

Robe is 'Cat's Whiskers' in Lively Dick Whittington Panto

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Posted on January 7, 2015



Photos and article courtesy Louise Stickland

Panto is one of the most fun and also one of the most demanding genres of performance to light, requiring busy cueing, lots of bold and fast moving multiple scene and location changes and several touches of pure visual magic to help the action flow, all with simultaneous split-second timing ... a challenge that Lighting Designer Andy Webb fully embraced for the Qdos production of "Dick Whittington" at the Swan Theatre in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, UK, where he chose Robe for all the moving and LED elements of his design.

Actor, comedian and singer Shane Richie - best known for his role as Alfie Moon in the long running BBC 1 soap 'EastEnders' - was back in the lead role at The Swan due to popular demand after his stonking success as Buttons in last year's Cinderella - and the gags and innuendos flew as quickly and slickly as the cream pies and crazy foam!

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Andy, a freelance LD based in Cirencester, has worked with Robe products over the last 10 years and was hugely impressed – in particular – with the authenticity of the various Robe LED lightsources that he used during the Showlight symposium in Cesky Krumlov in 2013, for which he was invited to create a lighting showcase in one of the city's theatres.

When the opportunity to light a major commercial panto arose, he decided to revisit the concept and specify Robe moving lights, the majority of which were LED sources.

His brief from 'Dick Whittington' – a poor boy who, accompanied by his faithful cat, rises to become Lord Mayor of London – Director Jon Conway was to make the lighting bright and dramatic with some specials centred around a number of key comedy routines, plus all those magical and surreal elements that are *de rigeuer* with panto, like evil queens, underwater scenes and desert islands, etc.



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For his main key lighting – rigged at the front side positions and also to a bar in front of the circle balcony, he chose five of Robe's ROBIN DLS Profiles, which formed the workhorses of the rig. Three of these were positioned on the FOH bar at the front of the circle balcony, with one each a side on the pros booms.

“Using DLSs at Showlight was awesome,” he states. “You completely forget it is an LED source and there's no waiting for lamps to strike when they are fired up, and it is considerably quieter when operating than discharge fixtures, which is a huge plus factor in theatre. You really need fixtures to be as silent as possible, especially when they are in exposed positions like on the FOH balcony”.



From sharp and tightly focused gobo-work onto the set – maximising the shutters and high clarity gobos for all those ephemeral moments – to blending them into the warm Source Four general FOH cover “The DLS is an absolutely ultimately flexible fixture,” he enthused.

One moment he could utilize them for general washes, shuttering off the edges of the pros, and the next as tightly defined rods of light hitting a mirror-ball with pin-point accuracy.

Also rigged on the two side boom were two Robe ROBIN DLF Washes which augmented the DLS wash looks, giving a nice wide additional strong colour from a good angle.

Six PARFect 100s on the pros booms were fitted with standard 7 degree lenses and used to highlight the false pros arch.

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Onstage, LX bar 1 hosted the three remaining DLS s rigged in the centre, and these were flanked by 12 x LEDBeam 100s arranged in four clusters of three on custom drop-down bars, so they could tuck in under the pros for the finale. The little LEDBeam 100s were crucial in many scenes to light the myriad of cloths that flew in and out, and also created fan effects and bump cues for those rock 'n' roll moments ... of which there were several – synonymous with the lighting style of many a panto!

LX bars 2 and 3 were loaded with seven ROBIN DLX Spots, with four ROBIN Pointes rigged on LX3.

The DLXs maintained the consistency of the LED lightsource for down-lighting and specials, and in particular, the custom rat gobo looks for Queen Rat and her ratster followers. These lights were also ideal – complete with frost filter – for wide washes onto the set – designed by Hugh Durrant.

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The Pointes performed many effects, especially in the finale of Act 1, slicing through everything else with ease, and another couple of Pointes at floor level pierced the layers of haze creating some X-Factor moments that delighted the audiences. Used judiciously, the six Pointes brought a completely different look and feel to the stage.

Rigged on four onstage side stage booms each side were a total of 28 PARFects with 40 degree lenses. Andy reckons these produce a beam spread almost identical to a CP62 from that position, "They are very bright and hold their own even amidst about 60K of generics! It's also like having a PAR with a scroller at your disposal, endless possibilities ... but seriously more reliable and with no noise!"

Along the front of the stage - replacing conventional 'birdie' footlights - was a row of 8 x ROBIN CycFX 8s which proved a bit of a *pièce de résistance*!

Not only did they provide excellent front up-light in tungsten colour-mix scenes, but also added a real WOW factor when turned around and blasted into the audience as blinders.

Thirdly, they made an exceptionally effective light curtain when in the vertical position through the haze, completely masking quick-changes and scenery shuffles onstage from the audience -

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put in place in a nanno-second without the hassle of dropping a scenic cloth! This was a function almost stumbled upon during rehearsals!

Andy was - again - well impressed with the performance and reliability of all the Robe fixtures, especially during production week when they were running nonstop for 18 hours a day!

The most galvanising aspect of lighting Dick Whittington was having very little tech time with the real set onstage, however with perseverance, his vast experience of lighting shows under pressure and the assistance of a good set of drawings on an iPad ... he produced some impressive results and a beautifully lit and balanced show.

The showfile contained nearly 250 lighting cues and was programmed by Miles Fisher on an ETC EOS Ti during the production week, then transferred onto an ETC Ion for the show run of 41 performances over three weeks. The fit-up Production Manager was James Henshaw and the Production LX was Martin Roberts.

The Robe products were supplied by rental company HSL and Robe UK, and Andy also used the house generics, strobes, followspots and assorted atmosphere generators.