Zactrack performs at Idols South Africa’s grand finale

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The nineteenth and final season of Idols SA was held at the start of November 2023 at the Mosaïek Teatro in Fairland, Johannesburg. Visual Frontier lighting designer, Joshua Cutts, and his

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right-hand man and operator Andre Siebrits, integrated zactrack SMART, the world’s first plug-and-play automated follow system, into the show for testing and evaluation.

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Idols has come a long way in South Africa, captivating the audience since 2002. Based on the popular British show Pop Idols, the contest was initially broadcast on M-Net before moving to Mzansi Magic. The technical production is supplied by Dream Sets for [sic] entertainment and the tightly-knit technical team has evolved into a close-knit family.

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“We honestly have so much gratitude for everyone who worked with us on SA Idols over the years,” agree Sean Hoey, Eben Peltz and Leanne Bancroft from Dream Sets. “We first worked on Idols in 2010 and what followed was a 14-year relationship with [sic] entertainment, Director Gavin Wratten, and a very skilled and professional production team. Everyone would look forward to each new season, and meeting up with the team at the start of the year felt like a family reunion. We are very proud to have been a part of what is undoubtedly SA Reality TV History. We are sad to bid farewell to this amazing show, which has helped shape our company and connected us to so many great people over the years. May the entire team continue to create magic in all they do, we look forward to what comes next!”

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Idols South Africa 2023 featured two DiGiCo SD5 consoles (Mosaïek’s in-house consoles), a grandMA3 light controlling a predominantly Robe lighting rig and new to the mix, the revolutionary and user-friendly zactrack SMART system. “Jaques Pretorius from DWR Distribution was friendly and came in to help set up the zacktrack system, and it integrated into our network perfectly,” Andre Siebrits explains. “There were no complicated drawings or anything that you had to implement. Once the anchors were placed, the pucks were added to the stage to align the lighting fixtures that we wanted to use. There were no challenging imports of a 3D drawing or placing the lights in the 3D world versus the real world. It was the simplest tracking system I’ve seen in a long time.”

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The use of the actual trackers placed on the performers was a fascinating aspect. Depending on the attire worn by the performers, the trackers would end up in various positions. From behind the grandMA3 console, Joshua and Andre could determine its height and adjust the lighting accordingly. If the tracker was positioned on the artist’s head, they would align the light lower, or if in the pocket, adjust the light higher. “We used the system for cool effects like a presenter link. Here the presenter did a full walk and talk from the audience all the way to the judges’ desk which our conventional followspots couldn’t do because of the obscure angles we needed to light,” Andre adds. A noteworthy effect involved placing a tracker on a performer and programming all the back lights to follow him throughout the entire song. The lights were programmed to change colours and effects, keeping the visuals engaging.

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Joshua and Andre were pleased to be able to implement, test, and fine-tune the zackack SMART system, understand its capabilities and limitations and have the basics to prepare future shows with zactrack in mind. “Users will have to have basic skill training and a solid grasp of DMX, Art-Net, and sACN, but ultimately using zacktrack on Idols SA paid off,” ends Andre.

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