

Big City, Big Dreams ballet with Green Hippo



Set, lighting and AV designer, Wilhelm Disbergen, relied on a Hippotizer Boreal and a giant mirror to create something utterly extraordinary for the ballet production Big City, Big Dreams, staged at the Joburg Theatre.



The original showcase, directed by Fiona Ramsay, was a collaboration between three dance companies – the Joburg Ballet, Vuyani Dance Company, and Moving Into Dance Mophatong. Over forty professional dancers adorned the stage as classical ballet infused with contemporary and street dance. The love story, with the city of Johannesburg as the backdrop, portrays a young man in the corporate world who falls in love with a dancer.



An artistic and key focus of the set was a giant mirror (15m x 9m) suspended at a 45-degree angle over the white ballet mats below, enabling the audience to see the dancers from above. "I also projected visuals on the floor that reflected onto the mirror behind the dancers," Wilhelm explained. "Because I used strong side lights, I could wrap the dancer in a clam shell of visuals. During the finale, the wall lifted and was almost perpendicular to the floor, giving the full company a gigantic silver wall to dance in front of and giving the audience a view of themselves watching the show."



Thanks to the Hippotizer Boreal, the enormous image (16m x 16m) was easy to set up and wonderful to paint with. Two stacked Christie projectors, supplied by Staal van den Bergh, overlapped slightly to achieve the square format. "It was wonderful to see the dancers enveloped by the numerous layers which gave the production a rich and authentic Joburg look and feel."



Top South African programmer Glenn Duncan assisted on the production. Hippotizer Boreal controlled 16 layers of content over two viewports. "This gave us immense freedom in composing the final tableau," said Wilhelm. "Images were sometimes made up of many different images blended together and moved to achieve the best look. The strange thing was that because we were seeing the floor reflected in the mirror, all images and videos had to be not only turned upside down, but flipped left to right as well, so that it read right. Sometimes I deliberately left the images like that so that it looked as if you were on the inside of a bar window looking out."



Two fibre DVI-D outputs for the two projectors were triggered by a grandMA2 full console over ethernet. All visuals and low-resolution video was streamed to the lighting console via CIP protocol, enabling the users to see the video running live on one of the console screens when selected.



“What I enjoyed was seeing how the follow spots made long shadows behind the dancers and this followed them upside down as a reflection above, melting with the projected image underneath and above,” said Wilhelm.





For this prolific lighting, set and AV designer, Hippotizer has been one of his greatest ground-breaking purchases. “I won a Naledi Theatre Award for my rather simplistic set for the musical *MARIKANA*,” said Wilhelm. “The set consists of only a bare black stage with an enormous steel mountain and a single steel mine shaft, but I was able to transform the visual picture for countless scenes effortlessly using Hippotizer Media Servers, keeping the audience engrossed and visually stimulated. I have used the Green Hippo products in many other productions too, and the audience’s response to it has always been terrific.”



