

Afrikaans is Groot with Robe



Photo by Anriette van Wyk, Kief Kreativ

The 2024 *Afrikaans is Groot* (AIG) concert series was staged at SunBet Arena in Time Square, Pretoria, South Africa, produced by Coleske Artist Management and hailed as among the best live entertainment showcases for a range of Afrikaans music and artists. Nine sold-out performances thrilled audiences over two consecutive weekends.

The show was lit by two of South Africa's best-known and most creative lighting designers, Joshua Cutts and André Siebrits from Visual Frontier, who stunned and amazed everyone with their visual style and flair. On the lighting rig were a load of Robe moving lights, all delivered by Johannesburg-based lighting rental company, MGG.

Josh and André have both worked on the annual event previously. In fact, Josh has clocked up around 7 years as lighting designer and André at least 6, the last four as lead programmer. 2024 was the 10th anniversary of the overall event which has proved enduringly popular with the Afrikaans community who play a prominent role in the vibrant 'Rainbow Nation' of South Africa.

The general theme this year was gold, so for lighting that immediately suggested a palette rich in ambers and warm tones as Josh and André set to work on producing their lighting magic. "This event has evolved into more of a Visual Frontier co-design," explained Josh, with him concentrating on the artists and atmospheric elements, while André takes care of programming all the effects. "We are a great team" says Josh describing the combination of André's cutting-edge technical skills with his overall imagination and perspective.



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A wide variety of Robe kit was used, including ESPRITES, BMFL WashBeams, Blades & Spots, LEDBeam 100s, 150s and 350s, Pointes, MegaPointes, Spiiders, Tetra2s and Squares ... plus four RoboSpot base stations, all adding up to 361 x Robe products on the rig along with some other lights making up the total of just over 800 light sources.

This BIG Robe presence was not just because it's what MGG had in stock, it is what Josh and André specified and wanted on the gig.

It is an 'all ages' show – from teens to grandparents – there is something for everyone and therefore the aesthetic must be a fine balance of being visually stimulating yet not overpowering.

Twenty-three artists took to the stage for the two-and-a-half-hour show, so the lighting department also had to give each one a different and distinctive look as they powered through the best Afrikaans songs of the year.

“Basically, we had to be very flexible and dynamic and that's what drove the fixture choice and why we wanted so much Robe,” stated Josh.



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The impressive 50-metre-wide stage traversed the complete width of the arena. Set and stage layout was designed by MGG's Günther Müller. The technical director was Coleske Artist Management's Ian Vos and their creative producer was Barry Pretorius, so much of the inspiration for all departments came from these two who decided the overall style, which Josh and André took as a starting point for the lighting design.

The diagonally orientated design was large, prominent and also set the tone, and one of the initial tasks for lighting was in-filling any black spaces in between the LED elements.

The small size of the various LEDBeam fixtures was a real asset, and three automated triangular-shaped header pods rigged over the downstage / forestage area were populated with LEDBeam 150s and Tetra2s on one side and a set of blinders on the reverse for completely contrasting effects. Each pod was rigged on 3 motors so they could pitch, tilt and completely change the structural appearance of the stage space.

"We needed small, light and fast fixtures for this feature, so LEDBeam 150s were ideal," noted André.

The ESPRITES and LEDBeam 350s were alternated along two L-shaped trusses covering three-quarters of the side stage depth, and from these positions, they could cover the stage with quality washes and highly effective beams.

LEDBeam 100s were positioned left and right of the main screen for a low angle flare. "They are so small, light, fast and brilliant for small flicks and accents," stated Josh, adding that they generally tried to contour lighting to the geometric shapes in the stage and screen design.



Photo by Quintessential

The Pointes and MegaPointes were the beam workhorses of the show, with the MegaPointes positioned along the front edge of the stage, thoughtfully calculated so they didn't blind the audience's eyes when doing sweeping all-encompassing room effects. These positions also allowed the roof space between the stage and the audience to be filled with the beams, an area that is often dead space, but here Josh and André utilised it to introduce additional lighting movement.

"We love the brightness, zoom, CMY mixing and the reliability of the MegaPointes," said André, "we can still do virtually anything with them even though they are now considered a 'classic' fixture."

LEDWash 600s were used as audience lighting, rigged in six trusses flown above the arena, and the Spiiders formed part of the back wall V-shaped feature lighting where the Flower effect and pixel capabilities could be maximised. "You have a pixel effect, a wash and a strobe all in one fixture – we love Spiiders!" commented Josh.

The 27 x ESPRITES were the main back light onstage, also specials on the band and dancers. The show featured multiple guest artists, so specials were vital, and this year, three of those ESPRITES were also operated via the RoboSpot system.



Photo by Quintessential

The BMFLs were the principal key lights – four also running on RoboSpots and the balance used for general stage front light, with the BMFL Blades especially used to light the band members. Robe’s legendary BMFL moving light series has been a staple in the industry for over a decade, and its legacy as a workhorse fixture is undeniable. “BMFLs have been a go-to for many years, and while technology has evolved, they still offer a familiar toolset,” said Josh.

The initial meetings for AIG typically start around Feb / March of the year and the concerts are always at the end of November.

An extensive creative brief developed by Barry – relating to looks, feels, moods and moments – is essential as multiple departments and disciplines need to synchronise to this and ensure that the prep time is used efficiently and effectively.



Photo by Quintessential

Josh and André receive the music in advance, and nearer to showtime, two weeks of intensive previz ramps up, followed by a week of pre-production. Josh explained that the process is well structured and organised, so any changes in music or presentation are communicated in a timely manner so everyone can adjust accordingly.

MGG also gets involved early on. As soon as Josh and André have the basic lighting plot, the MGG team looks at it and decides on the best approaches and solutions for rigging and engineering, and how to achieve the design in the timeframe.

Günther is very much at the heart of co-ordinating and making this work, “and he and all the MGG technicians are great collaborators,” stated André.

Alongside the many challenges of working on *Afrikaans is Groot* come many rewards. “The Coleske Artist Management organization really trusts us. This show is a big part of their identity and it’s an honour to receive and enjoy this professional respect from Arnold Coleske, Brendon Hargroves and Ian Vos, together with Barry who has very strong and coherent ideas that help us all to work towards a production design that’s exciting, beautiful and entertaining! Everything we envisioned for this came to life on stage” concluded Josh.