

Gearhouse supplies South African Tattoo

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Story courtesy Louise Stickland

Gearhouse South Africa supplied all technical production – including, sound, lighting, power and structures – plus audience seating for the hugely popular 2009 South African Tattoo, staged at Montecasino, Johannesburg, ZA.

The extravaganza featured over 600 local and international performers, blending the traditional Tattoo spectacle of massed pipe bands and Highland dancers with a distinctly African flavour. It was the second year that Gearhouse has been involved in the event, working for producers MC Squared. SABC2 also supported the show and recorded it for future broadcast.

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This year the show's production and lighting designer Tim Dunn wanted a fresh, vibrant, contemporary feel, and so chose to light the 'Parade Ground' performance area solely with moving lights and LED fixtures.

With all events being budget conscious in the current climate, this was also smart lateral thinking, enabling a dramatic reduction in the amount of power needed to run the show from that of 2008 - all production elements ran off 2 generators as opposed to 5!

The design and supply became a carefully calculated equation that both matched the budget and delivered all the visual dynamics expected by the client.

The 4500 audience seats were supplied by Havaseat (part of the Gearhouse Group of companies) and configured as 3 stands, positioned around 3 sides of the arena. 12 interlink trucks were required to transport the 90 tonnes of scaffolding and 200 tonnes of seating stands to the site, but the build took only 6 days to complete!

The fourth element of the space was an impressive 'castle wall', a 40 metre wide by 7 metre high Layher structure built by Gearhouse Structures, with a printed skin stretched across the front, simulating the real wall of the Montecasino Castle.

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Gearhouse had created this same scenic element last year, with photographic images taken from the real Monte castle wall. Apart from looking very authentic, this facilitated practical requirements like having a deck inbuilt at the top of the structure, so the Lone Piper could assume the appropriate position to play The Last Post.

Sound was designed by Gearhouse Audio's Dave Tudor and mixed by Pierre Slabbert. It consisted of an L-Acoustics Kudo near-field system, positioned around the arena on 8 x 1.3 metre high platforms, each containing 3 cabinets plus a single SB118 sub. This was carefully aligned to produce an even, robust, full-on sound coming from the Parade Ground and spreading out around the space.

Six L-Acoustics HiQ fold back monitors on stands were placed around the Parade Ground. Slabbert mixed the show using a Yamaha LS9 32 channel console.

Gearhouse Structures built 50 metre scaffolding-based technical platforms running along the

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back/top of the two lengthways seating stands to facilitate the rigging of moving lights, which were then ideally positioned to swoop down into and around the Parade Ground.



The FOH and another identical 'production' tower were built house left and house right, strategically offset in the gaps between the ends of the back stand and long stands to keep the site lines clear. An additional - lower - camera platform was built in between these, and then two trussing goal posts, one each side, were erected between the two outer towers and the camera platform. These gave extra rigging points for lighting fixtures.

Lights were also rigged along the top of the castle wall, and on the floor of the Parade Ground, for dramatic, low level beam effects.

Dunn's design used approximately 120 moving lights - a mix of Robe ColorWash and ColorSpot 700 and 2500E ATs and Martin Professional MAC 2Ks. For audience illumination, 110 i-Pix Satellite LED bricks were utilised, taking advantage of their brightness and versatility. These were dotted all along the tech platforms each side, on the FOH and production towers, the camera platform and the goalposts.

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Dunn programmed and operated the

lighting using a grandMA full size console.

Gearhouse Structures also built 2 follow spot towers in the corners facing the castle, each housing 2 x 3K Gladiators, with two more towers and 1 x Gladiator each at both ends of the castle wall.

Gearhouse Power supplied two 300KVA generators to run all the various technical production elements - drawing an expedient maximum load of 464 Amps. The cable runs of 150m and 100 m were split into 2 sides and a further split between lighting and audio to ensure no interference from lighting equipment was heard on the audio system.

The Tattoo was project managed for Gearhouse by Michael Lewis. It again saw the integration of skills and resources from a single company, and some great teamwork, energy, imagination and inter-departmental collaboration. All this combined to produce the stunning results helping to take the South African Tattoo into a new league of event presentation.

Audience and cast members who have experienced other Tattoos around the world including Edinburgh and Basel, have said that the SA Tattoo, from both a production and organisational point of view, "Can now be ranked among the best in the world. This is only possible through working with tirelessly committed partners like Gearhouse," concludes Simon Carter, Executive Producer for the SA Tattoo.