

Michael W Smith visits South Africa



The Michael W Smith South African Tour 2015 included performances at the CRC in Bloemfontein, Durban ICC, GrandWest Arena in Cape Town, Rhema Church in Johannesburg and the Moreletapark Church in Pretoria. With the venues ranging in size and application from church auditoriums to the convention centre, and set up different at each location, American Wayne Mertz had little choice but to busk a fair amount of the show – a Robe rig – on his grandMA2 lite.



Wayne Mertz from Delta Stage Lighting, Nashville.

Wayne Mertz, lighting operator for the South African tour, is from Delta Stage Lighting in Nashville. The Delta motto says it all, “Not the one in the limelight, just the ones who cast it.” It was the seventh show he had worked on for Michael W Smith and the first time in his career to make use of Robe Pointes.

The tour was organized by 104 Concerts who appointed Phoenix 5 Productions to assess the artist’s rider and in collaboration with his production team develop a locally acceptable alternative. “I tried to use an equipment list that would be reliable and easily available in the South African hire market, thereby making sure all the venues could at least be similar technically,” said Wayne Krull from Phoenix 5 Productions.



In Johannesburg, Pretoria and Durban the full technical was supplied by EPH Productions. In Bloemfontein and Cape Town, the full technical was awarded to Phoenix 5 Productions who appointed C&S to assist them. "The production went very well, it was beautiful," commented Leon Pheiffer, owner of EPH Productions. "It was all mood and effects with a lot of beam work."

It was a wonderful opportunity to chat to the American operator, Wayne Mertz from Delta. "I hadn't used the Robe fixtures before in the States. I was very impressed. I've never been a big beam fixture guy and at our company, because we thought the beam would be a fad, we didn't buy into that. But these have been great! Not only tight beams but able to throw a gobo and be used as a profile fixture."



He says Delta do not do large scale tours and don't always buy the latest and greatest. "We'd rather find a good piece of gear and work it. It's not about having the best equipment, but this is what I have, it's close to what I need so let's make a show. The Robe Pointes... well throw them in your pocket and put them on a plane!"

Wayne does all programming and lighting on a grandMA 2. "We provided a plot for the South African tour, but had to move equipment around from venue to venue." While Wayne had to substitute the original design, he knew that for the Michael W Smith audience in particular, it's all about the artist. His role was to zoom in on that and create an intimate atmosphere.



A family man with an audio degree, Wayne was born in Northern Indiana and moved to Nashville for college. "When I graduated from school I went and applied to all the touring sound companies, but being in Nashville, everybody wants to be an audio guy. So I applied to one lighting company and they put me on the crew the next week."

He completed a basic theatre lighting course in college and grins. "I like to say the only two classes that I used from my audio degree are my basic theatre lighting and my golf course." The rest he learnt on the road.

Wayne worked as a freelancer in Nashville in 2006 and then in 2007 joined Delta. He has worked himself up to a System Integrations Manager in charge of installations and on the side gets to go out on shows. "I'm actually just filling in for main LD," Wayne explained. "He wasn't able to come out of the country and said, 'Hey, do you want to fill in for me? I said, 'Sure, I would love to go to Europe and SA.'" After watching a Michael W Smith concert in Ohio to get the look and feel, Wayne's first performance was in the Netherlands.

"I was talking to Eric the backline tech about the differences between sound and lighting," said Wayne. "In sound there is an art to mixing but you are given the material. In lighting you have to hear a song and say to yourself, what does that song look like? How do you convey the meaning of the song and the look to create a certain environment? Especially in this case, where it is worship, to be able to create an environment for the audience to enter into that. There is definitely a more creative element involved when it comes to lighting, especially with live shows."



He adds, “When flying, they are always doing the safety demonstration. It’s always the lights that will lead the way to the exit; it’s never the audio cue. It’s lights that will save you in an emergency!”

In regards to the South African Tour, Wayne says the local crews were fantastic. “They were absolutely top notch. Wayne Krull from Phoenix 5 Productions really took good care of us. During the show in Cape Town we had both hazers go out on us. He had his guy fix one, but as soon as that was up and running, the other one went out. Wayne had the spares sitting there ready to go – you can’t ask more than that. Between our last two show in Johannesburg and Pretoria the crew from EPH had a very tough and quick turnaround. By the time we arrived in the venue for the last show everything was up and running for us. The guys were tired but did an excellent job.”

Michael W Smith has a heart for Africa and the tour ended on this continent with a performance in Nigeria.



Durban Lighting Rig

- 12 Robe Robin Pointe
- 12 Robe Robin 600 LEDWash
- 12 Robe Robin 1000 LEDBeam
- 4 Clay Paky Sharpy
- 4 Martin Mac 2000 Profile
- 8 ETC Source Four Profile

- 2 LSC DMX 5-Way Splitter
- 1 Avolites ART2000 24 Channel Dimmer
- 12 PAR 64
- 1 grandMA 2 Lite
- 2 JEM Compact Hazers

Johannesburg Lighting Rig

- 12 Robe Robin Pointe
- 4 Clay Paky Sharpy
- 12 Robe Robin 300 LEDWash
- 12 Robe Robin 1000 LEDBeam
- 12 Source Fours
- 4 Martin Mac 2000 Profile
- 2 JEM Compact Hazers

Pretoria Lighting Rig

- 12 Robe Robin Pointe
- 12 Robe Robin 600 LEDWash
- 12 Robe Robin 1000 LEDBeam
- 4 Clay Paky Sharpy
- 4 Martin Mac 2000 Profile
- 4 ETC Source Four Profile
- 1 Zero 89 Chilli Pack Dimmer
- 2 LSC DMX 5-Way Splitter
- 2 Clay Paky Followspots
- 1 grandMA 2 Lite
- 2 JEM Compact Hazers

Bloemfontein

- 8 Robe 700E AT Series ColourSpot
- 12 Robe Robin Pointe
- 12 Robe Robin 300 LEDWash
- 18 Robe Robin 600 LEDWash
- 12 ETC Source Four 15-30 Degree Profile
- 2 LDR Canto 2000 MSR Followspot
- 1 grandMA on PC
- 1 grandMA Command Wing
- 2 Screens
- 2 Strand 6 pack 6 Channel Dimmer
- 2 LeMaitre MVS Hazer

Cape Town, GrandWest Arena

- 8 Robe 700E AT Series Colourspot
- 12 Robe Robin Pointe
- 12 Robe Robin 300 LEDWash
- 18 Robe Robin 600 LEDWash
- 12 ADB theater profile 15-30 Degree Profile
- 2 Strong Followspot

- 1 grandMA 2 lite
- 1 grandMA Command Wing
- 2 Screens
- 2 Strand 6 Pack 6 Channel Dimmer
- 2 LeMaitre MVS Hazer