

# Robe Shines for Opera Hedeland

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Robe moving lights – ESPRITES, Spiders, iSpiders and iFORTE LTXs used as follow spots – all had great impact on the lighting and set designed by Simon Corder for Opera Hedeland’s *La fanciulla del West* (Girl of the Golden West) by Puccini, which is set in a ‘Gold Rush’ prospecting town in 19<sup>th</sup> century western USA.

Opera Hedeland offers Denmark’s largest permanent outdoor stage, and an elegant 3000-capacity amphitheatre sculpted into the landscape, a haven for opera lovers with open minds where they can imbibe an extraordinary site-specific experience each year with a series of special performances. The beauty of the former gravel quarrying area – now returned to natural heathland and forests – permeates the venue which nestles amidst a 15-square-kilometre recreational area, approximately 20km out of the central Copenhagen hustle.

This is the third time Simon has designed shows at the location following the 2018 and 2022 seasons. As a designer who engages in a lot of site-specific work, he was delighted to be asked to light the 2024 production and to work again - after 2022 - with Copenhagen-based lighting rental company ETP who supplied all the lights.

ETP has a large Robe inventory and has invested steadily in the brand in recent years, and enjoys a great relationship with Robe's Danish distributor, Light Partner.

In fact, he always used Robes on these three Opera Hedeland performances, but the big new Robe element this year was the iFORTE LTX. These super-bright, high CRI luminaires replaced the four classic 4K FOH follow spots of previous years, stationed equidistantly around the top of the amphitheatre seating terraces.

Simon is based in the UK and admits that when he first found out that ETP was proposing the switch to the iFORTE LTXs as follow spots in these positions with a 75-metre throw, he was a little unsure!

He admits that he could "hardly believe" that a compact, convenient, multi-purpose LED moving light would work these distances, and he was also a little sceptical about how they might mix and morph with the natural light as the show started in daylight and transitioned to full darkness.

He then reached out to Will Blackie at Robe UK to arrange a demo at their Northampton HQ which soon reassured him that the fixtures would be a great solution.

Having now seen them in action for real on the show where they were critical to the whole performance, the luminaires have even exceeded his expectations!

"The flat field is excellent as is the CRI, and the zoom is also impressive and there's plenty of punch," he stated.

As the Opera Hedeland summer shows are staged over a span of a couple of weeks, it's also super convenient to leave the IP 65 rated iFORTE LTXs on their vertical truss towers and out for the duration of the event, rather than having to de-rig and pack them away after each show.

This aspect was appreciated by the crew! Not only was the installation less physically taxing, but it was also simpler - in terms of the power needing to be run out to those positions.

“I love it – it’s a fantastic fixture and an ingenious system,” Simon enthused.

The four RoboSpot base stations were located in a backstage portacabin and were operated by local crew who learned the process quickly – of the several remote follow spot systems currently on the market, RoboSpot is renowned for its ease of use. This set up means that if it rained during the show – a frequent meteorological event in Denmark – they were also protected.

Most of the iFORTE LTX FS parameters were controlled via the lighting console, so the operators could concentrate fully on the following.



Simon enjoys designing both lighting and set together, when possible, for all the obvious reasons, and when possible, it is his preferred MO, and a perfect scenario for creating harmonious visuals, not to mention imagining a set that can be nicely lit!

The 12 x ESPRITES were rigged 6-a-side on two elegant 10-metre-high industrial style steel towers that are part of the site’s permanent technical facilities, left and right of the stage, and these were the only elevated lighting positions near the stage. They were joined by 6 x iSpiider

wash beam fixtures a side on the same towers that this year replaced a cluster of PARs in the past.

These luminaires plus another set of 3 iSpiiders on a tower stage right all worked hard lighting all the action, specials, set washing and scenic lighting.

Around the arena 12 standard Robe Spiiders were positioned, housed in special boxes for weather protection and aesthetics.



Simon finds Spiiders an ultimately useful fixture. Referencing their positioning in this show, he commented, “They offer the brightness and clarity of PARs plus all the additional features of an LED moving head fixture”. He thinks they are “extremely versatile and useful” and noted that they worked seamlessly in conjunction with the ESPRITES.

His approach to lighting *La fanciulla del West* was “almost architectural” in that the shape and space of the environment heavily influenced the show aesthetics and where devices could physically be rigged, while still maintaining the integrity and drama of this breathtaking setting.

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Simon loves site-specific projects for their uniqueness and atmospheric nature and is fully into “embracing the quality of the environment” in every way possible, while simultaneously taking the audience back to the crazy days of goldrush madness!

The main challenge with this production was time - which was short to produce a world class show - coupled with the intricacies required in morphing from day to dusk to dark to full artificial lighting, an achievement that is something of a black art!



In the six years since his first *Lucia de Lammermoor* production at Hedeland in 2018, the largely conventional PAR can lighting rig has shifted to primarily moving lights and LEDs at great speed. “You can do so much more with the same hanging space, less lighting fixtures and electricity!” Simon quips, adding that - naturally - the lights have been an important facilitator to enable ideas and imagination to flow.

Simon worked closely with his programmer Henrik Christensen and chief LX Jens Damsager Hansen, both of whom he describes as “brilliant and excellent team players”.



*La fanciulla del West* was directed by Rodula Gaitanou, costumes were by Gøje Rostrop, with music by the Opera Hedelands Festivalorkester conducted by Carlo Goldstein. The short 2024 summer season was a huge success for this rarer performed Puccini masterpiece, renowned for its complex musicality, which is every bit as entertaining as his 'blockbusters' like *Tosca* and *La bohème*.

**Show photos: By Mikal Schlosser**