

## Chatting to Tanya Brown, Head of Rigging!



Tanya Brown at Kings of Leon

**Meet Tanya Brown, Head of Rigging at the Gearhouse Group of Companies, an equipment and technical solutions company in South Africa. We sent Tanya a few questions and were inspired, as we know you will be, by her story.**

Â

**Were there signs from a young age that pointed to the career you'd end up following? Perhaps your family saw their little girl fearlessly climbing a tree or quickly building Lego blocks together?Â**

As a child, I always had a certain strength, but I think the Monkey Bars at playgrounds would have been the only clue honestly. I started to get interested in stage production and set work when I attended The National School of the Arts and received Half Colours for stage work, but had no clue that there would be an opportunity for me in the live industry at that stage.

**How long have you worked in the industry and what different roles have you worked in?**

I started in the industry straight after high school at the end of 2007. I joined a small company called Portal Projects after meeting the owner while I was working as a cashier at Mica Hardware Eastgate. The owner of Portal Projects often came in to buy gaffer tape, cable ties etc when one day I jokingly asked him why he always bought so much. He landed up asking me to meet at his company offices, which I did, only to end up loading a bunch of heavy equipment. He then told me to come back in the morning to load in a job; confused and intrigued, again I did, and got hooked! Mostly I did audio and lighting on a small scale.

I then joined the Gearhouse Group in September 2008 in audio as a freelancer, fixing cables, setting up line array systems, monitors and mic'ing up various artists. During quiet times I was in the lighting department helping to fix Parcan Bars and doing odd bits and pieces just to learn as much as possible.

I started freelancing in the rigging department and instantly felt at home. I worked closely with all departments, learning what was required for each one as I went along. Through some difficult times, I decided to expand on

my knowledge and kept learning, which is when I joined Gearhouse AV and LED Vision, mostly being in the workshops prepping and fixing equipment, constantly learning and fine-tuning what I had already learned on site. When hearing that the Inhouse Venue Technical Management (IVTM) department was looking for permanent crew I jumped at the opportunity and I went back to doing smaller corporate jobs focusing on the AV aspects. Alas, I realised that I needed to go back home to rigging and started learning the finer details of both the older Ibex and newer Kinesys Motors â€“ Motion Control/Automation technology â€“ for the entertainment industry and stuck to it from 2013, constantly learning how to do my own weights, rigging plots and basic draughting.



### **How did you realize that rigging was where you really wanted to work?**

When at IVTM I realised that I missed the constant challenges that kept me on my toes. Working on the larger shows there was always a sense of achievement and pride that filled my soul â€“ rigging and hanging around (haha) at the â€“Coca-Colaâ€™ or TicketPro Dome roof or FNB Stadium pulling points, running out motors and problem solving was the hands-on kind of job I needed. Not to mention I loved having dirty hands and being able to do what the guys did and constantly pushing myself to be better, no matter how hard or sore it may have been.

### **What events do you mostly work on and do you have any favourite shows?**

Before moving into the office doing rigging plots and weights, I was either touring or working on more complex automation jobs. There have been so many, but my favourite tour would have to be Neil Diamond. It was incredibly hands-on, we worked closely with the International crew non-stop around the country, and I loved every moment.

My favourite complex job would have to be the Castle Lite Unlocks 2021 job we did at the Ticketpro Dome, where I managed to get the Ibex and Kinesys Systems working cohesively and running all cues for the show. We had 6 x LED screens in a span of 100 meters moving at different times with performers running around right under them.

### **What do you love most about your job and what is most challenging?**

Always being on my toes and problem solving is what I love the most. Right now, while answering these questions, I am on the phone finding a solution with the crew! The most challenging is to ensure that Iâ€™m 100% accurate in all my calculations and that every detail and eventual has been accounted for so that I

donâ€™t cause the rig to come down, that everyone is safe and that the show is successful! Dealing with all the testosterone and pride would also be quite high on the list. Lastly, to ensure that all riggers donâ€™t take any shortcuts and are trained properly.

**How did you obtain your training? Did you have formal training or like many people in our industry, gain most of it on the job?**

I would say most of my training came from working on-site and in the workshops, but I have done a few official training courses such as Vectorworks for draughting, attended CM Motor School to service motors and a Prolyte Rigging course that was the start of me becoming a rigger. The PLASA (National Rigging Certificate (NRC) would be my next goal.



**Do you have any mentors or people in your life who have played a part in your journey and whom you would like to mention?**

Â

Definitely!

- My family as they are always there to support me, no matter what.
- Dave Tudor and Revil Baselga who took a chance and gave me the opportunity to work at Gearhouse.
- Kendall Dixon who took me under his wing to make me the rigger I am today.
- DWR Distributionâ€™s Duncan Riley who paid for my Prolyte Rigging course and believed in me as well as Robert Izzett who was a part of the training and always willing to help with weights whenever I needed it.
- To my amazing rigging crew, who are always willing and pushing themselves to keep to the standards set and ensure great deliveries.
- Charles Standing who took the time to do a basic course at the workshop for all my brilliant crew.
- To all the technicians who took the time to teach me and share their knowledge, without them I would not be where I am today!

**Where are you right now and what production are you working on? Unless you are on vacation?**

Currently, I'm on vacation visiting my sister who has always been my rock! And I'm meeting family for the first time since I was a child. Ultimately, I'm always available should my crew need me. But looking forward to getting back and getting stuck into the next exciting event.

**Do you have any last thoughts or encouragement?**

No matter how hard something may feel, keep pushing it's worth it in the end!!! If you happen to fall, fight to get back up on that horse and don't give up no matter who tells you otherwise.