

Robe 4 Idols

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Courtesy Louise Stickland Idols is one of the most enduringly popular global TV talent shows ... and Robe moving lights have joined the thrills, excitement and action on several Idols' around the world, with the latest being the current series of Idols South Africa. This is recorded at the Mosaiek Teatro in Fairlands, Johannesburg live in front of 3,500 people, and broadcast on M-Net, M-Net HD and Mzansi Magic on Sunday and Tuesday evenings.

The lighting and video visuals for this seventh series of Idols SA have been created by Joshua Cutts, one of South Africa's most innovative designers who is working for the first time in this role, having operated last year's series. It is the first time that Idols South Africa has featured a coherent 'visual' design incorporating both mediums, which is going down a storm with everyone, bringing a new fluidity and harmony to the show.



The set is designed by the renowned Dewet Meyer, and lighting equipment is being supplied by Dream Sets from Johannesburg, all brought in by production company, Nevermachine.

Dream Sets made a huge investment in Robe kit last year, and on this show are six ColorWash 700E ATs, six ColorBeam 700E ATs, 18 ColorSpot 700E ATs and 18 ColorWash 2500's, plus strobes, generics and LED fixtures.

These are rigged on a combination of installed trussed and dead-hung house LX bars over the stage, plus two advance trusses in the auditorium, with some clamped to the downstage edges of the set. Directly in front of the main set wall – clad in striking LED panels – is a skeletal arched truss which complements the elliptical shape of the set, echoing its sweeping curved side staircases.

Cutts received some general Idols brand design directives which ensure maintenance of a degree of global continuity as stipulated by format owners Freemantle Media. He also had the opportunity for his own creative input and styling as well as working very closely with director, Gavin Wratten, who is very proactive about the look and feel of the show.



Aesthetically, Cutts wanted to give it a cleaner and more sharply defined look this year, with lots of strong and distinctive back lighting – more akin to an American Idol look – on considerably less budget! With series six hailed as a cut above the first five in terms of production values, there was a strong commitment to “Raise the bar” further on this one in terms of technology and fabulousness

A major challenge was the tight stage space and relatively low headroom of the Mosaiek Teatro, which is also a practicing church.

Using the Robes enables Cutts to bring plenty of dynamics into play. Over the 10 week series he has to light a massive number of different performances covering all musical genres, making each look unique and interesting on camera and live.

Another challenge is the weekly programming schedule, which is intense, with a very limited time between finding out the performance schedule and having to be ready with some spectacular lighting for the record session.



The six ColorBeam 700E ATs are positioned on the floor and used to make dramatic, powerful high impact beam and silhouette effects. The mega-bright ColorWash 2500s are on the upstage bars in the ceiling and give high level, high quality beamage and also introduce an element of rawness.

In addition to the moving lights, 12 Robe CityScape48 LED wash lights are used to wash the set very effectively.

"They are great lights," Cutts says of the Robes, describing the ColorWash 2500s as "Awesome". In particular he likes the flexibility of being able to zoom right out for optimum stage coverage, or right in to make it into a tight, collimated beam light. He adds the consistency between the different Robe models and fixtures is also helpful.

He runs the show from a grandMA2 full size console which is triggering a Pandora's Box media server feeding all the video and LED surfaces.

From a technician's viewpoint, Dream Sets' Eben Peltz comments that the Robes are worked hard and are on all their major shows and time and again prove reliable and well built. He also praises service from Robe's South African distributor DWR Distribution as "Second to none".



There has been a stunning line up of talent on this

year's Idols SA, which is executive produced by Anneke de Ridder and production managed by Michelle Miller.

Other highlights have included James Blunt opening one show, US singer Chante Moore joining the judging panel for the same programme that also featured the incredible Mzansi Choir, who made their presence and rhythm felt as they performed special numbers with all the contestants reaching the final 7 stage.