

The show goes on with Urban Sessions 2020

The show goes on with Urban Sessions 2020

Posted on September 15, 2020



Singer Jacques Moolman at Urban Sessions 2020.

The show goes on with Urban Sessions 2020

As the city slept during the Covid-19 lockdown, a deserted building in downtown Johannesburg became a beacon of hope for musicians. Urban Sessions 2020, an amalgamated project by Militia Broadcast, technical supplier Stage Effects and Smack Entertainment for audio, created a studio for musicians to live-stream concerts to their fans. To date, over 150 performances have been hosted in this unique space.

Erik de Bruin of Stage Effects explains that as early as May 2020, Militia Broadcast, Stage Effects, and Smack Ent knew they had to do something to survive the strict lockdown in South Africa as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. They managed to secure an empty warehouse at Thabo Mpelo Studios in Johannesburg and converted it into an intimate and beautiful looking environment with a bit of a nostalgic feel, giving viewers at home the impression that they were part of a rehearsal or jamming session, with rugs, ambient lighting and five cameras set up in a 180-degree angle to capture close-ups of the musicians. Choosing lighting that would need the least amount of maintenance, Erik opted for LED-based fixtures, including 15 Robe Robin 600+, 5 Robe Pointes, 15 Mac Quantum Profiles, 12 x Portman P1 retro lamps, and Elation DTW 1000s bars with control on a grandMA2 light.



Under normal circumstances, lighting designer Erik would be on the road with festivals and music concerts. Now based in the same location, week in and week out, from Wednesdays to Sundays, he and the team have changed the set several times to keep it looking fresh and new. He has also invited some of his lighting operator friends like Marius Coetzee and Ethan Benjamin to come over, play on the control desk and light some of the performances.

Urban Sessions 2020 works as a revenue swap. Artists are invited to perform in the professional space at Thabo Mpelo Studios. Ticket prices to watch the live stream start at R80 per live show, while there is an option to purchase a View on Demand (VoD) for those who missed the live

The show goes on with Urban Sessions 2020

stream for R40 to watch anytime. Ticket sales are split, with 50% going to the artist and the remaining 50% divided amongst the Urban Sessions team from camera operators to tech suppliers.

“It has given us a lot of encouragement, and hearing the positive comments and creating an archive of stunning video productions, has made it worthwhile,” said Erik. “From rock and roll to jazz, any band is welcome to join us. It’s great to see that South Africa has die-hard followers who want to see the show and support the artist... really cool from their side.”



Marius Coetzee and Erik de Bruin
behind the grandMA2 light.

For the artist, it has been great to leave their home and finally perform on a fully kitted out platform again! What makes it special for them is not only performing for their audience, but talking to them, sharing a few stories, and making the live-stream experience personal. “Besides promoting the various shows on our social media pages, we leave the marketing up to each artist, and it gives them the opportunity to realize who their fan base is and to communicate directly with them,” Erik adds. “Because it’s not just a paying gig, they also make an effort and push really hard to earn some bread and promote their on-line event.

“We have tried to create as much content as possible, to show people that something is happening, even during these Covid-19 times, and to try to give hope. We want people to know that there is still a music industry out there and because Stage Effects comes from a music and

The show goes on with Urban Sessions 2020

festival background, we need and rely on the artists.”



Jacques Moolman

The part everyone misses the most is not performing in front of a live audience. That said, as the show is live and not pre-recorded. The phenomenal camera team has been able to capture the cool moments, like a drumstick falling, things you wouldn't normally see, which all add to the rehearsal type vibe. The show must go on, and until it does, kudos to Urban Sessions 2020, who have been a light in the darkness.

A great shout out to the brilliant crew members who work in the shadows including:

Eban Olivier – Militia

Theo Papenfus – Stage Effects

Chad Summers – Camera Opp

Sammy Aphane – Camera Opp

Refiloe Mojapelo – Camera Opp

Mpho Tekane – Camera Opp

Bradley Davis – Vision Mixer

The show goes on with Urban Sessions 2020

Fourie Smit – Smack Ent

“The names mentioned above form part of our core team, but I’d also like to thank the external artist bookers and the viewers at home,” Erick concluded. “Thank you very much to everyone!”

Photos courtesy Duncan Riley



Marius Coetzee, Erik de Bruin and Duncan Riley at the studios.

Marius Coetze