



WE WILL ROCK YOU ON TOUR

RACHEL ESSON REPORTS ON QUEEN'S RECORD-BREAKING MUSICAL AS IT GATHERS PACE AWAY FROM THE BRIGHT LIGHTS OF THE WEST END...



L-R: Britney (Leon Lopez) & Meat (Jenny Douglas); Scaramouche (Amanda Coutts); Pop (Ian Reddington); Killer Queen (Tiffany Graves). Below & opposite: Galileo (Noel Sullivan).

“On all the shows I have worked closely with Ben Elton, with Brian May and Roger Taylor in the background. We discuss everything down to the last detail...” Mark Fisher

It's in its ninth year of residency at London's 2,000-seater Dominion Theatre, where it's become the venue's longest running show of all-time and reportedly grossed over £100 million, thanks also to its successful tours and residencies all over the world.

I am referring, of course, to smash-hit musical *We Will Rock You*, a loud, tongue-in-cheek production that celebrates Queen's music by weaving 24 of their songs into a plot about a quest to bring back rock'n'roll in a future world where musical creativity and instruments are illegal.

Set in the year 2039, Earth has become Planet Mall, a world absent of individuality and free thought due to the dictatorship of Globalsoft Corporation, which manipulates the 'Ga Ga Kids' to wear the same clothes, watch the same movies and listen to commercial, computer-generated pop.

Non-conformists Galileo (played by Noel Sullivan) and Scaramouche (Amanda Coutts) are thrown together when they are both arrested by Globalsoft's head of police, Khashoggi (Earl Carpenter), and sent to the Killer Queen (Tiffany Graves). They realise they are kindred spirits, and after a joint rendition of 'Under Pressure' they flee. Following the random song lyrics that appear to Galileo in his dreams, they go on a mission to find elusive rebels, The Bohemians, so together they can find the banished instruments and bring back rock'n'roll to the world.

When I headed to the Manchester's Palace Theatre to see the show when it returned to the venue for a six-week stint in December as part of its new national tour, I wasn't sure what to expect. The figures spell out its success, and peers that had seen the show absolutely loved it, but the reams of unfavourable critiques in the press could not be ignored.

In the end, the enjoyment of the show for me depended on how lightheartedly I accepted the tenuous links between the storyline and the songs. In some cases, the jump the actors made from a scene of dialogue into song was almost farcical; the jokes juvenile. But this is all part of

the fun.

Towards the end of the show I had been enticed by the stunning production, quality of the performance and when the climax came — the previously hidden band being lowered from the upper heights of the stage roof on their purpose-built truss platform — I was positively rocking out.

PEDIGREE

Another reason to buy into the pre-show hype was the pedigree of the creative and production team. Written by British comedian and author Ben Elton, along with Queen's Brian May and Roger Taylor, the show was produced by Phil McIntyre Entertainment and the design and lighting created by the acclaimed team of designer Mark Fisher and LD Willie Williams, who also co-video directed the show, and recently worked together on the U2 360° world tour. The team on the ground is led by production electrician Ian Moulds, with technical production overseen by production manager Ted Irwin.

The original *We Will Rock You* production, which debuted at the Dominion Theatre on May 12 2002, was revised and adapted to make it roadworthy when it embarked on its first international tour, with the premiere at the Regent Theatre in Melbourne, Australia on August 7 2003. It was this design that formed the basis for the latest UK tour production.

STREAMLINING

“On all the shows I have worked closely with Ben Elton, with Brian and Roger in the background. We discuss everything down to the last detail,” explained Mark Fisher. He said all the shows outside of the Dominion had been adapted for the tour environment, so that the scenery could come apart faster, be more

flexible backstage to deal with different storage requirements and pack well into trucks.

“We got rid of the idea of Tottenham Court Road tube station playing host to the Heartbreak Hotel and the giant colonnade as the background to the first three songs. These changes were made for the Australian show and have been kept,” he said.

“The new touring show features a more compact Wasteland/Heartbreak Hotel transition and some other changes to scenery elements to make them work in smaller theatres. All the shows we have done since the Dominion place the band on a bridge at the back.”

Band rehearsals and pre-production took place at Three Mills Studios in east London for two weeks, before four days of full rehearsals at the Manchester's Palace Theatre.

The stage is framed by a staggered series of three-sided lighting trusses, all custom designed and supplied by Total Fabrications: a FOH goalpost truss with a curved upper arch to mimic the 'D' design from the Dominion; a fixed horizontal lighting truss downstage with two vertical 'legs' either side that move in and out during the show; followed by a second horizontal truss that moves up and down with two moveable 'legs' either side and the same design again for the upstage truss and legs. The moving lighting trusses are controlled by a total of 12 Kinesys motors which can each lift half a tonne running at 20m per minute.

Said Total Fabrications project manager Mervyn Thomas: “We supplied 152m of 45cm truss to the client specification, which included a dolly system for transporting the truss whilst they are rigged with lights.”

Unusual Rigging was commissioned to manage all the rigging, the motor control system and design a bespoke tracking system to move set pieces around the stage. Tim Follett operates the Kinesys controls during the show, from a Vector 2 system.

Clockwise from below: Stage hands prepare for the opening act; the Killer Queen's throne which tracks up and downstage; Unusual's Felix Pascal; the spade slot in the floor's tracking system.



UNUSUAL ENGINEERING

Unusual's rigging and automation crew member Felix Pascal, who works alongside chief touring rigger Richard McIlhiney, said: "The flooring system was built by Total Fabs, so there were drawings being circulated with their design and engineering department trying to get everything to fit because we've designed a totally new tracking system that's never been made before."

There are three track winches, the outer two are only used twice during the show to move a set of treads up and down for the opening sequence, whilst the centre one is used to

move various pieces of set up and down the stage, like the Killer Queen's throne, Galileo and Scaramouche's love-bed transit van and their motorbike. In the original show these set pieces were on winches, but this time there is a show deck with an 8mm slot running up and down the stage, with a chain system beneath it, capable of moving one metre per second.

"They are Kinesys controlled off a motor that goes through a gear box and changes it to a horizontal movement, then there's a continuous chain that runs round a cog underneath the stage, which is basically pulling a double stack

chain," explained Pascal.

"It goes round the cog, through two guides at the front of the motor and into a track, round another cog at the end, then up a return track.

"It was designed so that nothing can actually be seen or caught at any point in the track. Unusual designed a mouse system which pins through the chain and locks into place and in that mouse is a slot that's designed to take a spade.

"The spade system is incorporated into all the set pieces so it drops down into the slot and gets dragged up and down."

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE NOMINEES

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE WINNERS

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DisplayLED's digiLED Tile system is configured as four individually controllable panels for the set.



VIDEO GA GA

The show opens with a scene from the highly clinical Globalsoft world; a staircase platform tracks downstage with Ga Ga Kids dancing around in front of four white Ga Ga sculptures, created by Jacqui Pyle Studio, whilst the outcast Scaramouche sings 'Somebody To Love'. Video screens above portray a cartoon-like colourful world, before the platform splits in two and the Killer Queen tracks downstage on her throne.

Said Fisher: "The Ga Ga statues and stairs are used in combination with the LED screen and polished offstage vertical lighting trusses to create a hard hi-tech world for Globalsoft. This look is repeated in various ways for all the Globalsoft scenes."

Once again the show chose displayLED's digiLED Tile system to display the video, but instead of having one big screen moved by motors, this time the screen is split into four parts and Unusual put a winch system in place to allow more individual movement, effectively making the screens able to dance around each other. "The screens are on four winches capable of lifting 300kg each at 1m per second and they all move independently of each other. The screen weighs around 250kg per panel so it's about a tonne of screen in total," said Pascal.

"The Ga Ga statues and stairs are used in combination with the LED screen... to create a hard hi-tech world for Globalsoft..."
Mark Fisher

DisplayLED's technical manager Tom Mudd added: "As an improvement on the way we did it for the Italian shows, we've implemented a different data distribution system so that each screen runs independently and it's much more fault tolerant. It uses our own processor called a digiLED Navigator which does the conversion from DVI to LED signal."

Each of the Ti10S 10mm SMD screens measure 2.4m x 2.7m, configured from 3 x 3 'fast-rig' 800mm x 900mm digiLED frames.

"The screen is lightweight and has a proprietary signal processing system through direct Ethernet connectivity to the LED modules, which I believe is unique at this moment in time, and has many advantages not least its simplicity and minimal use of cabling," commented Malcolm Mellows, project manager for XL Video, which fulfilled the rest of the tour's video needs.

Throughout the show, the digiLED Tiles complement the futuristic world of Planet Mall by projecting a mixture of animation and graphics (created between Willie Williams' Neal Street

Studio and Mark Fisher's Stufish), lighting effects and even live video. When the Killer Queen enters on her throne, she speaks to her sidekick Khashoggi who appears live on screen. XL Video set up an off stage 'video booth' for certain characters, whereby a live camera feed is sent to a Hippotizer media server for size and visual manipulation.

"The prime and back-up cameras, with lighting, are set up for self operation by the relevant cast member and they are able to view themselves in a local confidence monitor," explained Mellows.

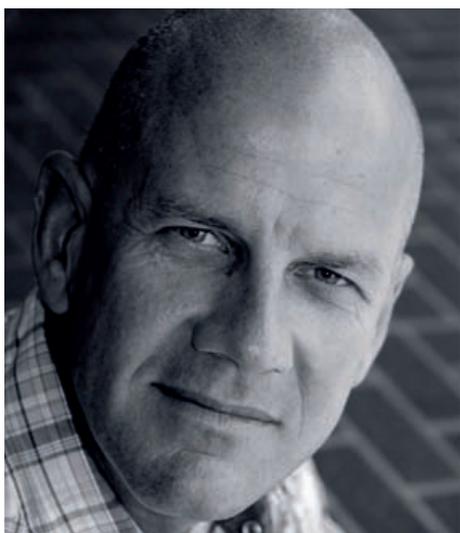
XL Video, which started working on the tour for the 2009 Italian leg, will also provide LED, server and projection technicians for each new installation as the tour changes venues.

As with the last UK tour, XL provides five Hippotizer HD media servers, all processing, including time-code, DMX and manual triggering of the system, which is undertaken by the lighting department.

"This versatile XL Video built system is racked



Above: The gates to the derelict Wembley Stadium where Galileo and Scaramouche discover the secret instruments.



Above, clockwise: Willie Williams; Mark Fisher; Ben Elton, producer Robert De Niro, Brian May & Roger Taylor at the original 2002 West End media launch; Richard Pacholski.

in a methodical and logical way, to allow the show crew to see what is happening and when, so that during installations as well as in show state the least amount of time is needed to remedy fluctuations to normal running," said Mellows.

Scenes set outside the world of Globalsoft, in the natural surroundings of the Bohemians' Wasteland underworld and the Heartbreak Hotel are created by two double sided set pieces that revolve, with some scenery painted by Frances Waddington.

For the latter scene, the Wembley Gates have been rebuilt to be more compact, with a different reveal of the guitar. This is where Scaramouche persuades Galileo to perform the opening of 'We Will Rock You', the banished instruments are revealed and the band are lowered into view. The band's platform and stair mechanism were made especially for the tour by Total Fabrications and are held by six Liftket one tonne D104 motors.

WILLIAMS AND WHITE LIGHT

Willie Williams' lighting design was also partially adapted to be made roadworthy when it first started to tour.

Associate lighting designer Richard 'R2' Pacholski, who has looked after the lighting for the Australian and other productions of the show

worldwide, explained: "Willie definitely kept the concept of the Dominion show alive for the tour, but changed the way things were done. Digital Light Curtains [DLCs] were added as general backlight wash, whereas the Dominion used rows and rows of PAR cans with scrollers. The DLCs help with that classic look of the big Queen shows with a giant grid of lights."

White Light was appointed as lighting supplier to the new UK tour. Pacholski said the show required a design that could achieve both the big rock looks and the more subtle dialogue scenes. "Getting a versatile design is down to the positioning and the fixtures. We have a good mix of conventional and movers; of course, the conventionals are kept busy in the 'book' scenes, while the movers come into their own for the songs. Many of the movers have now become incandescent so slowly one by one the conventionals are being driven out of town," said Pacholski.

The core of the tour lighting rig is a package of moving lights from Martin Professional and Vari*Lite, including 26 Martin MAC 700 Spots and six MAC 2000 Washes, plus 16 Vari*Lite VL 500 80V Washes. Sixteen DHA DLCs and 10 Coemar Infinity ACL M 700W Beamlights round out the automated lighting.

The conventional rig consists of 14 ETC

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Source Four profile spots and a wide range of PARs, together with 46 Coemar Parlite LED PARs, along with two truss-mounted Lycian Starklite 1271 followspots. A wide selection of effects includes LED fixtures, Martin Atomic Strobes, 21 custom police beacons, two 24" mirrorballs and 500 egg strobes mounted on festoon cable.

Atmospheric effects are from Look Solutions, including Unique 2 haze machines and Viper 2, Spaceball and Tiny Fogger 2 smoke machines.

"The workhorses of the rig are the DLCs and the MAC 700 Spots," said Pacholski. These units are mainly in the overhead rig, whilst the VL500 80v fixtures are spread around the entire rig. The FOH truss uses VL3000 Spots and MAC 2000 Washes.

"The scenic design uses a lot of box trussing so we have that filled with the Coemar Parlites and egg strobes," he continued. "For this tour we've added 10 Coemar Infinity ACL M Beams which add another layer to the rock numbers. And we have Willie's custom four-lamp beacons rigged vertically for a big cue.

"All this gear was easily sourced and manufactured by White Light. They did a great job and my thanks go out to Bryan Raven and Dave Isherwood."

Production electrician Ian Moulds prepared the package for the tour at White Light's facilities for two weeks with his crew, whilst Pacholski and programmer Simon Sherriff had one week in the rehearsal space with the console to add the new fixtures and work on the show file.

The touring version of the show started life on a Wholehog II, but the data has now been handed over to MA Lighting's grandMA console. "We changed to the grandMA because the availability and reliability of the Wholehog needed to be addressed. It's also much easier to find grandMA programmers in far flung countries where the show will be heading," said Pacholski.

"The grandMA console is rock solid, and it also makes it much easier to clone fixtures

because we often swap gear depending on what's common in the country the show plays."

The control system also includes a grandMA light and three MA NSP network processors, driving three Avolites ART2000 dimmer racks and two Howard Eaton (HELL) wireless radio receiver/dimmer systems and eight HELL dimmers.

"The joy of mixing this show is there are a good mix of scenes to deal with. Willie was in a cue frenzy when he designed the show, the cues just keep coming, so there's a lot to deal with!" said Pacholski, who is assisted by head electrician Mat Rutter, lighting/video tech Dave Treanor and lighting tech Catherine Crick.

BAND CONVERT TO M-48s

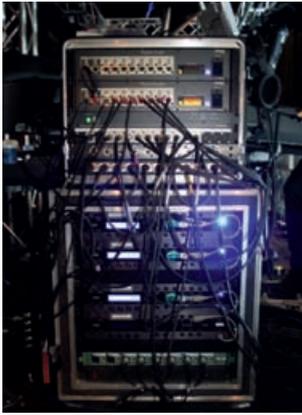
Before the show, musical director Jim Henson and head of sound Richard Scott invited TPI up to the suspended steel deck where the band play from behind a curtain for most of the show, a place that can sometimes reach 30°. Henderson directs an eight-strong band comprising a drummer, bass player, two guitar players, three keyboard musicians and a percussionist.

Each musician is fixed up with his own Roland M-48 live personal mixer — this is the theatre debut for the product. PA rental supplier Sonalyst recommended the personal mixers to the team and subsequently supplied them, along with the entire audio system for the tour.

The M-48 offers control over 40 audio sources, managed in 16 assignable stereo groups, which can be enhanced with level/pan/solo/three-band EQ on each group, built-in reverb, ambient mic as well as physical inputs and outputs.

Said Henson: "We had three days of band calls in Three Mills Studios to introduce the guys to the M-48 units and within a couple of days they were totally confident with them; the band have taken to them like ducks to water.

"It's useful when we have deps in because they can easily tweak the mix to their preferences



Above from top left: Roland's S-4000 modular digital snake system; musical director Jim Henson; the drum kit looks on to the airborne band platform; the M-48 personal monitoring system.

and store the settings. The most useful thing for me as MD is the ability to see level inputs on each of the channels, because then I can be sure there's signal coming from FOH.

"Because we're not in a pit, all the action on stage is happening behind me and I only have a tiny monitor. I rely on my ears to know what's going on, so it's a big help to be able to glance across and see what my channels are on, eight at a time."

Richard Scott, who has been with the show since it opened, and has toured with it and set up productions in Stockholm and Berlin, mixes nearly 120 channels of vocals (with a cast of 25), band and sound FX at FOH.

He said: "The Roland M-48 has replaced the analogue system we were using, which required a lot more cabling, so we're enjoying all the advantages of digital in terms of convenience. Not only is there a useful reduction in on-stage sound from the band, but it frees me up from having to worry about their monitor requirements. We're happy to pioneer this technology, which has been very well supported by Sonalyst and Roland."

SD7 SOUND

Scott is mixing the show on a DiGiCo SD7 for the first time, having used the D5-T previously, and was enjoying the versatility combined with its small footprint. *We Will Rock You* is no ordinary theatre show, it's very loud and sonically very demanding, requiring many cues on the desk.

"This show is very programmable. I prefer to mix a show rather than just press a button and

let it move the faders for you because you often get different musicians and cast members. I do crunch the lines quite a lot and actually mix it, but the versatility of having it all in the desk is good and the fact that it's so small and yet does so much is incredible really," said Scott.

"For outboard I have a couple of reverb units for the vocals, some TC 4000s, a Fireworx unit and a D2, which I use very sparingly for certain effects. I use a few in-board reverbs as well for the drums and percussion."

There are five optical racks placed around the stage. Figure 53's QLabs is configured to playback SFX and surround tracks triggered by Scott. The SD7 also has a MADI 128-track Mac Pro recording package.

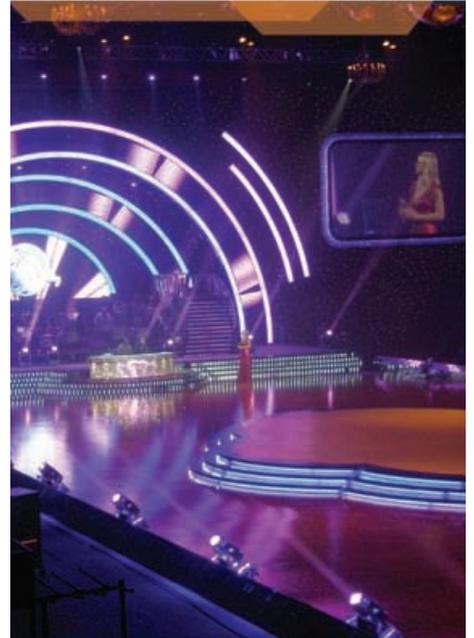
The audience hear Queen's songs through a Meyer Sound PA package supplied by Sonalyst, which includes 24 Mica compact line array boxes, 18 M'elodies, eight M1Ds, eight UPMs, eight UPAs and eight 600HP Subs. Delay and FX speakers are a combination of Coda K4s and G308s, powered by Lab.gruppen FP10000Q amplifiers.

"For powered speakers I think the Meyer system is brilliant; it's very crisp, it works well, and not having to tour amps is one of the best things in the world!" said Scott. "The versatility and the control over the speakers is excellent. The Galileo systems that run them are pretty much second to none as well."

Communications around the theatre involve 24 Clear-Com Partyline belt packs, 12 Tempest dual channel wireless belt packs, 18 Motorola DP3400 handsets, which have five back-to-back



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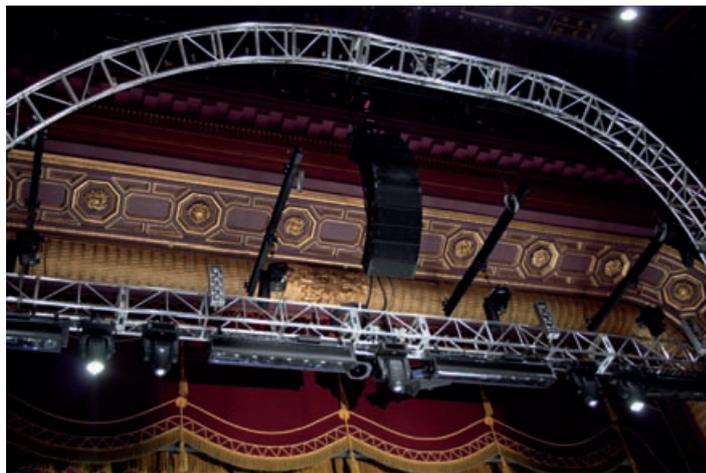
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"The band have taken to [the M-48s] like ducks to water..."
musical director Jim Henson

Clockwise, from below: The Meyer Sound Mica line array hang at stage left; a centre speaker cluster hung on Unusual Rigging's custom beams; head of sound Richard Scott with his DiGiCo SD7.



channels and interface via a TAIT two-way base station into the show comms. Sonalyst also provides CCTV for relevant departments to oversee the show.

Sonalyst supplies Sennheiser wireless systems that include 32 channels of AD3700 receivers, 29 SK5212ii belt packs and five SKM5200 handhelds, complete with KK 105 Neumann capsules. Sennheiser Wireless Management software runs both on stage and at FOH via the show's Ethernet network.

Sonalyst also provides five Barco FLM HD20s for projection. The cast use DPA microphones on booms, chosen for their "quality, durability and reliability", said Scott.

Sonalyst's Rory Madden: "All of the equipment on the production was chosen with the future in mind as the production is currently booked until January 2012. We understand equipment has worked faultlessly in the past, but we had an opportunity to invest in the best and very latest technology,

and to date the feedback from the audience and production engineers has been excellent.

"Sonalyst has 35 years of high profile touring experience; using this knowledge and experience we managed to package this show in a way that has helped the production load in a day earlier than planned."

After the Palace Theatre in Manchester, the highly streamlined and high-tech production was heading off on its UK tour, stopping first at Glasgow Kings Theatre, followed by shows in Cardiff, Southampton, Aberdeen, Birmingham, Liverpool, Sunderland, Bristol, Leeds and Edinburgh, going into 2012.

I've no doubt this production will continue to rock audiences well beyond its 10th year, and make further impact overseas.

TPi

Photography by Elliot Herman, Rachel Esson, Ginny Goudy, Louise Stickland & courtesy of displayLED & Phil McIntyre Entertainment