



Gearhouse at 2009 MAMAS

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Courtesy Louise Stickland

The Gearhouse South Africa Group of companies supplied rigging, lighting, audio, LED screens and power distribution for the 2009 MTV African Music Awards, staged at the Kasarani Gymnasium at the Moi International Sports Centre, Nairobi, Kenya. The project entailed air freighting 55,000 Kgs of equipment from South Africa.

The Gearhouse crew was led by Bill Lawford who collaborated closely with Simon Roche, logistics manager from production company VWV, together with an international production team primarily from the UK, including lighting designer/director Gurdip Mahal, moving light programmer/operator Ross Williams, FOH sound engineer Derrick Zieba and screens director Chris Saunders from XL Video UK.

Gearhouse also asked leading UK lighting rental company HSL to supply additional lighting equipment and technician Tim Oliver for the event. Gearhouse has a long standing relationship with both VWV and MTV.

The 2009 MAMAs was presented by Wyclef Jean and featured several exciting live performances from Akon, Nigerian rapper M.I., Zebra & Giraffe, Kenyan hip hop star Wahu and many more.

Claudio Santucci's spectacular stage design proved an eye-catching visual backdrop comprising a myriad of different sized cubes flown at varying heights, all clad in diffusion material and lit, acting like giant light-boxes, interlaced with Lighthouse and Schnick Schnack LED strips which were supplied by ProCon in Germany. The floor was black high gloss Marley criss-crossed with white lines to add depth and dimension. The entire set was constructed in Italy and shipped over especially for the event along with the high-gloss flooring.



Rigging

The Gearhouse Rigging crew of 6 for the get-in and out was led by Anthony Banks, and worked alongside MTV's head rigger, Kevin Monks from UK-based Blackout.

Their first task was to install a 34 metre wide x 4.5 metre deep mother grid to suspend the flown set elements. The tricky thing here was only having a limited number of panels through which the motor chains could be dropped, at 3.8 metres apart. The grid was picked up by 18 Lodestar motors.

Six lighting trusses were flown on 21 motors, and audio was flown on two 2-tonne hoists. The audio points had to be bridled in the roof void to distribute the weight across each of the flying nodes which had an estimated SWL of 1000Kgs each.

A 40 metre black drape was hung at the back of the stage, which was curved around to also form a backstage gathering area. Blackout supplied 8 custom made black drapes to mask the venue's windows.

A total of 19 tonnes of equipment was suspended from the roof on 70 motors - a combination of half, one and two-tonne Lodestars.



Lighting

Jason Fritz was Gearhouse's lighting crew chief, and Mahal's design was rigged onto over 50 sections of trussing forming 60 ft span mid and back trusses over-stage, together with an L-shaped front truss, stretching 60 ft in each direction. This provided lighting positions for highlighting the winner's platform and for washing the front of stage.

Further back in the audience was a T-shaped truss, made from another 20 sections, which accommodated 4 under-hung 1.2K followspots, audience lighting and additional fixtures to cover the winner and presenter areas. The fixtures on this were a mix of 5K fresnels, Source Four profiles and Robe ColorWash 700E AT moving lights.

Five sections of folding truss were used to form a 40 ft truss behind the winners pit, loaded with a selection of PARs, 5K fresnels and Source Fours.

Over the stage, the main lighting fixtures were 24 Robe ColorSpot and ColorWash 2500E ATs, plus additional Robe ColorWash 700E ATs on the mid truss, 6 Atomic 3K strobes with colour scrollers and another 2 under-hung followspots on the upstage truss.

Scattered around the floor and LED screens were 22 High End Studio Spots, 4 Atomics with scrollers, complete with 6 Studio Color moving lights at the sides for cross stage washes.

A WholeHog3 desk with backup was supplied by HSL and programmed and operated by Ross Williams, with Mahal running an Avolites Pearl controlling all the generics.

HSL also supplied 34 i-Pix Satellites which were ensconced in the set and used to light the cubes together with 16 i-Pix BB4 wash lights.

Fritz had to train up 4 follow spot operators from the local crew who had never done the job before, and reports that their skills and aptitude were amazing, "Among the best follow spotters I have ever worked with," he qualifies.

Ross Williams comments, "It was the first time I have worked with Gearhouse South Africa. The crew were all absolutely brilliant, and Jason and his team went out of their way to be helpful, look after us and ensure that everything went smoothly from the moment we stepped off the plane."



Audio

Jako de Wit looked after the FOH live sound for Gearhouse, ensuring that all the visiting engineers were happy with the set up, and mixing any artists who didn't have one, while Derrick Zieba mixed and co-ordinated all sound for the presenters, DJs, TV links, VT play-ins, etc

The system consisted of 24 L-Acoustics Kudos, configured in low frequency contour mode to suit the bass-tastic show. 12 Kudos were flown left and right of the stage, out towards the edges to ensure that site lines were preserved, a positioning which brought its own sonic challenges for the sound department. These were run in conjunction with SB118 subs on the deck and under the stage, arranged in the standard 'L' configuration, with cabinets at 90 degrees to one another.

Secondary left and right hangs each side comprised 6 x dV-DOSCs, with another 3 x dV's along the stage lip for front fills. All of the system processing was done by XTA DP424, DP 226 and a Dolby Lake processor.

The bands were all mixed on a Yamaha PM5D utilising all the onboard effects, and a Yamaha M7CL supplied for Derrick Zieba's mix which took care of the presenters, playback artists and DJ feeds.

Monitors were 20 x L-Acoustics HiQs and Flashlight sidefills, with 12 channels of Sennheiser G2 IEMs, and the mic package included 20 Shure UHF MA hand held mics. Monitor world was run for Gearhouse by Cyril Kholofela Sewela using another PM5D.

Radio mics and the IEM system for Zebra & Giraffe were tech'd by Tanya Brown, who was working on her first international gig for Gearhouse Audio, having joined the company a year ago. This busy and precise task of ensuring that all performing artists had their mics distributed to them in a timely fashion before going onstage - proved to be a valuable introduction for Audio's new recruit.

The main acoustic challenge was the forward and outwards position of the PA, and in getting a good even, voluminous coverage all around. The changovers were also tight and busy, for which all the Gearhouse Audio crew of 5 worked closely with the stage management team led by Mike Grove from Stage Miracles from the UK.

All technical elements of the show combined seamlessly with the lively and energetic performances, show programme and raft of Awards celebrating the rich diversity of African music, creating a memorable event for this, the second MTV African Music Awards.