Gearhouse supply another Africa Day

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Courtesy Louise Stickland Gearhouse South Africa supplied full technical production for the 2010 Africa Day celebrations in Johannesburg, which moved from downtown to a completely different location in the leafy green environs of Dries Niemand Park in Kempton Park.

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Gearhouse SA built the 30 metre wide stage, which was covered with an elegant In2Structures dome roof with clear skins and featured a set, lighting and visuals design created by Tim Dunn. They also supplied audio, power and AV to the event, the evening concert section of which was broadcast live on SABC 2 directed by Sean Pearce and produced by Brad Holmes of The Bassline.

The event started at 8 a.m. and included political speeches – including an address by President Jacob Zuma – and traditional African performance and music throughout the day, running into the evening's R'n'B and rock oriented show. This featured – among others – Nigeria's D'Banj, South African vocalist, Yvonne Chaka Chaka; South African hip hop sensations, Teargas, the Ivory Coast's Manou Gallo, Cameroonian crooner, Wax; SA's award-winning *Motswako* hip-hop artist, HHP; Ntombi, SA Idols winner Sasha Lee and spoken word artist, Mak Manaka as well as Voodoo Child, United Band, Ouled Hauossa, Deborah Fraser and Sankofa Afrique.

Gearhouse's site crew of 35 was project managed by Michael Lewis. They started the site build on the Friday, a week before the Saturday show.

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Set & Lighting

Tim Dunn drew his inspiration for the central 8 branch Baobab ‘tree’ feature, made from curved trussing sections, from the ancient baobab tree which is rooted in African culture and folklore. He wanted to create an iconic centre piece that was both “Contemporary and complementary” to the environment, that would create a visually interesting focal point for the cameras and be flexible enough to deal with the heterogeneity of acts performing onstage.

The design also had to look aesthetically pleasing during the day, so that requirement also informed the visuals, which included 5 strips of daylight LED each side of the baobab tree, flown in a fan shape, with lighting trusses in the gaps between the strips, creating depth.

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His other criterion was to produce something that looked completely different to the last few Africa Day concerts which he also designed.

The onstage LED was all Lighthouse R16 panels supplied by another Gearhouse company, LEDVision, along with two Lighthouse side screens for IMAG.

The onstage video visuals were run by Marcel Wijnberger from Gearhouse Media, who used 2 MA VPU video servers triggered by a grandMA full size console. Content was fed to 2 Barco Image Pro video processors which shaped and fitted it to the strips. He created impromptu visuals for most of the daytime action onstage, reverting to a pre-programmed show for the live televised concert evening section between 6:30 and 10.30 p.m.

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Dunn used over 100 moving lights on the show – the majority of them Robes – ColorSpot and Wash 2500E ATs and REDWash 3●192 LED wash fixtures – with some Martin MAC 2K profiles and Spots. These were distributed on the baobab tree branches, side trusses and the trusses in-between the video strips, with some on the floor. Some additional ColorWash 2500s were rigged off the FOH structure and used for audience illumination and stage colour fill.

i-Pix BB4 LED battens were hung on the baobab branches, pointing outwards, accentuating it's elegant curves.

The Robe REDWash 3●192s were also rigged on the baobab branches and used to illuminate and lift the structure and a white cloth upstage, which added another layer of depth and texturing to the design visuals, contrasting fabulously with the beamy back lighting from the Robe 2500 Spots.

There were 4 follow spots on the front of house tower, which were called by Hugh Turner, while Dunn ran the lightshow using a grandMA full size console.

The intricate task of getting all the lighting and video points in the correct positions was a major challenge for Gearhouse Rigging, led by Adrian Manley, and involved putting in over 80 points. As nothing could be bridled directly from the roof they first installed 16 steel load beams into the roof and then rigged off these.

Audio

While the pastoral surroundings, which included a lake with fountains running along one side of the stage, might have been pleasant for the audience on a fine sunny South African winter day, the changes in temperature and humidity kept the audio department on their toes, as environmental factors like this – and wind – can affect sound quality dramatically.

Adriaan van der Walt mixed FOH. The sound design also had to cater for a whole gamut of performance styles from traditional African to playback.

It was an L-Acoustics V-DOSC system, with the main 12-element left and right arrays flown from 2 V-Towers and 8 SB28 subs a side ground stacked on the stage deck and run in cardioid mode, a standard preset on the LA8 amps powering the whole system. Six 6 dV lip fills were added for extra coverage around the front of stage.

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He used Rational Acoustics' Smaart 7 test and measurement software to closely monitor the system throughout, so he could react quickly to the atmospheric changes.

The consoles were 2 Yamaha M7 CLs, one at FOH and one for monitors, which was run by Frikkie Souls, with 8 mixes of Clair AM wedges and floodlight side fills.

The comprehensive mics and stands package made use of Shure radio mics and a selection of others, and the hectic changeover schedule to fit in the 8 televised acts for the evening show was co-ordinated by Isaiah Malatji and Cyril Sewela.

Van der Walt used only one outboard effect, a Dolby Lake Processor, on the line drive system and as an EQ station in conjunction with the L-Acoustics Network Manager. This allowed him to do things like low frequency contour and zoom factors so he could shape the low end into a standardised tonality.

Gearhouse Power supplied 5 generators – 2 x 300KVAs for lighting and one backup, and one 200 KVA for audio/LED with a backup.

The Gearhouse crew and the ground staff at the adjacent golf course – who own the land – worked very closely together to ensure that putting in the production had minimal impact on the carefully nurtured lawns and greenery.

Africa Day 2010, just ahead of the 2010 Soccer World Cup, celebrated 47 years since the founding of OAU.

Dries Niemandt Park has been refurbished to serve as the City of Ekurhuleni's Legacy Project for the 2010 Soccer World Cup, when it will be used as a Welcome Village and a site for locals and visitors to gather and enjoy Africa's arts, culture and heritage.

The event was sponsored by the Department of Arts and Culture, African Union, The Gauteng Provincial Government and the city of Ekurhuleni.

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