University of JHB invests in grandMA

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(Back): JC, Sizwe Muloko, Thabams Thebe (Front): Kenny Longwe, Nic Britz (DWR), Gif Mabaso

Story & pics courtesy Louise Stickland The prestigious University of Johannesburg Theatre has invested in a new grandMA ultra light console as part of a major lighting upgrade.

The 436 seater theatre at Kingsway Campus, Auckland Park (one of 4) is part of the UJ Arts Centre, and hosts a busy and varied production schedule featuring contemporary dance, drama, live music and musical theatre performances. The University's own productions keep the stage fully occupied for 5 months of the year, and it is also hired out for a variety of other uses, including film shoots, conferences, lectures and presentations.

The console was specified by the Theatre's Technical manager Jean-Claude Laurent (JC) to replace the original lighting desk that was installed when the theatre was first opened 4 years ago.

The ultra light was delivered to the theatre by MA Lighting's South African distributor DWR, who also arranged on site training for JC and his 3 full time technical crew.

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JC spec’d the ultra light for a number of different reasons.

First was the reliability factor and MA’s excellent track record for being a stable system with all the power and flexibility they needed. Another reason was because they are a receiving as well as a producing house, and with MA consoles appearing more and more frequently on theatre specs throughout South Africa, visiting LD’s will often have show files that can easily be transferred into the console. Another reason still was the amount of competent MA programmers available.

The “amazing” service, support and backup from DWR was another vital element in the choice of brand, states JC with enthusiasm, “I know I will have backup not just for now, but for many years to come, nothing is ever too much for DWR and their knowledge and efficiency is indispensible”.

JC likes many things about the console, “The touch screens are excellent, and the ease of operating and plotting with functions like copying reduces my time by 59% in setting up a show compared to the system we had before. That’s a huge asset as we’re always squeezed for time”.

Yet another contributing factor was the very competitive price that DWR was able to offer in a deal negotiated by their theatre specialist, Dan Riley.

The new grandMA ultra light is controlling approximately 180 dimmer channels and up to 250 generic

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lights – a mix of profiles, fresnels and PARs – plus 12 Martin Professional MAC 250 Krypton moving lights.

JC has worked at the UJ Theatre since it opened in 2005. He describes his 3 key technical staff as “very hot” and “streets ahead” of some he knows who have been in the industry for 20 years or more. The theatre has also implemented a new technical training community outreach programme that takes in individuals from townships who are passionate about learning the skills to work professionally in theatre.

He reckons that the next time the console is upgraded, he’ll be looking at MA2.

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