

zactrack Builds Bridges in Spain

Posted on September 12, 2023



Madrid, Spain based lighting designer Felipe Ramos specified a zactrack SMART system for tracking several key lighting fixtures for a production of *The Bridges of Madison County*, directed by Alberto Negrín (also the set designer), produced by Mad Bridge and Grupo Smedia and staged at the Gran Vía Theatre, Madrid.

As director as well as scenic designer, Alberto already had some very clear ideas about how the show should look. He and Felipe had not worked together before but were aware of each other's work. Alberto shared all the necessary technical information with Felipe from the start, including sketches and 3D models of the scenery and was impressed with Felipe's first visions for the lighting, so asked him to join the creative team.

They collaborated closely on crafting a very distinctive aesthetic for the production.

A starting point for visuals was focusing on two main narrative locations - main character Francesca's house and the bridge - which were also the most impressive elements of the scenery.

"The idea was to generate postcard-style images illuminated with the beautiful skies of Iowa which were partly inspired by Clint Eastwood's 1995 movie version of the story. Terrence Malick's acclaimed 1978 movie Days of Heaven was another reference for Felipe. "All those incredible sunsets over the fields of central USA that photograph so beautifully," he explained, "I wanted to recreate that in the theatre and in everyone's imaginations!"

To achieve these impressive landscapes, video was created by Alvaro Luna and projected onto the scenery, so this required lighting to be very precise and avoid encroaching onto the projection areas, as well as consistent with the projected skies in terms of angles of incidence, colour, and intensity.

Felipe knew he would need some sort of intelligent tracking for the actors as he didn't want to flood the stage with general washes and knew that 'traditional' follow spots angles would not work adequately.

Although he had not utilised zactrack before, he believed it was an excellent solution for all these requirements.

Twenty lighting fixtures were integrated into the zactrack system - a mix of LED profile, spot and wash moving lights - and these were working with 10 zactrack Trackers and 8 Anchors (Antenna) related to five actors.

The Trackers were mainly concealed in the costumes. Main actress Nina had a single tag on the top of her head under her wig, deemed the safest and most practical position as she had many elaborate costume changes, and this plan worked very well.

'zactrack wrangler' Himar Santana, who is an expert on the system and recently used it on Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, came onboard to assist with the initial setup.

He also taught Felipe and the production lighting team, led by Pato Bessia, how it works so they could maintain it during the run. Having now used it and seen the results, Felipe thinks it is a

“great solution” that in this case “provided multiple options that helped the lighting design.”

He added that, in turn, the system benefits from having good operators.



Configuration and programming are critical for an intricate production like this where the musical is complex and the whole system must be finely tuned, from the positioning of the Trackers and Antenna to the programming of the lighting console, which takes in positional information from the Trackers along with all the other fixture parameter information which are executed as an integral part of the lighting cues.

During the performance run, company lighting technicians David de Diego and Marcos G. Nuñez tech'd the zactrack, and are now themselves experts and great advocates!

“As a brand, I think zactrack is doing a good job,” noted Felipe, “There’s a lot of good information on the website and we’ve enjoyed great support from both Fluge – the rental company for this production – and Spanish distributor, EARPRO&EES.”



Challenges for The Bridges of Madison County included blending and balancing a delicate combination of realistic scenery, textured materials, and projections to achieve an intimate, theatrical style of lighting, whilst also creating more colourful and spectacular musical show lighting for the popular production numbers.

It was obviously a huge success, as Felipe has specified another zacktrack SMART for Forever Van Gogh that premieres in September at the Marquina Theatre in Madrid.

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