

Robe Shines with the Stars for Toby Keith American Icon



The stars gathered onstage, backstage and at the stage right artists bar in Nashville's Bridgestone Arena packed with music fans and anticipation for a special concert – "Toby Keith: American Icon", a heartfelt tribute to late singer-songwriter Toby Keith, who in addition to being an outstanding musician and performer, was a dedicated philanthropist and supporter of those who served their countries in the military.

Tom Kenny was asked by producers Adam Freed and Alex Colletti to light this show which was filmed for broadcast on the NBC network, and Tom's lighting rig included three different types of Robe moving lights – " 8 x BMFL Follow Spots on RoboSpot systems, 12 x iFORTE LTX WashBeams and 61 x MegaPointes. The lighting vendor was 4Wall, who supplied from their Nashville shop.

Tom's task was to ensure the broadcast had a sumptuous "big rock show" aesthetic that looked great on camera as well as live for the 20,000 Toby Keith fans packing into the venue to enjoy a unique set performed by his studio band and a glittering lineup of special guests including Carrie Underwood, Jelly Roll, Luke Bryan, Eric Church, and many more.

"It was an evening of many very special moments," recalled Tom, with his characteristic enthusiasm. He has worked with Toby Keith a few times over the years but highlights the synergy and teamwork that united everyone on the production side to bring all the elements together and deliver a magical show in a short timeframe.

Tom worked closely with scenic designers Bruce Rodgers and Marcia Garcia in developing the style and look. He needed lots of dynamics and scope in the rig.

"We had absolutely the best crew," he stated, "a massive amount of talent, and everyone was committed to giving their all and producing an outstanding event" to honour a popular, much loved and sadly missed artist. Keith passed in February this year after a battle with stomach cancer.

Tom used the iFORTE LTXs as high-impact beam and accenting lights to punch in from the side and up from the floor.

The LTX output was so strong that Tom reckons they mostly ran them at around 10 percent! He describes the fixtures as “beautiful” and in these positions they provided some amazing cross stage and back-fill shots for multiple camera angles, all directed by camera director Alex Coletti.



The 8 x BMFL Follow Spot fixtures on the RoboSpot system were positioned four at FOH, two on the side trusses and two at the back; used extensively for following and key lighting. BMFL FSs have been a go-to for Tom for a while, and he was one of the first people in the US to use the BMFL series of lights after their launch in 2014.

“They have stood the test of time, and are still an awesome light, especially for arena follow spotting,” he noted, adding that he loves the colours including the whites. Having used all the various remote spotting systems on the market, from this experience he thinks RoboSpot is the best, plus the most straightforward and intuitive to operate.

Robe’s legendary MegaPointe is another favourite “as with many designers! Despite using MegaPointes innumerable times for various projects, Tom is still finding new effects to create with them, and rates them as “still the best, strongest and most versatile” effects fixtures available.

MegaPointes were dotted around the overhead trusses and used extensively to light around some scenic trusses that Bruce had introduced resembling RSJs and industrial oil extraction and pumping equipment “inspired by the Oklahoma landscape where Toby grew up.

As always, once programming started, Fuji and Scott found a multiplicity of tasks for the MegaPointes, and they were the workhorse effects light of the show.

With time seriously tight between the get-in, rehearsals and going live to record, Tom and his FOH team “

programmers / operators David “Fuji” Convertino and Scott Cunningham plus lighting director Han Henze “programmed furiously as the stars lined up for sound checks in the afternoon. This was the only time they feasibly had to do it!

“It’s a great way to work,” commented Tom, who enjoys thinking fast, laterally and on his feet and being aware of multiple parameters all the time.

“It’s the biggest challenge, you have to have a real harmony with what’s happening onstage and good communication skills” but that is also the fun of this type of scenario,” he explained, adding that a rock-solid rapport with all the crew and creatives involved was the key to making it rock.

Apart from the inherent problem solving, it really gets the spirits and camaraderie going! “We so enjoyed ourselves, worked right up until doors,” he recalls with a large smile, “and this was a big part of the vibe of this show” Toby’s outlook on and attitude to life inspired all of us to work hard and create an exceptional event he would have been proud of.”



A vital part of the lighting crew were gaffers Michelle “Pickles” Griesmer and Candida Boggs (overnight gaffer) with Daniel Fly as Best Boy. Matt Weede was 4Wall’s crew chief and the lighting techs were Benoit St-Aubin, Justin Grotteland, Joey Brewer, and Taylor Sherman.

4Wall also supplied video, with the department project managed by Robert Thomas and Connor Adams as the video crew chief, joined by LED techs Alli Murphey and Dawn Rueda. The media server operator was Nicholas Cumming, and all the content was created by Alex Coletti and Toby’s manager TK.

Tom quickly also shouts out rigger Justin Campbell and FOH audio engineer Dave Natale as “completely instrumental” to the staging and technical process being so smooth and calm given the ambitious nature of the show.



Many Nashville-based industry friends and colleagues rocked up to catch the mood and the moment, including LD Sooner Routhier who is based in the city and Robe North America's own Tommy Hall, who was there supporting Tom and soaking up the great atmos. "It was excellent to see Tommy, Sooner and so many other people there," concluded Tom.

The broadcast was aired on NBC on 28th August 2024.