

Chemical High for MegaPointes



The Chemical Brothers have been at the forefront of inventive, interesting and infectious rhythmic electronic music for nearly 30 years and were a pioneer of the UK's 'big beat' movement in the 1990s. They are among the most influential and critically acclaimed for their mixological magic, topping the charts on numerous occasions and getting the whole world foot tapping to the lines of "Galvanise" and "Do It Again" and many more.



This summer they played a hectic festival schedule followed by a week of high-profile headline shows. These were complete with another fantastic visual experience created by show designers Adam Smith and Marcus Lyall who fused effervescence, excitement and new ideas with some vintage Chemical Brothers visual gags ... including everyone's favourite, large-scale dancing robots!

For the first time on the lighting rig, Robe's MegaPointes also made their presence felt!



Marcus and Adam's decision to spec 50 of Robe's newest multifunctional moving lights led to Blackburn based lighting rental company Lite Alternative making their first Robe moving light purchase.

The Chemical Brothers are well known for their interactive, eye-catching and entertaining visual shows, a perfect confluence of lighting and video which, with the band's preference to remain in silhouette, is a significant element of all their live performances.

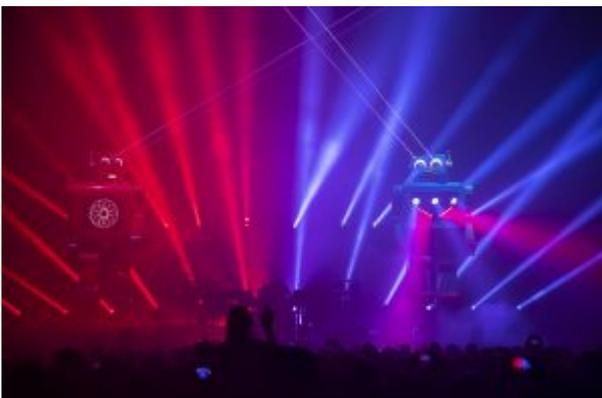
Their shows are also known for their high production values and for not comprising on the end result. The Chemical Brothers is also a desirable tour to be on, with lots of amazing people and friendly vibes, all kept running smoothly and efficiently on the road by production manager James Baseley.



Adam and Marcus both have interesting careers. Adam is a well-known film and TV drama director and Marcus creates art projects, many of them using lighting and other visual media. Together as @smithandlyall they have been involved in multiple imaginative projects including – since the early 1990's – the Chemical Brothers.

Both originally coming from filmic backgrounds has given rise to a highly individual cinematic styling for their live music visual work ... the lingering narratives and introduction of characters with whom the audience connect and identify.

The Chemical's visual show is crafted with a script and a strong sense of theatricality. While they play the same set every night, each performance is unique as they constantly re-mix and improvise from their centre-stage hub, a heterogeneous laboratory of rare and unusual synths and other fascinating music apparatus.



Adam and Marcus receive the music in advance of the tour and start planning the looks, styling and ambiances from there. They and their team of visual artists create all the video elements taking the peaks and dips in the music as start points, developing ideas which will fit, some segueing from one section or song to the next, others involving a completely fresh start for a new piece of music.

The essence of the show design is about connecting with the audience and helping move the energy coming offstage out and all around the space, creating that big, immersive environment and serotonin-synchronised place at the heartbeat of a Chemical Brothers show.

And while it is essentially all about the visuals in terms of what is happening onscreen, the lighting plays an a vital supporting role that must be bang on – every cue that’s programmed and executed.



With the new album still in the works, these latest shows featured a mix of favourites and new work.

For this run of own-shows, all in arena venues, a large 20-metre-wide by 11-metre-high LED screen filled the upstage area, with the 50 x MegaPointes – which were also part of their festival package – as the main lightsources.

“We wanted beam lights” explained Marcus, “the show is all about beams, and MegaPointes are the perfect lightsource to reach out and touch the audiences and help draw them into the show”.

When it came to the actual decision on which moving lights to choose, there were a few other criteria as well, including good CMY colour mixing and brightness, both needed for impact and to reinforce the visuals.

Lite Alternative – the Chemical’s lighting supplier since 2015 – organised a shootout between three different types of moving light, all potential contenders including the MegaPointe, and from this it was chosen as the best option to add all the right elements to their design.

Twelve MegaPointes each were positioned in lines along the upstage and downstage edges of the stage, with another twelve rigged on the downstage truss. There were another 10 behind the LED wall, rigged onto five moving pods together with some LED battens.

The pods flew up and down with lights shining and blasting through the screen, adding an ephemeral mysterious touch and another layer of optical depth and texturing to this very multi-faceted picture.

The MegaPointes were joined on the rig by a load of strategically placed strobes, some LED washes, LED squares and battens, plus a 30-Watt full colour laser, a 30-Watt green laser and 22 x Kinect beam lasers (lasers were all from ER Productions).

From a rental company perspective, it was a major move for Lite Alt to invest in Robe – although some PATT2013s had previously managed to sneak into the rental stock!

However Lite Alt director Jon Greaves observes – pragmatically – that “The compact size and the versatility of the MegaPointes was a clear development to the other moving lights we stocked”.

He was impressed by the brightness and the sheer amount of effects and options that one MegaPointe luminaire gives designers, “In all, we’re very happy to add MegaPointes to our rental inventory”.



On working generally with the Chemical Brothers and their team he states, “We were sooooo pleased to be working again with a production that puts so much time, effort, consideration – and a not unsubstantial amount of cash – into creating their perfect show”.

Lighting for the tour was operated by Thomas Deschandon who came onboard earlier in the year after meeting James through his work as lighting designer for French superstars Indochine.

He also used MegaPointes on that tour ... and loved them!

He was also involved in the decision on which moving light to pick for the Chemicals. “MegaPointe is the best beam light on the market right now, it’s very lightweight and the colours are fantastic” he commented, also mentioning that it’s super quick – in movement and all the effects – and extremely easy to programme.



Lighting programming was a complex process, with an average of 200 lighting cues per song, and around 6000 in total in the current show, which he operated using a grandMA2 console.

It's clear from a short visit to the tour that the entire crew has the same mentality and dedication to making the show rock, and this as well as the evolution of the music and freshness of live shows keeps the Chemical Brothers right up there as one of the most popular live acts worldwide.

Photos : Louise Stickland