

Behind South Africa's Innibos Festival

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Power to the people

An enormous thanks to Ledetta Asfa-Wossen and Simon Luckhurst from Pro AVL MEA for covering the Innibos event. Beautiful photos thanks to Anriette van Wyk of Kief Kreativ. Story below.



Ready for the stage

Extensive preparations were needed under Mbombela's gruelling humidity at the Innibos festival. **Ledetta Asfa-Wossenspoke** to some of those that made it happen

Born out of South Africa's Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK) festival from the early 1990s in the Western Cape and Aardklop Arts Festival in Potchefstroom, Innibos has grown to become the largest festival of its kind in the region. Each year, the five-day show welcomes an influx of people from far and wide to Mbombela (formerly Nelspruit) for its live music and theatre.

Now in its 16th year, the event has come to rely upon the safe hands of MGG Productions for its main structures and major live areas. This year, the rental company was in charge of supplying technical and stage structures for Innibos' Main Stage, the Vodacom-Lowvelder Arena Stage, KykNET Leefarea Stage and Rock Stage while also supplying the raked seating structures for the theatre productions in the school halls.

'We started with our prep on 10 June and the last trucks arrived back on 4 July, but the actual pre-production of the event took five months,' explains MGG project manager, Günther Müller. 'Our aim this year was to really lift the standard of the festival which impacted the decision-making as well. We have been involved with Innibos for five years now and every year our responsibility has grown. The beauty of being involved with a production for a long period of time is the fact that you can improve on your own performance each year, which lifts the production value of the event in return.'



With Innibos featuring a variety of indoor and outdoor venues with different types of performance, a key factor was selecting the right audio, video and lighting for the job.

'Innibos is a large-scale project, so we spent a lot of time using audio prediction software to make sure that each sound system is suitable for the size and capacity of that specific stage. The Main Stage, for instance, had to cater to 40,800 people on the Saturday night. Kyle Freemantle, our systems technician and engineer, was given the task to draw, predict, plan and execute the PA systems for all four stages,' adds Müller.

The heat is on

The festival setup was split up into core areas, with MGG working on all the main festival grounds and live areas. Local company AVS Hire supplied technical for the clients located in the festival ground, while Blond Productions was appointed to supply technical and manage the production in the theatre venues. And with the Lowveld being home to the hottest winter temperatures in South Africa, conditions were sticky.



'We were working in a dusty and sometimes rather uncomfortable environment. Mbombela peaks at 30°C during the day and can drop to very low temperatures at night. We're constantly reminding the crew to drink enough water, apply sunscreen lotion and take multivitamins. It is so vital to plan the event in detail. You cannot take on a production like this without proper technical drawings and, most importantly, weight calculations. We liaised with the engineers from various equipment manufacturers to ensure we do it correctly. This scale of event is a logistical beast. We hauled over 135,000kg of structures and scaffolding. That's without a single piece of technical equipment. We had about 14 trucks carrying approximately 20,000kg per load – that's more than 280,000kg of equipment and structures,' adds Müller.

MGG alone had a crew of 60 people onsite, excluding additional support that came from its HQ. 'Planning and communication is key to the success of a project. Without that it would be impossible to get all the equipment and people needed in one place safely. Timescales were tight and we had to stick to a schedule to get the rigs up on time. The hardest part of the whole event was to get everything back safely after a draining three weeks with long hours but Innibos turned out to be yet another world-class festival,' recalls Müller.

The sound setup for the Main Stage was composed of L-Acoustics K2s, SB28s, SB18s, Karas, Arcs

Wides and 8XTs with JBL VTX V20s as out-fills. Onstage monitoring consisted of L-Acoustics 12XTs and SB18ms. The FOH engineer for the Main Stage, Murray Lubbe, used a Soundcraft Vi7000 as the FOH audio console with a combination of a Soundcraft Vi5000, DiGiCo SD9 and DiGiCo S21 to mix monitors, in-ears, ME units as well as talkback and comms systems. Handheld mics, belt packs and wireless in-ear monitors on the primary live stages included Shure Axient, Axient Digital, UHF-R, ULX-D, PSM1000 and PSM900 units.



Lighting up Innibos

The lighting rig on the Main Stage was specified by the festival's lighting designer, Johan Ferreira,

while the stage lighting fixtures were chosen by MGG. 'The lights had to be reliable and durable enough to withstand the harsh environment of a festival. We deployed over 650 fixtures across four stages,' adds Müller.

Marking his 13th year as the lighting designer at Innibos for the Main Stage, Ferreira was responsible for all the visual design aspects, from stage to LED screens, lighting design, programming and operation.



'Designing for Innibos is a lengthy process starting well in advance. Most of the artists for the Main Stage are booked just a month after a festival has passed, giving me 10-11 months to get it all ready. We had more than 110,000 people attending this year and the event has received the Fiesta award for best outdoor production specifically for the Main Stage,' adds Ferreira.

Innibos turns the surrounding area into a buzzing cultural village. The festival runs from Wednesday and culminates in a free gospel show on the Sunday. During the week, the festival grounds are filled with four stages, ranging from pop to rock to theatre in the round and the Main Stage with full productions in the evenings.

'My design approach for the Main Stage changed this year as we had the opportunity to transform the stage structure. Being an outdoor event, the environment is very tough on equipment. For the stage design, I created a multi-layered performance area comprising risers for bands and a thrust area to accommodate the different performers for all the shows. The Layer Scaffolding system supplied by MGG worked

exceptionally well and provided me with a bigger and stronger structure. It's important to have a design that is flexible as the productions onstage vary dramatically between artists. One moment can be intimate with a solo artist and the next can be a 10-piece band with an ensemble cast or choir. Fortunately, I work closely with the production directors, but surprises do still happen in a festival environment,' he adds.

The lighting design consisted of four main truss hangs over the stage, fixtures on the stage floor, side wash positions and lighting on the scaffolding structure for audience effects.

The extensive stage rig included several Robe CycFX 8 lights, Robe Robin LEDBeam 100s and 150s, Robe Robin LEDWash 1200 and 600 fixtures, along with Robe MegaPointes and Pointes, Clay Paky Sharpys and Clay Paky Mythos luminaires with Philips Nitro 510s and 510cs and Martin Rush Strobe 5X5s around the audience and front AV screens.

As the main lighting console, a grandMA2 Full size with a grandMA2 onPC for backup and system monitoring together with MA NPU and MA Network switches were deployed. An MA 3D visualiser was used to help pre-program all the shows. 'grandMA has got the ideal package when it comes to full system control and will always be my console of choice - it just makes life easier,' he adds.

Creative thinking

Pieter-Jan Kapp of PJK Production Management, operating as technical manager for the theatre venues, brought in Blond Productions, which was assigned AV production for the theatre venues, having worked on KKNK and Aardkloppreviously.



'We worked on eight venues - mainly school, community and church halls with a stage and that's it, so we had to convert these spaces into theatres to perform cabarets to small comedy setups and larger dramatic theatre productions. On top of that, you're looking at around two or three performances per day, per venue, with differing technical requirements. So, we had to equip the venues with full technical rigs, FOH and lighting consoles and the same with the sound,' explains managing director at Blond, Christian Ballot.

For lighting throughout the theatre venues, several ETC Source Fours were fitted. 'They're such solid, bullet-proof fixtures that really stand the test of time. Onstage, we usually use 1K Fresnels or 650 Fresnels supplemented with LED PAR cans and some special effects if needed,' adds Ballot. DWR Distribution provided technical support on the MA Lighting dot2 control systems in place.

Highlighting some of the problematic factors of working an event like Innibos, head of audio at Blond, Riaan Rademan, elaborates: 'At some festivals, we can often use a generic rig but one of the challenges at Innibos is the venues have limited power so we had to go down the LED route. These are not professional venues to start with and Mbombela isn't a big place, so the infrastructure isn't always there.'



The key is to adapt, interjects Ballot. 'You might walk into a venue and there's no FOH bar. Or, we have to bring our own pipes and find a way to rig an FOH bar or climb through the roof to hang a lighting bar. You have to think outside the box and carry a big bag of tricks. 'Similarly, the same flexibility was needed for the audio setup. If it's a musical performance, you'll add a bit more beef onto the PA, or, if it's a larger venue, we'll add a VRX line array instead of say a JBL point source box.'

An event like this requires lateral thinking and, regardless of the scale, weather and lack of power, this year's event was a case of meticulous preparation.

'The thing that everyone wants to avoid in any type of production is equipment failure. We had one or two pieces of equipment giving problems, but everything was soon fixed or replaced with the help of the excellent crew onsite and the great after-sales service from our suppliers. We had a big rain storm on the Wednesday as gates opened for the public. This was a first for the festival, but we were prepared, so the rain had little-to-no effect on us. We thought that it would impact festival attendance, but the sales were up 16% on last year. The event was truly a culmination of hard work, an incredibly focused and professional crew and quality equipment,' concludes Müller.



www.blondproductions.co.za

www.dwrdistribution.co.za

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