 mm LED screens showing graphics, stings and VT play-ins.

It is a basic rig, but it has to be made to go a long way!

The MMXs are used for powerful back lighting from top and bottom, and to create the mood for each song with bold gobo looks and brightly coloured beam-work slicking through the haze.

Some of the LEDBeam 100s are used to internally light the set columns, while the others - fitted with the 20 degree diffusers are used for set washing. Their small size and light weight are ideal for rigging on the house bars.

All the lighting is programmed and operated by Lombard using a grandMA2 light.

He receives a brief for each episode and theme and then considers other related elements like costumes, etc. and programmes 'live' to create the scenes and looks required. It is an intense way to work but the spontaneity involved also produces some really gratifying results.

Series director Valentina Jelani Mathibela comments, "Lighting is absolutely fundamental to this show. It helps set the scene and mood of the theme and provides a dynamic backdrop to the individual pieces of work being performed".

Blond's Christiaan Ballot is delighted to be involved in Clash of the Choirs once again. "It's really taken off as a concept and makes great TV. Making the performances work in a completely different space has been interesting and challenging and produced some great teamwork!"

Blond Productions - a leading SA rental company specialising in the television sector - has a large stock of Robe moving lights and has been investing in the brand for over eight years, supplied by Robe's SA distributor DWR Distribution.



Clash of The Choirs

After the regional auditions, during which each choir or singer performs an acapella version of a song of their choice, seven choirmasters select the best choir or assemble the best singers to create their own unique choir. With expert coaching to develop the singers and guided by choirmasters, these seven choirs compete in the televised section Clash of The Choirs and are eventually whittled down to three for the grand finale.