

Afrikaans is Groot, powered by DiGiCo, back and bigger than ever



Kief Kreativ

For three weeks in November, Time Square's 8,500-capacity SunBet Arena in Pretoria, South Africa, is home to Afrikaans is Groot, a series of performances devoted to Afrikaans music and culture. 2023 was the first outing with DiGiCo Quantum consoles and in 2024 the audio team increased their capacity with a Quantum 338 and Quantum 326 Pulse at Front of House and Quantum 338 at the monitor position.



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2024 was Afrikaans is Groot's biggest year yet, boasting nine shows over two weekends, with over 70,000 people enjoying the spectacular cultural experience. There are approximately seven million Afrikaans speaking people and the community tight knit, so the run of concerts is an event not-to-miss. Kyle Freemantle is Head of Audio for the production and has overseen the extraordinary growth over the last decade. He offers his insight into why DiGiCo continues to be Afrikaans is Groot's console of choice.



### Quintessential

“DiGiCo consoles are at the top of my list because of their flexibility regarding Optocore networks and their ease programming,” Fremantle explains. “We are running an additional Dante network for all the radio-microphones and playback lines. In total, we have just shy of 128 inputs across both the Optocore and Dante networks. All these inputs are fed via copy-audio and Dante to a pair of MADI/DANTE bridges, which feed two MADI recorders for our main recording. There is a backup recording, which is fed by the MADI outputs on the RMIO units to a DiGiGrid MGB to accommodate all 128 channels.”



### Quintessential

Utilising a family of DiGiCo products has reduced set-up times in the venue, with Freemantle appreciating the ease of using Fourier and DiGiGrid MBG for all their external processing. KLANG is in use for in-ear-monitoring, enabling a clear and consistent environment for the many performers featured during the concerts.



Quintessential

“Fourier runs all the effects and multiband compressors on the masters,” he says. “Once you’ve loaded plugins for the first time, it’s easy and straightforward. It’s been great being able to use the Valhalla reverbs. The fact that its Dante I/O ties into our existing large Dante network makes load-in time much faster and the backbone is much more robust than on other brands. The need for third-party gear has also drastically reduced.”



### Quintessential

The shows combine musical performances from a whole host of Afrikaans musicians, but they also reflect the cultural richness of the Afrikaans community, combining spoken word performances in a Variety-style. This style of performance can mean a busy time for monitor engineers, but as Gert Watson found out, having KLANG and DiGiCo on your team can make all the difference.

"With a Variety show like this one, where all the artists join each other on stage to perform a single number, I have countless button presses on the console for each song," he says. "I was really surprised by how seamless the DiGiCo – KLANG integration is. Using KLANG on the artists aux sends did not affect my workflow or speed at all; it was so smooth that I almost never had to take my hands off the surface to fiddle with a laptop because everything was right there on the console. This resulted in a truly amazing audio experience not only for the artist, but also for me because I could focus solely on the audio, plus having such a fun surface to work on is a real treat!"

Paulo Azevedo is a producer and Executive label manager for Coleske Artists PTY, promoters and producers of the concerts. His unique understanding of his label's artists makes him well placed to mix front of house. The show is so complex that there are two FOH engineers, with Azevedo mixing the vocals and Murray Lubbe looking after the band, tracks and additional instruments.

"Afrikaans music is vocal forward, so we need to have the acoustic space to ensure the vocals can be managed

effectively,” Azevedo explains. “There are some really quick cues in the group numbers, with people entering and exiting in quick succession. This is a unique performance, with a full range of emotions for the audience, from excitement and comedy to nostalgia and legacy.”

Mixing for live performance is a very different experience to the studio environment that Azevedo is used to but, as he recalls, the opportunity to use a DiGiCo desk has been a real game-changer.

“Being a sound engineer, it is not often that you hear something as marked as the change to DiGiCo,” he says. “Normally a difference in console would be very subtle, an incremental improvement that pushes you over the line. But the change to DiGiCo was quite a significant jump because you can clearly hear the headroom and the transparency overall. The desk brought so much more clarity. There is a real comfort in knowing you’ve got this very stable, incredibly good sounding console. It was a learning curve for us for over the last two years, but now, I don’t think we could move to any other platform, it has been fantastic.”

The show is staged in a variety format, with a full house-band that is adapted for each performance, with drums, bass guitars and keyboards being added or removed as needed. There are backing vocalists and 16 lead vocalists, who may also be playing acoustic guitar, all using radio-microphones and in ear monitors.

“Because the show is so big, the audio team have three full days to rehearse,” expands Azevedo. “We keep most channels in isolate throughout rehearsals and sound-check, then once the performance has settled, we start recording Snapshots. The rehearsal days are full on before we even hit the first show, but it gives us the time to programme everything nicely!”



Ruben Roos Photography

Azevedo's Quantum 326 Pulse is programmed to change Snapshots via timecode, so when there are big group numbers, that could have up to 30 triggers during a song, it is all taken care of automatically by the console. This is a feature that has enabled Azevedo to concentrate on what he does best, capturing the essence of a studio-recorded performance and elevating it for a live audience.

"These are top-class musicians and Murray and I manage about 80-90% of the artists on stage, so we know their preferences well," he says. "Using a desk like the DiGiCo Quantum 326 is great fun, it allows us to encapsulate the studio production in a live setting and we don't just have the audio excitement, we have the visual excitement too! People come every year to see what we will do next, it's a feeling you can't get from streaming and using DiGiCo made the whole show run like an absolute breeze."

Günther Müller, project manager for the show supplied the 326, adding the console to MGG's inventory just in time for the festival, maintaining their position as Africa's largest stockist of DiGiCo consoles. Getting these results relies on great relationships, as he concludes.

"Kyle Robson and the whole team at DWR got our brand new console flown in, prepped and delivered to site in record time, it is due to this amazing team work and help from Ian Staddon and his team at DiGiCo that we are



able to push to get these results,” Müller finishes. “We will continue to invest in DiGiCo, the local support from DWR and international support from Ian and the team really gives us confidence in the brand. We never feel like ‘just another customer’ at the bottom of Africa. We are valued and have a personal connection with the team at DiGiCo, which will keep us coming back for more, because they keep it personal.”