Robe Goes to the Moon

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Nina Westervelt

“We Chose to Go to the Moon” is a special theatrical concert and ‘living documentary’ that was recorded at New York’s Carnegie Hall and aired last week on PBS, PBS.org, and the PBS App on the eve of Veterans Day, 10th November 2026.

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Created and narrated by writer and historian John Monsky, produced for television by Academy Award-winning RadicalMedia and directed for the stage by Tony Award-winner Michael Mayer, the event, part of the “American History Unbound” series, was lit by Mike Baldassari, who specified Robe moving lights – T2 Profiles, FORTES, iFORTES and a RoboSpot system – as the backbone of his lighting rig.



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The show follows America’s dramatic race into space through the personal stories of the astronauts, engineers and their families, set against the transformative cultural and social backdrop of the 1960s – from the civil rights movement to hippies, beatniks and Star Trek.

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The soundtrack was inspired by enduring music of the era and delivered by the 45-piece Orchestra of St. Luke’s plus six high-profile Broadway vocalists, and staging the show presented many challenges to the technical production team, especially for lighting.

Covering multiple people onstage was one galvanising aspect for Mike and ensuring that it looked great for television, a multi-cam shoot, and the live audiences for the two recorded concerts … was another.

Added to these was the fact that flags – from a small sliver of the famous flag planted on the moon by American astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on July 20th, 1969, to the poignancy of the three Apollo 1 burial flags – had an integral role in the storytelling, and projections onto the walls behind the stage were another essential narrative element.

So, lighting had to complement these, be tightly focused on the musicians and performers, and fully integrated with this overall visuality.

On top of that, time was extremely tight. The production get-in was midnight on the day of the first show being recorded that same evening, so the pressure was ON, and there was no margin for error.

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Fadi Kheir

Mike needed reliable lighting fixtures that were camera-friendly, had plenty of power, excellent whites and good CRI.

“Colour was super important,” he explained, “and being able to colour match between different fixtures was essential,” and that’s why he, working closely with DoP Declan Quinn, chose these two types of Robe fixtures to be prominent on the rig.

Twenty-four of the 32 x FORTES were in front positions. Goal posts were constructed to the side of the high boxes stage left and right, each rigged with 10 x FORTES, and another four FORTES

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were attached to the front central balcony rail. The other eight were on the floor, left and right, in ‘shin buster’ positions with two each side for up-lighting the Carnegia Hall proscenium arch.

Mike notes that these are “excellent” fixtures for key lighting and specials.



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Fadi Kheir

Pointing in from FOH, the FORTES and their white LED engine had to blend perfectly and precisely with the 18 x T2 Profiles hung on three over-stage trusses with their multispectral LED engine. The colours were all matched between the two fixture types during their three days of pre-viz and they replicated precisely once Mike and his team arrived on site.

The FORTES were used as keys for all the solo performers or vocalists onstage, so the colours also had to be consistent throughout the performance. Sometimes performers were revealed directly one after another, a process that Mike refined during pre-viz by dialling in different colour variants for the faces. As well as the colour, the focus, shuttering and edge blending of the

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fixtures also all had to be identical and spot on every time! “That repeatability was mission-critical,” commented Mike, “and the FORTES delivered each and every time!”

Some of the FORTES were also used to highlight the venue’s architectural features.

The relatively light weight of the T2 Profiles also makes them ideal for this setup on stage to comply with the historical venue’s weight loading restrictions.

On the mid over-stage truss were two iFORTE LTX Follow Spots running on a RoboSpot remote follow spotting system, with the operator located in the attic of the venue.

“These Robe fixtures were perfect for this show,” commented Mike, noting that next time he does a televised event like this at Carnegie Hall, he will replace the house spots with 2 x iFORTE LTXs fitted with LightMaster handles for getting that bit more punch from the FOH spotting positions.

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Main Light were the lighting equipment suppliers, and working alongside Mike to deliver a fabulous audience and viewer experience were lighting director Mitch Fenton, moving light programmer Jason Marin and theatrical gaffer, Sarah Arnold.

Also integral to making “We Chose to Go to the Moon” a success were general and production manager Bethany Weinstein Stewert and film director Michael John Warren. The venue’s head electrician is Tim Donovan and the production’s best boy team comprised Michael Mustica, Stephanie Freed, Mark Krasnov and Max Breslow.

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“I’m extremely pleased with the results, and VERY proud to have the opportunity to honour our amazing veterans and astronauts in such a unique, interesting and entertaining production,” concluded Mike.

.***Photos by Fadi Kheir + Nina Westervelt***

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