

Astera for PoliNation Project



The city of Birmingham, UK, hosted the first PoliNations event, an epic and vibrant ‘urban oasis’ installation work that took over Victoria Square with stunning 40ft-high sculpted archi-cultural trees and thousands of varieties of plants crafted into a unique setting that hosted a diversity of live events, experiences, and performances. The forest celebrated the colour, existential beauty, delicacy, and adaptability of horticultural life, telling stories of different species and their global journeys, movement and transformations, a fantastic metaphor for the energy and symbiosis that cultural diversity brings to any society.

Lighting designer Matt Daw was already onboard with the project when Hampshire-based lighting rental company Liteup won a competitive tender issued by creative production company Trigger Collective – under the artistic direction of Angie Bual and Carl Robertshaw – to illuminate the project.



sive task, including 117 x PixelBricks, 8 x

PoliNations was commissioned via the 'UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK' initiative to produce as part of the Birmingham 2022 Festival, staged as the city celebrated hosting a very successful Commonwealth Games event. It was presented to the public over 17 days with the support of Birmingham City Council.

Astera is an "obvious" choice from many angles, explained Liteup's project manager Marc Callaghan, adding that – obviously – all the lighting had to be as sustainable and environmentally friendly as possible.

They also needed robust reliable products with bright high-quality outputs that would work outdoors over the 17 event days plus the build period.

The small size and efficiency of all these Astera products was ideal for Matt's lighting scheme, especially the PixelBricks which were used to illuminate the pathways criss-crossing the forest.

His starting point for lighting PoliNations was the 30-minute 'Sunset shift' sequence, an all-encompassing daily sonic and visual experience which played out at dusk. He broke this down into five 'chapters', the Golden Hour, the Blue Hour, Forest Floor Awakens, Mycorrhizal Communication and After Dark, each illustrating the forest coming to life after dark, as the foliage and the assorted creatures living within it energise.

PixelBricks were positioned all around the installation so the light skimmed the pathways. Their small size meant the lightsource could be easily concealed and ensconced in the forest foliage with only the light streaking across the ground visible!

They also played a functional role in providing essential light for the public to walk safely through the installation. "These compact fixtures offered me a lot of options and look great," enthused Matt.



The PixelBricks were all run wired, and arguably, this is the largest UK installation of these hugely handy and flexible luminaires to date!

Liteup has invested heavily in Astera in recent years, however this project fully cleared them out of PixelBricks admitted Marc!

Some of the Astera AX9s and AX10s were used as longer-range wash lighting for the trees from the outside, in conjunction with 28 moving lights with gobos that textured the tops and trunks, and the trees were also internally lit with bespoke LED fixtures to add depth and dimension to the structures at night.

The balance of the AX9s and AX10s were utilised as mobile lights that could be deployed wherever there was a need for a performance or an intervention happening in the forest. This enabled participating artists to respond spontaneously to the space and where the public were gathering.

Obviously, a wireless option for this was essential, and the AX9s and 10s proved incredibly easy to set up and

‘go’.

Matt appreciates the colour mixing, the consistency and continuity of the Astera colours generally and the overall quality and richness of the light outputs.

He uses Astera products on most of his shows now for their flexibility and high quality which includes the “excellent” front and numerous lens options.

While the Astera units were one element of multiple lightsources Matt used to craft his light-art and help create the forest environment, they played a very fundamental role.

All the lighting was programmed onto and run through a grandMA2 lighting console.

Matt found this project very exhilarating and fun, it made him think out of the box and work with a highly creative and imaginative team who gelled and made it happen.

A major challenge was competing against the substantial city centre ambience, and the other was in not overpowering the beauty and enchantment of the forest of plants with lighting! It had to be a perfect balance.

PoliNations Birmingham proved a massive success that engaged the community and generated lots of interest and positive feedback.