

Its no joke for Gearhouse SA

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*Story by Louise Stickland* Gearhouse South Africa supplied technical production including lighting, video and sound for "It's No Joke" the landmark 46664/Real Concerts comedy festival event at Sun City Super Bowl.

This unique, side-splitting one-off event utilised the universal language of laughter to raise funds for the Nelson Mandela charities by uniting 10 of SA's cutting edge comedians – Trevor Noah, Marc Lottering, John Vlismas, Tumi Morake, Nik Rabinowitz, Ndumiso Lindi, Chris Forrest, David Kau, Riaad Moosa and Barry Hilton – all performing in the same evening.

Gearhouse's Tim Dunn was asked by promoter and show producer, Roddy Quinn, to create a visual concept for this high profile showcase that was enjoyed live by over 4500 people.

Dunn rose to several technical and creative challenges. One was producing a sophisticated, yet uncomplicated stage look that allowed the performers to communicate directly with the audience and feel like they were in a much more intimate space than the cavernous Super Bowl.

To aid the technical flow of a very busy show, Dunn integrated control of the outro audio cues for each artist, applying video effects and running them from his grandMA lighting console.



Each performer also had to be clearly seen from every seat in the auditorium, particularly as their facial expressions and gesticulations are vital in the delivery of punchlines. Some of the individual performances also drew heavily on improv, a specific style requiring intense concentration by both performer and audience for full impact.

Dunn had the idea of a really open stage, clear of set, clutter and distractions, with a cross shaped LED screen, which consisted of a large portrait shaped section in the middle, dividing two smaller landscape sections at the bottom. This offered a strong, elegant visual backdrop with a large version of each comedian for their performance. "I really wanted something contemporary

and alternative to the standard two side screen IMAG set up,” explains Dunn, adding “That would have been too distracting. The whole idea was to keep everyone completely engaged with what was happening onstage.”



The screen was made up from Lighthouse Technologies R16i/o II modules. The top was 69 metres high and the sides 14 metres wide and it was supplied by LED Vision. LEDVision’s Operations Manager Allen Evans managed the LED aspects onsite as well as camera direction.

Dunn’s LED design was tricky as the centre panel was flown and the side screens stacked on

Layher before the three separate screens were locked together. Kendall Dixon and his team from Gearhouse Rigging were on hand to advise with this delicate procedure.

Gearhouse AV supplied 3 IMAG cameras, positioned at FOH, in the pit and at either side of the stage. Feeds from each of these plus additional playback content - ambient clips, logos and 46664 idents - stored on an MA video server run from Dunn's lighting console - were sized and output to screen via a Barco Encore system.

In keeping with the clean design aesthetics of the design, above the stage were 2 circular lighting trusses - of 16 and 6 metre diameters respectively - with a fabric ceiling stretched between. This was another stylish scenic element to complement the shape of the screen, which changed constantly using different colours and gobo texturing from the lighting fixtures below,



Each comedian had their own music/audio intros and outros, and for convenience of control, Dunn and the team from Gearhouse Media (Chris Grandin and Marcel Wijnberger) decided that this should be run from the grandMA lighting desk via one of the MA VPUs.

It was the first time that they had run sound from the lighting desk, but the concept worked perfectly and also allowed Dunn to choose specific video clips and edit and match them to the audio - all adding to the visual dynamics of the presentation. "It gave us a really tight and coherent control that allowed us to integrate sound and visuals ... and apart from anything else, it was really good fun to be controlling sound from the lighting desk for once!" concludes Dunn.

He kept the lighting clean and simple, using a rig of all Robe moving lights. A total of 24 x

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ColorSpot 2500E ATs were positioned on the circular trusses and 23 of Robe's new REDWash LED wash fixtures were divided between the air trusses and the floor. Another 8 Robe ROBIN Spot 300s on the floor were used for gobo texturing and colouring the circular ceiling and for some spectacular upstage beam-work.

Gearhouse Audio supplied an L-Acoustics sound system which was mixed by Johan Griesel.