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The Hillsong Christmas Carol Spectacular takes place annually in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town. For the second year to popular demand, the Cape Town leg of the show - with three

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sold out back-to-back performances - was hosted at the GrandWest Arena. A theatrical atmosphere was created using over 170 Robe fixtures, including 12 Robin BMFL Blades. An Avolites A1 Media Server played an instrumental role in the production.



The show changes every year and this time the aim was to create a seamless presentation with a visually strong storyline. “We may not have the biggest budgets, but we always want to challenge the way we think about production and production design,” commented Alan. “We have an incredible team of hundreds of volunteers and a handful of staff members, *as well as* fantastic contractors who write the script, music, produce screen content, suggest ideas, perform and put in whatever it takes to produce a great experience for the audience.”

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With a huge backdrop screen and a massive stage with various performing spaces, Alan's vision was to take the audience on a journey. "Artists performed in a range of 'rooms' and 'landscapes' depending on where we were in the overall story - we created large scale performances that would encompass the whole stage and screen, to smaller and more intimate moments that only concentrated on a small section of the stage and screen," he explained. "It also meant that if we wanted one scene at home, and another scene on the North Pole, we could mimic that. I think it worked well..."

### **Lighting**

Jonathan Bandli from Bad Weather was the lighting designer who worked alongside Hendre Bloem from Hillsong Cape Town. He programmed on a High End System Road Hog 4.



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“Jonathan’s work is always great, he is super flexible and has a good eye. He is also super sensitive to the wants and desires of the creative directors, this dude is super awesome to work with,” Alan elaborates. “I think the way he and the crew go from an event like the Rage Festival at Ballito to the Hillsong Events is their greatest strength, and you definitely cannot box them into one category. No matter what the event, Bad Weather give their best, above and beyond the call of duty, and that speaks louder than any equipment specifications. You can give them freedom to design and change elements in a production, and know that it will be in keeping with the overall design brief. Bradley Bruchhausen from DWR, Cape Town, is also an exceptional part of the team, and the fact that he is able and willing to come out and service lights for an event makes Robe even more attractive.



From the get go Jonathan Bandli knew this was going to be a video intensive show. “With the entire set being projection mapped onto, balance was always on the forefront of my mind when designing and programming this show,” said Jonathan. “Not only did I feel it very important to enhance and support the video with the lighting elements, and let them work together, but also to manage the overall balance of the show to make sure the projection had enough room to punch through. This just took some careful considerations when approaching the programming.”

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One of the challenges was keeping the front light very tight on every performance. “This was tricky with multiple singers and dancers in each number with the numerous stage levels and areas. Our main approach was to tackle this with a very theatrical approach, only revealing the areas we wanted to show and highlight. The Robe BMFL Blades came in handy a few times to trim spill of the screens and keep things controlled. I also did my best to frame the 36 odd meter screen with a row of Robin Pointes and Robin 300 LEDWash fixtures. I chose the 300s for this task as I wanted some eye candy but didn’t want or need a massive light output, as it would affect the screen. It worked beautifully, especially as I ran them in mode 5 for complete control. Of course we also had the massive looks in some items but the contrast is what made the show rather unique this year.”

Five trusses were flown directly over the screen/set to frame it, which the crew flared to be as parallel to the curves of the set as possible. Spread on these trusses were 18 Robe Robin Pointes and 15 Robe Robin 300 LEDWashes.

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Three “V” Trusses hung over the stage. “The upstage “V” had 8 Robe BMFL Blades and 6 Robe Robin 600 LEDWashes, the middle “V” had 4 Robe BMFL Blades and 4 Robe Robin 600 LEDWashes and then the downstage “V” had 4 Robe ColorSpot 700E AT units and 6 Robe Robin 600 LEDWash.

Three FOH Trusses had 12 Robe ColorSpot 700E AT units and 8 Robe Robin 600 LEDWash. On the stage deck were 8 Robe Robin Pointes, 8 Robe ColorSpots 700E AT units and 9 Robe ColorWash 700E AT units.

For House lighting the in house Fly Bars were used with a combination of LEDForce 18 LED Pars and Robe ColourWash700E AT Units.

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“Robe is good and solid, the service is exceptional and we always have a great time knowing that there is plenty of it around – that is the biggest and best thing about it,” said Alan. “There is nothing worse than getting to an event with an uneven mix of lights, or being limited by quantities. We also make sure that gobos and colours are all synonymous between the lights so that we can use the full spectrum of what the lights have to offer.”



Each performance of the show had to contrast creatively to the next item, and this took many creative meetings to *discuss* content, performance, blocking and lighting. “As in theatre we had to consider if the next item needed time to load or if the previous item needed time to clear, so we used the stage accordingly to let each element flow seamlessly without having pauses in the show for loading or unloading the stage,” said Jonathan. “I tried to add as many unique looks as possible, but the main feature was a fly bar with 72 par 64s all pixel mapped which we lowered as a backdrop at different heights for 2 of the items. This added huge value, and to be honest I loved working with generics again, the look is just so special. We also had a handful of mirror balls on 2 fly bars for the opener and closer.”

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## Media

For the second year, Bad Weather with Andrew Bosman at the helm, managed the video system as a whole, while Hillsong's team were responsible for the camera, vision mixing and content supply. "It was a fantastic show, we ran time-code from an *Ableton* setup on stage from the Musical Director and that was split to both the Ai Media Server and to the Lighting consoles at FOH," said Jonathan.



This was the first time Andrew had opportunity to work on the Ai server. "It is a server that I have wanted to get my hands on since viewing it at Mediatech in 2015, and the Hillsong Christmas Spectacular was the perfect show to use it," said Andrew. "The server worked fantastically for many reasons, the main one being very low latency on the live inputs, we ingested 3 live inputs throughout the show, and having little to no latency was a very important factor. The other

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reason, as mentioned, is that we *time-coded* the entire show from opener to closer. We needed a system that was stable, yet easy to make any changes during rehearsal if need be, in order to not to disturb the flow of the rehearsal. The timecode feature was phenomenal and was so stable throughout the whole production. The timecode was my favourite aspect of the production, after watching the show run flawlessly from start to finish in rehearsals, it gave me a huge sense of comfort and excitement.”



The relationship between Hillsong, Bad Weather, C&S Audio and GrandWest has grown over the past few years with the team caring about every element of the production. “A huge thanks to Alan Leviton from Hillsong South Africa for his amazing work as the production manager, he really is the guiding force of these projects. We can’t wait for the next Hillsong experience!” ended Jonathan.



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Continuously pushing the boundaries, the team hope to continue raising the bar with next production.

24x Robe ColorSpot 700E AT

24x Robe ColorWash 700E AT

26x Robe Robin Pointe

12x Robe Robin BMFL Blade

24x Robe Robin 600 LEDWash

15x Robe Robin 300 LEDWash

48x Robe LEDForce 18 RGBW LED PAR

72x Par 64 WFL (12 Bars of 6)

1x MDG Hazer

2x Le Maitre MVS Hazers

1x Avolites Art 2000 48 Channel Dimmer

2x Avolites Art 2000 24 Channel Dimmers

1x High End Systems Road Hog 4

1x High End Systems Nano Hog 4 with OnPC

1x High End Systems Playback Wing 4

1x High End Systems DP-8000 Processor

1x Acme Artnet Node

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FOR the screens:

1x Avolites Ai Media Server

