

Glenn Duncan on a grandMA2 for Evita



Glenn Duncan

A grandMA2 full size, operated by South African Glenn Duncan, runs the musical *Evita* which kicked off at Johannesburg's Montecasino Teatro, moved to Cape Town's Artscape Theatre and then will complete an Asian tour by mid 2018.

"This production of *Evita* has been publicized as the original production," said Glenn. "We had a few of the original creatives out for the set-up, some wonderful people. It was interesting to see them interact with each other, people who have known each other for over twenty years and who are not scared of speaking their minds." These included lighting designer Richard Winkler from New York, along with his associate Gary Echelmeyer and programmer Joe Allegro.

The current lighting show was originally built on MA in a visualization studio and arrived in Johannesburg complete, based on the 1998 production. While untested on a full physical rig, the programmers had examples of each light fixture to ensure correct colour matching.

"I didn't get to really do much with the desk until the first performance," says Glenn. "Joe even operated the final dress so that they could do live notes. It was great to see him work, and he did interesting things on the console – which I had fun reverse engineering to know what was actually inside." Glenn is the lighting operator and will program the changes for the move, so with a thick pile of paperwork, he makes sure he knows where everything is to be able to do that. "It's interesting on *Evita* because none of it's my own programming, so there has been some learning how things have been put together – which we covered when setting up. In the early days if something went wrong, there was sometimes a bit of digging around to figure out how it is controlled."

The show runs on a grandMA 2 full size FOH console, and there is a MA light on stage – both networked and sessioned. Three NPUs run 10 universes of DMX. "The onstage console is the backup so if anything goes wrong, the on-stage lighting tech will run cues until I can run backstage, but the system has been pretty solid and there have been no issues."

Apart from controlling lighting, video is also run off the MA. "We've got two Catalyst servers backstage and two 20K projectors running video, all of which run on Artnet. It's different to other shows I've worked on where Catalyst has its own cue list. Here the video cue list is on the MA and all the commands to Catalyst are sent from the MA which actually makes it quite a bit easier because there's only one console to talk to."

Evita is more like an opera than a musical, but there are dramatic scenes and big numbers like *Buenos Aires* and *Rainbow Tour*, where lighting gets busier. “It’s art, rather than throwing lighting at the stage,” said Glenn.

It has been a lovely show to work on. “It’s less of a feel good, happy song and dance – it’s not *Annie*,” smiles Glenn. “It’s a bit more emotional on stage, which you have to be careful of. *Evita* has a funeral scene in the beginning and the death scene at the end, so watching it every night I have to make sure I don’t get too wrapped up otherwise it could actually get you down. But the work itself has been great, the people have been good and the equipment has behaved, which is always a plus.”

Glenn works closely with Alistair Kilbee from Gearhouse Splitbeam, Technical Director for the SA and Asian Tours. “We are in touch quite a lot, he handles all the logistics for the moves which is great and he is our go-to person for a whole lot of things.” *Evita* started off with a challenge with some shipping delays but while it made the tech time a lot tighter, everything got done.

His career has taken him all over the world and introduced Glenn to new experiences and delightful people. Glenn must have had a hunch when he signed up for his high school drama and public speaking department, lighting *Little Shop of Horrors* at the age of 15, that there would be no turning back.

Glenn was introduced to the grandMA over ten years ago when he and lighting designer Denis Hutchinson worked on the production *Hairspray*, which was to run at the then brand new Lyric Theatre at Gold Reef City. “Denis and I were shown around what was one of the first consoles in the country at the original DWR premises. Duncan Riley of DWR had brought out René Berhorst from MA and those few days were probably the best introduction you could have to any console. Now there is MA2. I still work on MA1 desks and my mind has to do a bit of a switchover to MA2 (the long “Clear” button press is a few tenths of a second longer on MA2!), but we get on quite well, the console and I.”