



Miss South Africa

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Courtesy TPMEA (The issue is available online now, so see:
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One of the most hotly anticipated annual events in the country and a potentially life-changing moment for the participants, there's a lot riding on a Miss South Africa show. TPMEA speaks to Lighting Designer Joshua Cutts of Visual Frontier to find out how he creates a look befitting of a beauty pageant.

Amongst the biggest entries on South Africa's live events calendar, Miss South Africa is one of the most prominent shows lighting designer Joshua Cutts of Visual Frontier works on each year. A high-profile event for numerous companies, sponsors and the many individuals involved in the production, Cutts is under no

illusions as to the task in hand.

“It’s a life-changing moment for the girls, so you have to get it right,” he said. “You have to make them look good, and it has to work on television, so you end up putting a lot of pressure on yourself to ensure that everyone else succeeds along with you,” he explained.

“I was very proud of this year’s Miss SA,” Cutts continued. “It looked exactly like my renders, the project looked clean on television, and the contestants were well lit with enough vibrant background in the walk and the performances, which I was hoping for.”



Lighting Designer Joshua Cutts and Assistant Designer, Andre Siebrits.

Celebrating its 61st anniversary, this year’s contest was held on 8 August 2019. Hosted at Time Square Sun Arena in Pretoria, the show was produced by [sic] entertainment and directed by Gavin Wratten, with MGG appointed as the full technical supplier.

Cutts has worked with Creative Director Wratten on Miss South Africa for the past five years. “Every time we start with a Miss SA design, we talk about new ideas in the industry or new images we’ve seen,” he commented. “Gavin and I draw on each other; he starts with the ramp style in his mind and then I go away and create something around that.” Fire is recognised as a purifier, representing energy, change, creativity

and inner light. Wratten's vision was to incorporate flames to be used right from the promos to the live performance.

Stepping away from a single fashion-style ramp, this year saw two ramps on either side of the stage coming together to form a triangular shape. Built within each corner of the triangle was a pool of water contained in a spearhead shape, each outlined with a trough dedicated for the pyros. This created the contrast of water and fire. Bird view camera shots saw the lights above the stage reflecting in the water.



Joshua Cutts with Music Team Kurt Herman, Llewellyn George and Tia Herman

"Last year we used a large number of LED screens as the main background, but this year, while I still required LED screens, I wanted to create a central feature using lighting for the backdrop," said Cutts. "I wanted to draw in people's attention, so my mind started drawing lines, and from drawing the lines I had the outline for the Martin by Harman Sceptrons.

"I realised I couldn't just have Sceptrons and needed to add something more," Cutts continued. "Then one of the most exciting lights out there at the moment came to mind: the Robe MegaPointe."

The lighting design incorporates 180 Martin by Harman VDO Sceptron 10 Strips, 24 Robe MegaPointes, 24 Vari-Lite SL Nitro 510 Strobes and 27 Robe LEDBeam150s. It then continues up into the roof, where a V-Shaped truss, hung over the stage and mirroring the triangular stage, has 39 Robe Spiiders.



“You have to keep lights in groups, clusters and formations,” Cutts explains. “Instead of taking 24 fixtures and spreading them throughout the whole room, it works better to group 12 together as closely as you can, so they almost become one fixture and work in unison.”

Cutts and his Assistant Designer, Andre Siebrits, made use of two MA Lighting grandMA2 full sizes, five NPUs and a VPU for pixel mapping. “Andre was the programmer and operator for the show. We have a very strict style when working on MA,” said Cutts. “This year’s Miss SA had limited rehearsal time, but because we understand the production so well and work so well together, we were able to work on the tight deadline thanks to how we structure our MA show files. That’s why I love MA, because it lets me keep to a certain style and we get through a big job quickly.”



For a number of years, Cutts has relied on Vectorworks for his drawings. “It has all the tools you need and is very similar, in my head, to MA,” he commented. “It’s a very powerful and accurate device and I do not start a grandMA show file until I have completed it in Vectorworks. It’s huge how well Vectorworks and grandMA work together.”

Cutts and Siebrits also took control of the video and pyros, enabling them to be in sync with the entire production.

The Green Hippo Boreal Plus was the main machine used, with an additional Boeral server. “We used all 4K outputs to map the large surface,” said Cutts. “The total pixel count across the large screen surface was 10,416 pixels across and 2,688 pixels down, so essentially 10HD screens altogether.

“I find Hippotizer intuitive and easy to operate. I don’t do the nuts and bolts of setting it up - Johan Botha from MGG did that for us. He slices up the content and applies it to all the LED screens. That is the tricky stuff, but it’s still very simple on a Hippo.



MGG's Johan Botha

“What I love about the Hippotizer for LED screens is that you can slice a piece of content out of a video file and put it on a specifically dedicated LED screen easily. The way it allows me to control colour of the content is great. I just find it a very powerful server and simple enough for any programmer to use.”

The end result was a design that was a mixture of both the left and right brain – creative and logical at the same time. “You have to put the science, logic and angles behind lighting, and at the same time use colour, expression and mood to create feeling,” said Cutts.

While Cutts admits to still getting nervous ahead of shows that he is working on, after the dust settled and the new Miss South Africa, Zozibini Tunzi, was crowned, he knew that all his and his team’s hard work was worthwhile. “Congratulations to Zozibini,” he said, “and congratulations to every person involved in putting on a fantastic show.”



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