

Collective Works debut Black Box at Mediatech Africa Expo



Crew shot, left to right: Douwe Grobler, Joshua Cutts, Christopher Bolton, Andre Siebrits, Jade Manicom, Bradley Hilton and Marinus Visser.

Brand new South African creative production and visual design practice Collective Works staged their new 'Black Box' live show concept at the 2017 Mediatech entertainment technology trade expo in Johannesburg in July.

Black Box is an experimental show and visual design space / experience conceived by Collective Works – Chris Bolton, Josh Cutts and Bradley Hilton – in conjunction with Simon Robinson, show director of the biennial expo which attracts visitors and exhibitors from all over Africa.

Chris and Josh created a show stopping production design in the Black Box theatre space that demonstrated their creative and technical programming talents and through the generous support of many high profile brands, organisations and companies in South Africa ... put some of the latest-and-greatest lighting and visual technologies through their paces.

In addition to this, at the heart of Black Box was "Designing with Light – A Way of Thinking", an educational seminar in three parts developed by Chris and Josh. This was open to anyone, but is specifically designed to energise those interested in embarking on a career as a lighting professional.



The Mediatech format was an hourly Black Box Main Lightshow performance which took place around a bespoke 'floating' stage supplied by Stageworks located in a dedicated area of the Ticketpro Dome which hosted the exhibition.

Six daily Main Lightshows – where Collective Works applied fresh and innovative visual treatments – were interspersed with two cycles of the three part seminar by Chris and Josh – so visitors had the flexibility of being able to catch all or any over the three days of Mediatech.

The goal of the triumvirate of seminars was to provide a basic window and insight into the industry.

The first, 'Getting Started', was presented by Chris and dealt with the myriad of considerations – from managing the client's expectations to feeding the crew – that have to be taken into account before a single lighting cue is even programmed! This was illustrated with two different lightshows programmed to contrasting music.

Josh then followed with his 'Console Workflow' presentation, demonstrated using a grandMA2 control desk. He detailed how to set up the console and keep the workspace neat, tidy and efficient. This section was illustrated with lighting programmed to a dance track.

Both of these sessions were followed by in depth Q&As.



The third seminar, presented jointly, was a walk-through of how to programme a Cue-Stack on the grandMA2.

The overall response was "Fantastic – way beyond our expectations" enthused Chris, recalling that they had full audiences right up to the last shows on all three days.

"It's clear that there are lots of people out there hungry for knowledge" said Josh, and following the incredible response and interest at Mediatech, they are now looking at ways to expand the opportunities of sharing their knowledge.

Of course it was also extremely exciting to be able to use some excellent new products.

For the first time in South Africa, 48 of Robe's new LEDBeam 150 were used prominent in a show, together with 24 x Robe Spiider LED wash beams, 12 x Spikies, a single BMFL Blade and 24 x CycFX8 moving LED battens.

Also debuting in South Africa were three of the latest Claypaky fixtures – the Unico Scenius, the SharBar and the Stormy colour-changing LED strobe. CP's hybrid Mythos moving light also featured in the show.



Thirty-two Ayrton Magic Panels were rigged around the black box together with 96 Martin Sceptrons which were fed video signal via a Martin P3 controller.

Other effects appearing in the show, including two full colour lasers, two MDG low foggers and one hazer ... all adding up to 14,900 parameters requiring 29 universes of DMX control.

The consoles were two grandMA2 lights, networked with four MA NPUs. An MA VPU light was used to store some of the video playback content, together with a Green Hippo Borreal media server. The video sources were played out on a Barco FLM 20K projector onto an upstage screen.

Black Box proved to be a lively, interactive and fun real-time-real-life forum for both technology and ideas to be pushed to their limits, plus the chance to chat honestly, openly and in-depth to Chris and Josh.

The featured technologies are applicable to a range of industry sectors including live events, concerts, theatrical, broadcast and film production, AV integration and others, so the educational initiative they want to extend is as diverse and accessible as possible.



"It was ultimately all about design, the challenges and the methodology," stated Josh adding that one of the main goals was encouraging audience participation, which was a big hit. "We can now hopefully develop this educational model and take it elsewhere," he concluded.

Joining Josh and Chris on the Black Box FOH crew were assistant LDs Jade Manicom and

Andre Siebrits., Head of Technical, Paulos Modise, Laser Programmer George Mkowe and Douw Grobler who custom designed the Track-It movement used to move sections of truss on and offstage for the Main Show.

The fabulous sound system was designed by Marinus Visser and delivered via a d&b system and a DiGiCo SD10 console supplied by Blue Array.

Sponsors included CCPP from Cape Town, which supplied 90 per cent of the Robe kit, most of it brand new; Theo Papenfus from Stage Effects who contributed the Magic Panels and . Guillaume Ducray of LXXFX and AV Unlimited who made the Martin Sceptrons and Barco kit available.

The lasers were supplied by LaserX, Richard Baker from LED Vision assisted with the LED banner wall and Warren Liss from Keystone Productions produced custom video content, while SA Draping dealt with wrapping the venue and all the soft good requirements.



Leading SA choreographer Debbie Rakusin of Debbie Rakusin Dance choreographed the performer and helped the flow of the show and Stuart Andrews from Gearhouse SA and his team undertook all the rigging.

Duncan Riley from leading SA sales company DWR Distribution and “all his people helped us in numerous ways” stated Chris.

The list of corporate sponsors was similarly impressive with Robe, Claypaky, Ayrton, MDG, DWR, Electrosonic, Stage Audio Works, DiGiCo, Green Hippo, MA Lighting, Martin, QSC and d&b ... and this is remarkable in itself, as Collective Works managed to unite some of the fiercest competitors in South Africa in their support of the project!

“When Simon first approached us at Prolight in Frankfurt and we all began discussing the seeds ... we had no idea how it would germinate” agreed Josh and Chris, “and with the incredibly positive response, we all really want to take this forward”.