

## The jury has decided: grandMA3 for Idols SA 2021



Photos: © Duncan Riley

Idols SA 2021 became the first television show in South Africa to use a fully grandMA3 – software and hardware – lighting control platform, chosen by Joshua Cutts and Andre Siebrits from Visual Frontier to run their spectacular lighting design for the final televised segments of the popular and high-profile singing competition.

Other ground-breaking aspects for this year's broadcast shows included a move away from the State Theatre venue in Pretoria after several years decamping to Studio 10 at the Urban Brew Studios in Johannesburg. With that came the need for a completely different aesthetic approach and treatment.

"The objective was to ensure it looked amazing from all camera angles," explained Josh, adding that his own Idols expertise – this is his 17th series – plus Andre's fresh eyes as an LD has been a great combination.

Knowing the show and its demands and challenges very well, and being experienced grandMA users, the two felt it was the right time to deep dive into the power of grandMA3. Over 200 moving lights plus other LED fixtures and some conventionals, all adding up to 17,000 parameters and 34 universes of lighting control, were run using one grandMA3 light console with a grandMA3 XT as tracking backup. These were running over a fiber network comprising one grandMA3 processing unit L, three grandMA3 4Port Nodes, one grandMA3 8Port Node and two MA Network Switches.

Joshua and Andre have worked together before on the show, but it was the first year that the lighting is a co-design, which has brought new dynamics to the mix. Effectively a 'bare stage' production with black gloss floor and upstage LED screens, this starker look meant that while lighting had to work harder, it could energize all those negative spaces to create true depth and properly multi-dimensional environments in which to present the different artists. Andre is engaged in most of the programming. Creating a polished and unique show for each artist after having minimal onstage or rehearsal time with them and their songs means speed is of the essence, and some weeks there are up to 14 songs of lighting to program!

Andre likes the fact that the grandMA3 system needs considerably less physical hardware to control larger numbers of parameters, and they only need one grandMA3 processing unit L on this show. In terms of grandMA3 features that he could immediately appreciate after using the system for only a short time, he enjoyed the flexible playback options – being able to have four different playbacks on one fader. “This makes a huge difference, and everything becomes much more accessible,” he commented, adding that “it’s an ongoing learning process of course!”

Josh and Andre both definitely see grandMA3 as the way forward for future lighting control, as well as that of potentially many other visual elements connected via the same network. They were both “hugely impressed” by the “outstanding” tech support they have received from MA whilst working on this project, especially from Luke Chikkala and brand manager Daniel Kannenberg who have been “amazing”, all helping to smooth the transition from grandMA2 to grandMA3.

Andre points out that most of their MA ‘training’ for this was watching Daniel’s YouTube videos, illustrating that the transition can actually be achieved very flexibly and practically to your own prep schedule.

Luke commented on how quickly Andre and Josh grasped the grandMA3 thought process and methodology, while Josh also admitted that the change was “a lot easier” than he was initially anticipating! “I’m pleased we chose this time to do it as well, to coincide with all the other Idols related shifts happening for this series,” says Josh.

Andre has been “very excited” to use the new platform and is delighted to now be in a position to give feedback on his experiences to MA’s highly proactive development team that will be assisting their whole community going forward.

Duncan Riley from MA’s southern Africa distributor DWR stated: “It has been a great learning process for all of us, and Josh and Andre’s enthusiasm and commitment to making it happen and their willingness to make the switch on such a major show has been fantastic! Hats off to them!”

Idols SA 2021’s director is Gavin Wratten. The producer is Anneke de Ridder and technical AV production is being delivered by Dream Sets, co-ordinated for them by Eben Peltz for series production company, SIC Entertainment.