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Walnut Hill Community Church located in Connecticut, USA, provided a combination of both in-person and online weekend services to their five campus congregation. The central campus in Bethel, CT, has invested in top level production values and technology, which includes the purchase of a grandMA3 compact XT lighting console which is running with grandMA3 software.

Creative lighting senior intern Jonathan Martin, who designs, programmes, and operates lighting for most of Bethel's worship service events, helped guide the team's decision to purchase a grandMA3, backed by Walnut Hill's production director, Christopher Ellington.

Jonathan explained how lighting was high on the agenda when the decision came to up the

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production stakes. “We kept coming back to grandMA3, which had the perfect combination of price point and hardware feature set,” he explained, whilst Christopher also underlined the importance of investing in lighting both for now and the future, and co-ordinated much of the logistical work involved in making the transition to MA.

The console is running approximately 40 conventional fixtures, 16 moving lights and 42 custom RGB pixel tubes, plus some LED PARs and MR-16 blinders, with the pixel tubes used extensively for creative lighting and to provide illuminated scenic elements, either hung from roof trusses or floor mounted where it also assists in creating visual textures and depth of field for the streamed events.

As well as lighting the stage, some of the moving lights highlight the 750-seat Bethel auditorium and are utilized for key lighting / specials, while the warmth and glow of the blinders produces classic fade-effects and contrast to the cool precision of the LEDs. There are 25 DMX universes and around 4000 parameters running from the grandMA3, which the entire production staff love!

Jonathan uses a combination of Phasers and MATricks extensively in his programming, which is a “favourite” method for creating very complex lighting looks extremely fast, especially effective when utilising the pixel tubes.

He finds Phasers generally very easy and straightforward to use. “It’s a whole new way of thinking about effects, especially when working with large amounts of fixtures / pixels.” This console is also Jonathan’s first major grandMA experience.

“I had always been aware that grandMA consoles were an industry standard for high-level live productions,” he says, however it was when Walnut Hill borrowed an MA onPC command wing from Adam Biscow, production designer at Strictly FX, for their 2019 Christmas Eve services, that their own MA journey truly began!

“Personally, I found it very easy to transition from grandMA2 to grandMA3 and it felt like much of the workflow was improved,” commented Jonathan, who enjoys working on a console that can be “moulded to the differing programming needs of myself and our team of volunteers which has been exceptionally valuable!”

Everyone on the Walnut Hill technical crew saw the sense of investing in a quality piece of equipment that would serve their needs for many years, including Andrew Baggett, assistant production coordinator who was a key figure in the transition, handling much of the required

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installation work. Jonathan also takes advantage of the grandMA3 software to program offline and test future design ideas whilst not in the building!

He’s not yet used the grandMA3’s powerful GDTF / MVR facilities for Walnut Hill but he has done so on some of his other personal programming projects. This year, he plans to draft their stage and fixtures in 3D for which he will be using both GDTF and MVR, so these will further come into play going forward.

Jonathan started working at the church as a 13-year-old volunteer lighting tech. The biggest challenges of lighting the different services include no haze, which forces everyone to think laterally and imaginatively when creating stage designs. Being able to add depth to a picture is critical for both in-person and the broadcast / online campuses experience, so that is a big influence in the production team’s creative process.

“I really think grandMA3 is a perfect choice of console for Houses of Worship both large and small, as it is so flexible and can meet the needs of such venues and operators with ease,” Jonathan concludes.

Photos: © Walnut Hill Community Church

Company Profile

MA Lighting International as master distributor is responsible for worldwide sales and marketing of the professional lighting control solutions of MA Lighting Technology. The current product range offers the grandMA3 series and the MA Network Switch. In the past MA has become well known for its grandMA2, grandMA and dot2 series.

Today, MA Lighting is respected for its technical knowledge and has achieved a unique international reputation for its operational philosophy. The company offers several decades of experience and strictly follows a professional user-centric approach, getting as close as possible to the market via its own international offices and support centers in the UK, North America, Latin America, the Middle East/India, Asia Pacific and Scandinavia/Eastern Europe/Russia – supported by a world-wide distribution and service network.