

Black Coffee gets a Robe Flavour



Jenny and Brandon Bunyan

Black Coffee is a bustling technical production company based in Durban, South Africa, founded in 2000 by Brandon Bunyan and his wife Jenny. They started in a garage supplying creative staging and lighting to theatre shows, and now have 25 full-time employees and occupy four warehouse / office units in Berea, close to central Durban. *Story with thanks to Louise Stickland.*

There is never a dull moment at Black Coffee. The core business is design and rental of set, staging, lighting and AV, all of which is delivered with their trademark imaginative flourish, and they work across all industry sectors from concerts, music, corporate events and fashion shows to weddings and parties.

Black Coffee started purchasing Robe products in a major way when Robe's South African distributor DWR was founded by Duncan Riley in 2007, although just before that, their first ever Robe products were some trusty ColorMix 250 ATs – a colour changer with a fresnel lens – and a unit that fitted perfectly with the theatrical style of their designs.

“We like to combine the latest technologies with some of the more traditional and classical techniques,” explained Brandon.

After the ColorMixes, the next venture with Robe was buying 24 x ColorSpot 575E ATs, acquired in 2007 and still going strong in active service today. “They are absolutely rock solid,” states Brandon.

This good experience with Robe prompted them to stay with the brand and they continued to invest in a wide selection, so the inventory now includes: ColorSpot 1200 E ATs, ColorSpot 2500E ATs and ColorWash 700s from the classic ranges, plus 48 x LEDBeam 100s, 36 x LEDWash 600s and four Pointes which were the most recent purchases. The total Robe moving heads in-house is now around 160 units.

Brandon explains that the nuances of the Durban market dictate being “Careful about what you buy”. The average show staged in and around the city will utilise around 24 moving lights in a large venue, and having multi-purpose luminaires like Pointes ... or small and versatile fixtures like LEDBeam 100s ... is the way to get the quickest ROI and serve the greatest selections of productions!

“Robe are very proactive and successful right now,” comments Brandon. “They seem to be coming up with fixtures that are different and really useful – the Pointe is a great example – you can do so much with it – it’s simply an awesome light!”

Black Coffee’s Pointes have been out constantly since they were delivered. They are proving especially useful for theatre productions, and have featured at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre and Westville Boys High School which has a large drama department and produces three full-on shows a year. The latest one utilised the Pointes, 8 x LEDWash 600s and was overseen by locally based maverick SA theatre lighting designer, Michael Broderick, also one of the founding members of Black Coffee, now one of the country’s best known independent LDs.

Michael designed the ground-breaking “One Man One Light” show – a collaboration between a performer, a choreographer and a single BMFL Spot – at the 2015 Mediatech Africa expo this winter – which Brandon also loved.

Brandon has visited the Robe factory in Valmez where he was impressed with the workspace and the set-up. “There are personal touches everywhere in the manufacture of these lights, and Robe is an important part of the town’s working fabric and community which is very good to see and appreciate first hand”.