

Battle of the Bands – National Schools competition

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St Mary's School Waverley, located in Johannesburg, recently marked the return of the Battle of the Bands competition hosted in the school's 540-seater theatre, The Edge. The event, which has a history spanning more than a decade, was put on hold during the Covid-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022. This year the primary objective was to rekindle the competition and to offer young talents a platform equipped with lighting and audio to showcase their musical skills!

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Sasha Ehlers is the Head of Culturals at St Mary's and the Technical Manager at The Edge and has enjoyed being part of the Battle of the Bands, taking over as technical director for the festival in 2018. What she appreciates most about the competition is the inspiration she gets by helping young people gain confidence, find their "tribe", and experience the joy of live performances. She finds it extremely fulfilling to witness the student's growth and excitement, especially those who have never had the opportunity to perform on a stage with professional equipment.

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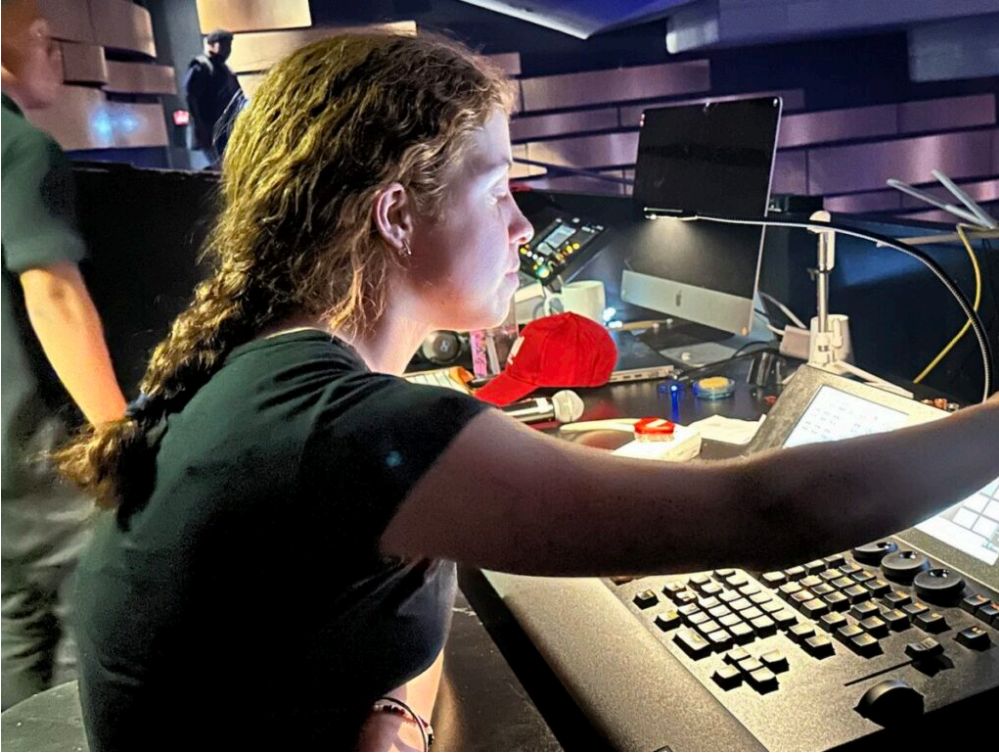
This year, DWR Distribution was delighted to once again be a sponsor, supplying an L-Acoustics A10 Sound system, 2 x Robe Tarrantulas, and 2 x Robe Esprites. In addition, DWR's Jaques Pretorius who serves as the Head of Training at DWR, not only delivered training to St Mary's students and The Edge's resident sound engineers, Joshua Molotsi and Eldino Kleinbooi but also made the learning experience enjoyable. The students were trained on a grandMA dot2 and they discovered that lighting isn't as complex as it may seem and that the lighting board is far less intimidating than they initially thought!

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Sasha describes the sponsored equipment making a noticeable difference to the schools' existing sound and lighting system. "The feedback from many schools and audience members was just how great the experience was," Sasha comments. "Most notable on the audio was the difference the sound system made to the quality, clarity, and bass of the music. The staff were discussing the difference between Battle of the Bands and a fashion show hosted recently which they described as 'way too loud and noisy', while this added PA system made a difference - the audio was strong and vibrant but not overbearing. The lights looked fantastic on stage and the students learnt that a little can go a long way as well as realizing how versatile simplicity can be. This year's competition was not as large as previous lighting rigs, but still added to the fantastic overall atmosphere of the night."

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Jaques also shared his valuable expertise to enhance the technical aspects of the event by helping to program lights and setting up for the event, while DWR's Richard Smith set up the sound system and showed the crew how to use the equipment.

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Rand Park High School's victorious band, known as Philaphobia, stood out among the competitors. The event also featured two bands from St Mary's School (a junior and senior band), along with two bands from the Saints Music Academy in Bloemfontein, King Edward VII School (KES), Roedean School, Kingsmead College, and Parktown Boys' High School.

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Sasha expressed her gratitude to everyone who played a role in making the event a success namely the bands and their dedicated teachers who consistently go the extra mile for them, Jaques Pretorius for his unwavering support and technical expertise, to DWR Distribution for supporting this initiative and to the crew at St Mary's for their hard work and for going above and beyond to give learners and fantastic experience.

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“I think that the event is noteworthy for many people in many different ways and that, in part, is the beauty of it,” Sasha concluded. “For some bands that are entirely student led, the sense of accomplishment at producing their own song and hearing the crowd cheer is special. For many school bands, the opportunity to play on a stage with music and lighting of such high quality is a once in a lifetime chance. For the children behind the scenes, they realise just how valuable the ‘hidden’ roles can be, but overall, the children take away the idea that ‘Yes we can!’ The energy and excitement that permeated the foyer and auditorium of The Edge is a testament to the valuable experience.”

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