

Hippotizer out in force for South Africa's National School of Arts



Credit: © Wilhelm Disbergen / NSA

Celebrated South African production designer Wilhelm Disbergen has completed an array of video-focused shows across his home country, utilising Hippotizer Media Servers to transform the look and feel of each piece.

Disbergen “who has served as video and production designer for dance and ballet, musicals, opera, theatre and corporate projects” focused on two of Johannesburg's National School of the Arts (NSA) productions recently, using Hippotizer Media Servers on both to raise the bar on visual design. One of the National School of the Arts projects was called Project 24, which invited audiences to experience a new generation of emerging choreographers from the school to showcase new choreography. During the production, the students gave shape and form to abstract concepts and ideas as they offered a unique perspective and window into the mindset of young South African creatives.



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“My brief for this production was to transform the stage in the main performance space at the NSA, using lighting and video to complement the performance and the specific narrative of each piece,” says Disbergen. “I used my own Hippotizer Nevis+ MK2 and was able to achieve a third dynamic to the staging. Hippotizer enabled fast and powerful programming and visual manipulation, and execution for each dance with effects and video projection and video masking. It was fun as each choreography required its own unique story, and visuals ranged from static shapes and colours to emotive videos. I often took inspiration from the choreography, music, costumes and mood. The combination of lighting and video meant that a blank space could instantly be transformed into a unique canvas enveloping the artists.”



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Disbergen also served as Production Designer on the NSA Jazz & Pop Extravaganza – a showcase of the next generation of musicians which played two nights on the magnificent Mandela Stage at the Joburg Theatre. Performed with a backing of South African music, the NSA band were joined on stage by the NSA Choir featuring NSA vocalists, backing vocalists and solo instrumentalists, with the NSA dancers adding movement and drama to the proceedings.

“For this ambitious concert I used the Joburg Theatre’s Hipotizer Boreal+ MK2 to drive content from various sources including textile patterns, traditional embroidery and AI-generated art to its large LED screen,” says Disbergen.



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It is imperative that the lighting and the video content work together. With an amazing tool like Hippotizer, colour adjustments and artistic modifications can spur the creation of a novel lighting state and vice versa. Often, an archival image can be changed into line drawing or adjusted to match the mood and colouring of the stage performance. Combining LED screen and mood lighting transforms a static stage into a rich jazz club with warm select lighting, key focal spot, and a minimalist pink neon glow from a thin horizontal line at full punch.



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Thabang Phiri, the Head of the Music Department at the NSA National School of the Arts, commented: “We were thrilled to showcase the exceptional talents of our students and celebrate the vibrant diversity of South African music. This concert is a testament to our commitment to nurturing the next generation of musical pioneers and fostering a love for the arts in our community.”



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The Hippotizer Media Servers were supplied to Disbergen by DWR Distribution. “I always get wonderful support from DWR,” he says. “They are always just a call away, and trusted and kind which is something so important in a stressful get in of a new show. I have had various Hippotizer Media Servers since its launch in South Africa more than 10 years ago. Green Hippo is a trusted co-partner in most of my shows, with unparalleled reliability.”

Dylan Jones from DWR Distribution says: “Over the years we’ve enjoyed seeing Wilhelm use the Hippotizer like an artist uses a paintbrush, transforming his imagination and the tools at his disposal into pure magic.”

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