

Robe In the Clouds with MF

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Talented US rapper MF toured his *Clouds (The Mixtape)* album in October with a raw and stylish production design created by Chris Denholm (also musical director) and Clay Joiner (also lighting designer) ... tuning in to the artist's big presence, smart words and intimate one-to-one live performance bond with his fans – shouting out to the world whilst communicating to every individual in the room!

To capture the narrative flow and massive energy of his music on this first ever shed tour, Chris

and Clay needed some seriously bright lights ... and chose over 200 Robe fixtures as the 'lead luminaires'!

The lighting rig included 64 x Robe Tarrantula wash beams, 128 x Spikies, and 16 x BMFL Spots plus two BMFL FollowSpots on a RoboSpot remote follow spotting system.

Chris and Clay have both worked with the rising star artist since early days trawling cozy 300 capacity clubs with a passion, and have seen him fast-forward in presence, popularity, and credibility to now regularly play amphitheaters and arenas. The two also have a natural creative synergy and have been production collaborators for some time.



The design process for *Clouds (The Mixtape)* started with the idea of a bold definitive look, architectural in form but functional as well to assist in the dramatic delivery of a hyperactive set.

The 'big box' geometry featured a large upstage screen, and the lighting both maximized the space and enabled it to be broken down into tightly concentrated areas.

With storytelling at the heart of the show, when drummer Rico Nichols – Kendrick Lamar associate and other major artists – was added to the touring line-up, the dynamic shifted slightly, so Chris and Clay introduced a modular riser system with the drum kit in the middle. A small thrust at the front enabled IIF to get out into the fans, and a toaster lift at upstage center added some cool entrances and exit magic!

IIF had multiple paths and runways to traverse the space and a clean, uncluttered symmetrical environment that could be big, small or whatever was needed.

With a heavy emphasis on upstage and back lighting, two pods of 4x4 Tarrantulas were positioned upstage left and right – four in total, flanking the screen.

The 128 x Spikies were deployed in eight raked Svoboda-style pods – again in the 4x4 format – above the stage. With this concentration of Spikies, Clay could program lots of beautiful fluid kinetic effects to match the rhythm and beat of the music.

The beams looked fantastic, but they additionally looked equally eye-catching as a ‘pixel-art’ canvas, a handy visual treatment for those outdoor shows where haze was always an issue!

Fourteen BMFL WashBeams were equally spaced out along the lowest section of the upstage truss, with the two BMFL FollowSpots in the center for backlighting IF.

Clay has worked with Robe products for many years, and they are a ‘go-to’ moving light brand for the “versatility, speed, output and clarity and the excellent range of fixtures that Robe keeps developing,” he enthuses.

Both he and Chris love Spikes for their speed, great colors and as a “highly distinctive light source. The single beam is great and so are Spikies working together in batches,” stated Chris.

The Tarrantulas were picked for their sheer output!



“That extra ring of color and LEDs (one more than Robe’s standard Spider wash beam) is fantastic,” commented Chris, adding that it was the first time he’d used them

at the suggestion of lighting rental vendor, Solotech.

“It’s a great fixture to program and the flower effect is also excellent,” reckons Clay. Combined with the Spikes to produce over 200 flower effects onstage gave them latitude to create some fabulously rich multi-dimensional looks!

The BMFL WashBeams are another favorite of Clay’s. They wanted something powerful with a discharge lamp at the back to bring some contrast to the aesthetic.

“As a flagship moving light, this is THE one,” he stated. “I do love BMFLs, they are simply a wonderful, intense, no-nonsense fixture.”

The two upstage center BMFL FollowSpots were chosen for backlighting MF for practicality and ease of use. “The overall RoboSpot control footprint is really small, so the BaseStation sat at dimmer beach and was run by one of our techs,” explained Chris.

As the console programmer / operator, Clay had control of all RoboSpot parameters via his grandMA2 apart from iris and zoom which were tweaked by the operator as needed, and having these two spots follow him everywhere was essential for the show.

Also on the rig were LED pixel strips, blinders, and strobes.

The performance is BIG, unrelenting and full-on, demanding a high level of concentration and participation from fans in the audience, and it’s all completely visually integrated, with Chris and Clay as creative directors commissioning all the video content that ran throughout the complete set.

Visuals and lighting for each song was crafted to reinforce the lyrics and semantics, the richness added by the drums and some of the quirks of the backing tracks.

MF (Nathan Feuerstein) knows what he does and doesn’t want onstage, but he also trusts his core production team with the stage presentation.

Everything starts with the music and the audio files. The other production elements – staging,

video, and lighting, etc. follow this narrative, and from there Chris, himself a musician, organizes the audio crew to adjust all the musical arrangements, adding to the fluidity and energy of the show.

Clay pre-vizzed the lighting for 10 days in Solotech's Nashville office using Vectorworks and imported the show into Depence2 via MVR, a process he relished, and one that enabled him to arrive at the 8-days of full production rehearsals in Nashville with a lot of content and ideas in hand.

Photos: Eddie Diaz