

Neg Earth & Robe Help Energise Rose Bruford College's Live Event Project

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It has been a tough year for the entire industry and none more so than those studying the performing arts, with colleges having to radically re-think not just the teaching process and online learning, but also the realisation of practical coursework modules.

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Second-year students on the Creative Lighting Control (CLC) and Lighting Design (LD) courses at the UK's Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance thought out of the box and forged ahead with the staging of their annual 'Live Event' project, delivering a full programme of music entertainment in a fully covid compliant environment!

The action took place at the 330-capacity Rose Theatre on the college's Sidcup, Kent campus, comprising a series of shows featuring the talents of four live artists – two solo acts, a band, and a DJ – with performances either livestreamed by the Lighting Design students or recorded music-video style for broadcast by the CLC students ... instead of being played to a live audience.

Each year, the College reaches out to different industry players for the Live Event project looking for partner companies on the technical side who will participate by providing equipment, and those responding this year included Avolites, Colour Sound Experiment, ER Productions (lasers), Neg Earth Lights (NEL), Rigging Team, Tom Young (MA3) and White Light, among others.

Neg Earth was the sole provider of the Robe equipment in the form of LEDBeam 150s, PATT2013s and two MegaPointes running on two RoboSpot systems – organised in conjunction with NEL's Sam Ridgway.

The Live Event project typically covers a three-week period in April, including set up, rigging, rehearsal, programming and tech'ing during the first week followed by two weeks of shows, during which all students gain valuable practical 'in-the-field' experience on multiple levels.

Week 1 is the get-in / learning kit period; Week 2 is where second-year Lighting Design students come in with a design that is facilitated by the CLC students; and week 3 is the second year CLC students' own, complete with a rig re-design for the livestream event, which was then turned around into the music video scenario.

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Specified, led, and delivered by students, the core 2021 Live Event lighting and visuals production team comprised CLC students Billy Coates who production managed the whole Live Event process; Daniel Holland, technical manager who liaised with all the supporting companies; Bradley Bywater, production LX for the duration ensuring that all ran smoothly in terms of power and technical facilitation; and systems engineer Sam Blackmore who created most of the production design elements.

CLC Tutors Enrique Munoz Jimenez and Danny Cunningham were also instrumental in supporting and making the whole project happen.

Additionally, Sam plus Chris Shute and Emily Carter visited Neg Earth prior for training on the kit, especially focusing on the RoboSpot set up and operating.

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"It was hugely exciting to have RoboSpots and also lasers available as part of the shows this year," enthused Sam, explaining that once all the kit is set up during the first week, the Lighting Design students come in the following week to develop and programme their shows.

The Robe PATT2013s were used by LDs Dan Maxted, Lilli Fisher, Jack O'Sullivan and Ash Copeland for artists Trip Kenneth, Tony Smith and Hard Boiled Eggs during the lighting design students' week, mainly for acoustic numbers and by designers requiring tungsten effects or a stylish scenic aspect that is also a functional light source. Some LDs rigged them upstage juxtaposed with traditional PAR cans, a mix that blended beautifully.

The LEDBeam 150s were used mainly during the CLC students' week of music video recordings which followed, with the return of Hard Boiled Eggs playing to a timecoded light show and for RnB DJ Kiran Raywilliams featuring Teddy Walker who rocked the house. Musically, this second week had a more electronic vibe encompassing DnB, RnB, hip hop, grime, etc., ideal for the small punchy LEDBeam 150 fixtures to help create dramatic lightshows.

"We wanted a small fixture with a great zoom that could produce great beams and colours and punch though the lasers and other lights used with a small footprint and low power consumption, and the LEDBeam 150 was perfect," stated Sam.

For the band set, the LEDBeam 150s were rigged upstage and used for aerial effects and to create bright 3D white and coloured shafts shooting through from behind.

The MegaPointes on the RoboSpot system were used for both production weeks – mostly for key lighting.

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One MegaPointe was rigged directly in front of the stage with the other upstage centre, both in positions squeezed for space and where until now it has simply not been practical to have a traditional follow spot. "It was a brilliant solution for the music video week," commented Sam, who enjoyed having this technology onboard for the Live Event as most involved had not used the system before, so they learnt first-hand about the many advantages of remote follow spotting.

"Seeing this in action has opened a lot of doors for future productions," commented Sam, noting that this could also be a good solution for The Barn Theatre, another performance space on campus.



During the training at NEL, Sam found it very straightforward to learn the basics of the RoboSpot BaseStation and he reckons that the gaming-style user interface makes it accessible to most people, especially after they have used it once.

During the CLC / music video week, the colour, gobo, and intensity parameters were all controlled from the grandMA3 full size lighting console – provided by Tom Young – leaving the RoboSpot operators to concentrate on the focus and zoom parameters of the MegaPointes.

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During CLC week, Sam programmed a 10-minute lightshow on the MA3 which was used as a filler during the changeover between band and DJ sets.

Robe UK's head of marketing Theresa Gibson commented, "It was great to collaborate with our friends at Neg Earth Lights in supporting the CLC and LD students at Rose Bruford. NEL was instrumental in supplying a variety of Robe equipment and facilitating valuable training time.

"It was wonderful to see several Robe NRG members engaged in this project and inspiring to witness how they've utilised the opportunity to hone their creative skills, enhance their practical development and lead this initiative during such a challenging period! Huge testament to the fantastic teamwork and the industry support they secured to deliver some exceptional events!"

Photos by Michael O'Reilly