

RMB Starlight Classics

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With picnic baskets and blankets in hand, music lovers eagerly gathered for the RMB Starlight Classics hosted under the stars at the Country Club Johannesburg in September, for a harmonious journey that has become a springtime tradition over the past twenty years. The RMB Starlight Classics is hosted twice annually - once in Johannesburg and the other at Vergelegen Wine Estate

in Somerset West.

Sam McGrath and Joanne Jaques from Jam Events have managed the prestigious production since its inception in 1998, which is one of the crown jewels in the South African event calendar. “RMB Starlight Classics is an amazing product and has grown beyond anything we thought it would,” Sam expressed. “We have reached a point where the technical team is a family.”



Gearhouse South Africa once again provided the iconic dome structure, as well as all lighting requirements, with Peter Abrahamse appointed as Project Manager. “It’s probably my favourite gig, and I get to do it twice a year,” smiles Peter, who has worked on the event since 2005.

“The show really has evolved over the years, and while it’s always held under a Gearhouse In2Structure roof, the lighting changes every time. The venues are beautiful too; we work outdoors, and the client, RMB are amazing and take great care of us. Sam and Jo have put

together a top team over the years and handpick the people with whom they want to work. The great thing is that they also love it when promising youngsters from the Gearhouse's Kentse Mpahlwa Academy, work on the event. RMB Starlight Classics is a great platform for learning, and Sam and Jo have flown students to work in Cape Town or Johannesburg."



The vision for the lighting design, by Joshua Cutts of Visual Frontier, was to create a clean, static picture, something the audience could admire but which would not detract from the performance. For the first time on RMB Starlight Classics, Andre Siebrits worked with Josh and they each operated and programmed on a full-size grandMA2. "The grandMA is always seamless, and we used it on this production from the visualizer to the finale without any problems," Andre says. "It really has, once again, proven to be the backbone of the show."



“This year, instead of using five truss ‘fingers’, Joshua decided on straight lines across the dome to create a neat and elegant look,” Andre explains. “We had 24 x Vari-Lite VLZs and 23 x Robe Spiiders positioned on the horizontal truss to supply backlight and effects, with subtle gobo work over the orchestra.” The rig also included 24 Robe BMFL Blades.

To accommodate some of the more upbeat pop songs, 18 x 2 cell blinders, 7 x 4 cell blinders and 18 x Robe Pointes, on truss totems on stage, provided beam work. In addition, 48 x Robe LEDBeam 150s were positioned on the floor front and also used for sidelight. “The 150s were surprisingly versatile and did a great job,” Andre points out.

New technology on the show included two Robe RoboSpots, which controlled two Robe BMFL FollowSpot LT (Long Throw) replacing Strong Super Trouper (2KW Zenon) and Strong Gladiator (3KW Zenon). The only concern was that the conventional followspots were typically placed 80m at FOH, and they needed something bright enough to replace them. The BMFL ticked all the boxes.



A key benefit of the RoboSpot system is that safety comes first, and hence operators can be placed anywhere in the venue and not have to climb up followspot towers or sit in truss spot position, which can be hazardous.

“Because we had control of the RoboSpots via the grandMA2, the follow spotters only had to be concerned about pan and tilt, following the performer,” said Andre. “Colour changes were programmed into the cue list, so there was no need to call it. The RoboSpot offered quick pick up points, and I can definitely see the benefits of the system. The should be the future of followspotting systems going forward and should be something used on every show.”

Peter agrees. “The RoboSpots were awesome, and we were blown away with the system’s performance. The units were set up in a day, and we never had any issues.”



The line-up included Zahara, international guest tenor Gaston Rivero, piano virtuoso Charl du Plessis, Musa Ngqungwana, Lee Scott and The Voice South Africa’s Siki Jo-An. These impressive vocalists were supported by the Joburg Festival Orchestra, Quava vocal group and the Chanticleer Singers. RMB Starlight Classics 2019 was directed by Darren Hayward, and conducted by Richard Cock and Chad Hendricks.

Photos: Duncan Riley

