

Soweto Theatre invest in programmable ASM hoist system

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The young and vibrant Soweto Theatre, which opened its doors in 2012, has invested in a fully programmable ASM Steuerungstechnik scenery hoist system, supplied and installed by DWR Distribution, to control five of the existing bars in the main theatre.

Built-in a former township of Johannesburg, the busy theatre has become the home to the local community. Throughout the restricting lockdown period, wonderful productions have been staged there, many of them live-streamed, such as the Soweto Comedy Festival, The Schools Setwork Festival (an exciting youth development programme), Poetic Thursdays and the Lutavula Cultural Fiesta, a celebration showcasing various transitional dance forms and dance choreographers from Soweto.

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The Soweto Theatre

The Soweto Theatre was initially equipped with 43 counter-weight fly bars and 2 FOH bars on worm-gear winches before becoming the second theatre in South Africa to own an ASM hoisting system. DWR's Keith Pugin, who headed the installation was able to automate five existing bars - to be used for scenery, drapes, sets, audio and lighting - in the main 436-seater theatre, which boasts a beautifully designed proscenium-arched stage and an orchestra pit.

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Soweto Theatre General Manager, Nomsa Mazwai, shared that she is thrilled with the upgrade as 'it improves our technical offering for local and international clients. Soweto Theatre has a growing interest from international producers, and such upgrades only make us more attractive to the international performance community.'

For Technical Manager Lebugang Mnisi and his team, the upgrade is a step in the right direction. The system is computerized and enables one person to operate many bars. The electronic user-friendly system, which ultimately saves time and manpower, allows variable speed, repeatability and high precision positioning of the load and allows the user to add these positions to a cue list. The system is more accurate than operating a manual fly bar.

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“We had to align the venue to twentieth-century technology,” said Lebugang Mnisi. “The old system was good for a period, but it took time to load and balance the accurate weight and made operations a nightmare. The new system allows you to pre-programme the fly cues and minimizes hard labour and injuries, enabling the stage crew more time to focus on other stage requirements.”

The new system runs off three HCWA Junior 400 Eco hoists on stage and two HCWA Junior 600 Eco hoists at FOH positions, with power packs. These are economical entry models by ASM,

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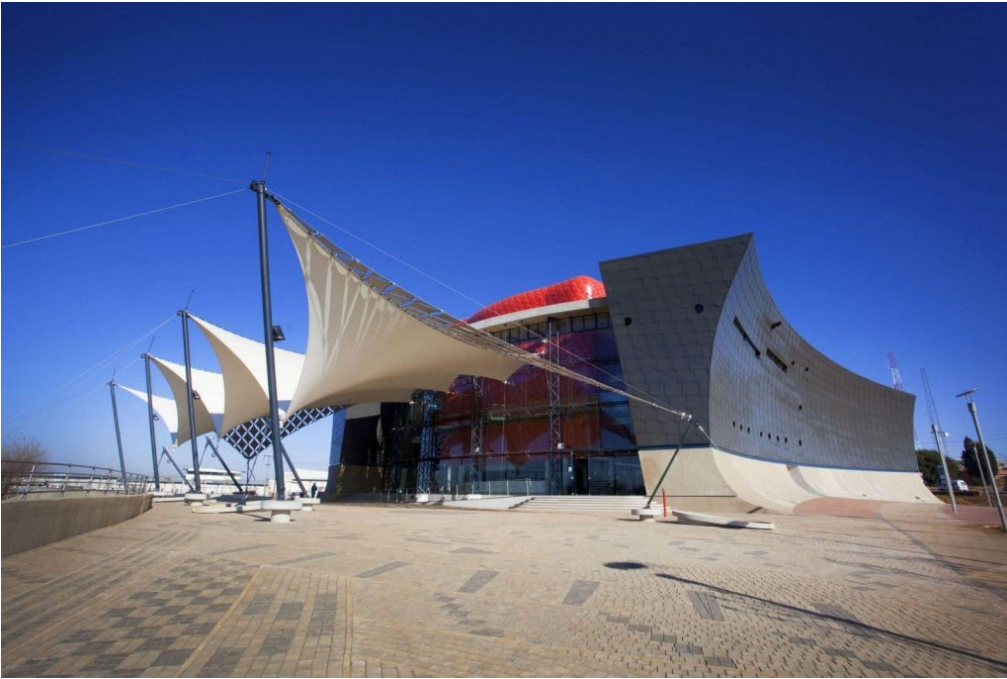
known for smooth and silent operation, reliability with an emphasis on safety. DWR also supplied and installed the necessary galvanized steel wire rope (5mm on Junior 400 & 6mm on Junior 600) and additional sundry items to make the conversion possible.



Lebugang Mnisi

The system can either be controlled at the stage manager's desk or upstage prompt side using a Genesis RC128 handheld touch-screen controller. The Genesis LC8 controller is a highly developed point hoist control based on Can-Bus. Housed in a 19" chassis, the LC8 takes over the control of up to 8 individual hoists. The ASM Genesis Handheld Control RC128 is a useful tool, enabling control anywhere within the theatre, and is as comfortable to operate as the LC 8 while including all the functions. Additionally, critical information displayed on the controller screen includes current load applied to all connected hoists, current fly bar position, as well as slackline/overload conditions.

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While the theatre crew are still learning and have not put the system through its paces, mostly due to the quieter lockdown period and no large productions being performed as yet, they have found the new upgrade smart, easy and user-friendly to operate. "It's a dream come true and an evolution to theatre operations," said Lebugang. "It's faster, accurate, silent and smooth."

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