

Christiaan Ballot - Blond Productions

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There's no arguing that Christiaan Ballot is too young to be an Industry Legend, but here's a young man who just proves that a bit of drive and initiative, mixed with an enormous amount of passion, is the combination to success and fulfilment.

Living his dream at the age of 28, who would have thought that the owner of Blond Productions had alternative plans for his career? "It's very funny," says Christiaan. "My whole life I always wanted to be a vet. The hostel fees paid for, Mau took me on a few gigs." Mau, better known as Mauritz Neethling from LCD Productions, had at the time completed studying Sound and Lighting at the Pretoria Technikon and took his brother on a few shows.

Christiaan grew up in "V" town, as he calls it, short for Vereeniging. . "We all have our set

backs.... I started off in one,” he teases. He attended a couple of schools including Helpmekaar in Braamfontein and Edenvale Hoërskool.



The early days, working from a garage

It was in October during his matric year, after attending gigs with Mauritz that Christiaan decided to change his vocation, not a decision that made him all that popular at home! With his mom pulling some strings with the head of department at the Pretoria Technikon, Christiaan was able to study Sound and Lighting.

Whilst studying he would hire a few parcans which he in turn used to do shows for bands and thus obtain the necessary spending money to party! At the end of his first year, Christiaan took a loan (which he paid back) from his grandfather to buy a 1400 bakkie, and with the help of a few good college friends to lend a hand, he was able to work on smaller gigs.

“When I started working, I went to MJ Event Gear for a couple of years,” says Christiaan. “Mike Jones and Theo Rood took me under their wings and I always learnt. Back then I knew nothing about lighting. At that stage moving lights were not big yet and I had no knowledge or experience on them – it was just too expensive. At MJ I could play with this units and Mike sent me on High-End training.”

Anyone who has ever worked for MJ, will know their stance on neat and cleanliness in the

workshop. “To this day, being at MJ was one of the best moves I ever had. Mike used to shout at us to keep the gear neat and tidy. Now that I have my own company, I realize that it’s all about pride. MJ taught us discipline,” said Christiaan.



At work

Christiaan also freelanced for Southern Lighting and Strike Productions besides other companies, and then in 2000, at a festival, met Chris Vorster, a director and actor in the Afrikaans television series 7de Laan. Chris Vorster started using Christiaan for the KK & K events where he would provide a service on the technical and lighting side. In 2002 the two friends decided to join forces and formed Blond Productions. The company name had already been established by Chris Vorster in the nineties when he had started his own production company. It was named after James Blond - ‘n Afrika Avontuur - which Chris Vorster had wrote and directed.

Christiaan remembers purchasing his first 12 parcans from Dan Riley, who then worked at Electrosonic SA, as well as a Zero 88 dimmer and a 12 way Strand desk. “We were doing small shows in Pretoria, mostly rock shows and gigs - corporate was a hard market to get into,” he explains. At the same time his main objective was not to grow too fast too soon and he didn’t want to go into debt to buy the necessary kit.

In 2004 Christiaan became the sole owner of Blond Productions. “Chris Vorster was committed to 7de Laan and couldn’t be as involved in the business as he wanted to be. We were growing; things were happening, but to this day, we still work closely on other productions.”

Blond Productions steadily took on more work and in 2005, when Ian Hutchnison, a friend of Christiaan who owned a sound company passed away, his staff merged with Blond Productions. Oros Roux, from the said company, became a partner with Christiaan and after purchasing a JBL rig, a sound division was formed.

For Christiaan, one of his most important days in businesses was when he bought moving lights for the “Oppie Koppie” gig. “I bought Martin Mac 250+s which I still bought from Duncan Riley,” remembers Christiaan. “It was also the first time I had bought a big desk, a Rav which we still use. The moving lights were all I dreamed about... and I only had two!”

With Oros Roux and then Peter Rieck also joining the company as a partner in 2007, Christiaan still describes Blond Productions as “the small okes in Centurion.” He adds, “There are a lot of big companies with much more experience than us, but we are trying to get our company there and our crew are passionate about the jobs we do. My crew are my most valuable asset and make things happen – we give a hundred percent.”



Getting ready to ride

Christiaan is also a partner in LCD Productions, along with Mauritz Neethling and Peter Rick. LCD Productions concentrates on television work and the supply of television lighting equipment. He is also part of Cotton Events, along with Clarissa Meyer, which specialises in corporate event management.

Personally his favourite part of a career is being able to light for theatre. “Corporate and

television gigs pay the bills, but theatre enables you to take your clients on a journey. In lighting you can be creative and create something special. My main passion is theatre.”

All work and no play would certainly not describe Christiaan best! “For me the best fun to unwind and to clear your mind is on a bike,” he says, being in the position to enjoy both the pleasures of a KTM and a Harley Davidson. “It’s the only place you don’t have to worry about work and you can’t answer your phone because you can’t hear it ringing.”



The Desert Run, 2007

The picture seems rather rosy, a successful biker with a beautiful girl on the back. However, like everyone else, the industry has its highs and lows. “Hang on, it’s not easy and sometimes you get knocked down”, comments Christiaan, thankfully referring to business and not biking! “Sometimes I don’t see how I can carry on, but in a day things can change. There were times when I was down and out and Chris Vorster would say, pull yourself towards yourself and keep going.” We are certain that Christiaan is glad he followed his friend’s advice.

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