

Joburg Theatre embraces the LED revolution with Absen



Joburg Theatre Complex, Johannesburg, South Africa

The Nelson Mandela Theatre at the Joburg Theatre Complex in Braamfontein remains one of the most prestigious and celebrated stages in South Africa. Home to the Joburg Ballet Company, the much-celebrated annual Pantomime and one of the best-equipped opera stages in the country, the theatre complex is a flame of hope that continues to keep the performing arts alive and well in the city.

In keeping with international trends, the Joburg Theatre has recently invested in an Absen LED video wall, which will be installed on the Nelson Mandela Theatre 's opera stage.

Technical manager at the Joburg Theatre, Enos Ramoroko explains that, historically, the Joburg Theatre has relied on set pieces and scenery. "In the 1980s and 90s, we used a lot of large-scale painted scenery and set pieces to bring productions to life – which was possible thanks to the ample size of our stage and scene dock. However, it took a lot of time and manpower to set up for productions, and it cost a lot of money."

As digital technology has developed over the past decade, Joburg Theatre has incorporated projection and media server technology to supplement scenery. "We have been fortunate to secure some very high-performance projectors through Gearhouse's Set, Drapes, Screens (SDS), which have made a huge difference in terms of modernising our staging and cutting down on both the cost and time needed to design sets for productions," says Enos.

While projection continues to serve the theatre well, Enos explains that there has been a huge increase in demand for an LED screen on the main stage, especially from corporate clients. "We have been looking forward to getting a screen for our theatre for a long time, and we are very pleased to announce that we have now taken delivery of an Absen PL2.9 Lite LED wall from DWR Distribution," he says.

The Joburg Theatre has acquired 240 Absen LED panels, which will enable them to cover the entire backdrop of the Nelson Mandela stage with a LED screen," says Schalk Botha, Absen product representative at DWR. "The PL2.9 lite is ideal for this application, as it offers the ability to curve in both directions as well as delivering a fine pixel pitch, exceptional brightness and contrast. As a result, the screen offers a high-quality image and versatility. Due to its phenomenal outputs, lighting designers no longer have to worry about spilling light onto the cyclorama, which can be a challenge when using projection to animate a set."



Schalk Botha of DWR with Enos Ramoroko and crew at Joburg Theatre

In addition, Schalk points out that Absen offers a robust and versatile LED solution at a very competitive price-point, which makes the Absen PL2.9 Lite an ideal choice for Enos and his crew. The screen will be managed using Novastar's state-of-the-art, NovaPro UHD Jr, a controller that is renowned for its excellent video processing capabilities, sending card functions and LED screen configurations.

"We will be flying and ground stacking the screen to serve as a backdrop for the stage, as well as for set pieces and legs for scenery," says Enos. "This will give us a lot of creative range, while dramatically reducing the need to build and restore scenery for productions," he adds. "Another huge benefit is that we will be able to load productions in and out far more efficiently, which means that we can stage more shows at the theatre. We will also be able to host a corporate event during the day and, by simply loading the appropriate media files for the video wall, host productions in the evenings without having to load in or out a physical set. The possibilities are endless and we look forward to seeing this acquisition taking the Joburg Theatre into the digital era."