

zactrack gets into the Starlight Zone

Posted on August 4, 2023



The Guinness World Record breaking German version of long-running musical phenomenon Starlight Express celebrated 35 years of performance in June 2023 ... and zactrack celebrated its own slightly shorter 'milestone' all the same ... in November 2022 with a Starlight Express 5 year 'show anniversary' dating back to 2017 when a zactrack PRO system was first specified by the show's technical director, Peter Lucassen.

In that time, he reports, "it's been fantastic – completely stable and reliable!" and has revolutionised the way the fast-paced roller spectacular has been lit.

Peter has been working on the show's production since 1990, two years after it was first installed into the purpose built 1651- capacity Starlight Express Theatre in Bochum. It is a 360-degree

zactrack gets into the Starlight Zone

show, and the venue features U-shaped tracks or skateways for the roller-skating action on three levels. The show plays with audience in the middle and surrounding these.

At the end of 2017 and start of 2018, the show received a complete revamp and technical refresh making it more appropriate and contemporary for today's audiences.

The original production had been lit by legendary UK theatre lighting designer David Hersey, followed up with a few re-lights over the years. Five years ago, Rob Sinclair was brought in to light the new version. Rob is well known for his innovative approach to lighting and his ground-breaking work with music artists like Queen & Adam Lambert, Lil Nas X, Kygo, Tame Impala and many more.

This also seemed a great time to replace the show's traditional follow spot system and introduce zactrack.



Before, six follow spots were used around the venue to follow the lighting quick skaters which were great in the day, but fast-forward 30 years and somewhat cumbersome, space-hungry and

less efficient at lighting the subjects!

These have been replaced with 30 moving lights in the rig linked to and controlled via the zactrack real-time tracking system.

This gives the production a massive amount more flexibility and control over the movement of the lights plus the modern style of follow spotting that was desired for the show, together with seriously more precision to follow cast members whizzing around the arena unfolding all the drama and excitement.

The lights are High End SolaSpot 1000 and SolaWash 2000s. Forty-two zactrack Trackers are used in total, carefully concealed in the costumes of 26 artists, mostly principals, with 16 zactrack Anchors marking out the system's active zones. The zactrack server feeds positional data into the grandMA2 lighting console.

The production features a large looping track measuring 40 metres by 42 metres with 12 metres of headroom, so the strategic placement of those 16 Anchors is crucial in order to cover the tunnels and every curve and corner of the stage design. This is easy work for the scalable zactrack PRO, which handles arena and stadium sized tracking areas with aplomb.



The 2018 technical upgrade included inbuilt video projection, some new lights and sound equipment as well as fresh actors and even some new songs to celebrate a remarkable 30 years of the German production's success which has been enjoyed by over 18 million spectators.

Peter reckons that deploying zactrack has been the biggest visual and production game changer for the production. It was seen as THE way forward for this style of show by himself and theatre director Meinolf Muller, with both delighted by the results.

"It changed everything related to how we can stage the show for the better," he notes. They are enjoying all the various options that zactrack has opened up and are "extremely happy" that they made this investment decision. "I would use and recommend zactrack any time," he concluded.



Starlight Express Germany performs around 420 shows a year with 7 or 8 a week, well on the way to clocking up 12,900 shows! A cast change every 12 months or so has seen the involvement of more than 850 actors from 27 nations. It's also the longest-running show worldwide playing in a purpose-built venue.

Over the years, the smooth and streamlined backstage and production operation has become very much a family scenario, with many long-term employees on the crew and in the departmental teams who all collaborate closely to ensure this spectacular theatrical show continues to thrill audiences.

Photos: © Mehr-BB Entertainment