

18.3.2019

NRG crew take on the TPI Awards 2019

Demonstrating the creativity and enthusiasm of the next generation, for the third year running, a number of NRG (Next Robe Generation) crew members made a significant contribution to the production of the highest profile evening event of the industry calendar – the TPI Awards 2019.

Held at Battersea Evolution in London, and welcoming over 1,600 guests, the evening was attended by a 'who's who' of the industry. The lighting rig was a Robe spectacular, with over 300 fixtures specified by Robe's in-house Media and Lighting Designer Nathan Wan in order to meet the brief from TPI. And Nathan again offered the opportunity for a select number of NRG crew to join the Robe production team.

"We totally appreciate this is a high pressure, high profile opportunity for students to get involved in when they are still in the midst of their studies, but we love the fact that those who took on the roles rose to the challenge ... and then some!" says Nathan. "Their overall approach to the project and the roles we gave them was exceptional – and their enthusiasm to present their design and technical skills to a 'highly opinionated' audience was contagious!"

This year's team of six NRG crew included Alex Merrett, in his final year at University of South Wales, Owen Yelland also in his final year from Rose Bruford College, Ben Linwood from Guildford School of Acting and Espen Karlsen from Rose Bruford College. It was also encouraging to welcome two female crew members – Jasmine Williams, a final year student from Royal Welsh College Music & Drama and LIPA's Georgia Wren.

Alex had been part of the NRG crew last year, designing and operating the main bar at the TPI Awards 2018 and this year he re-applied and was successfully appointed as Assistant Lighting Designer working alongside Nathan, and associate LD Andy Webb. He couldn't resist the chance to get involved again. "It is a great opportunity to work with some incredibly talented people and to learn some invaluable skills including new methods of programming and how fine-tuning the attention to detail makes all the difference. The pressure was on for impressing the very knowledgeable audience but having said that the highlight for me has to have been seeing the whole production and all the hard work come together on the night" he says. "Overall I can honestly say the experience has been completely amazing and an unforgettable highlight in my student career!" he concludes.

Another member of the NRG crew who also had prior experience of the TPI Awards was Owen, who reprised his role as Systems Tech for the production. Owen didn't think twice about

applying again. "I saw it as a further opportunity to expand my experience of looking after the systems being used on the event, and to work for a second time with Kling-Net by ArKaos. In addition to which I was head RoboSpot operator and so I now have hands-on experience of configuring the RoboSpots – I can honestly say I was bowled over by how easy they are to set up and operate – what a great piece of kit!"

Espen was asked to light, programme and operate the main bar of the TPI Awards. As an international student and fairly new member of NRG, he knew this would be a great way to build his UK industry contacts. He was impressed that the opportunity presented the chance to demonstrate his skills with a WYSIWYG challenge as well as benefitting from a two-day Avolites training course. The experience has also provided him first-hand insight into how productions and load-ins work in the UK. "I think these student opportunities being offered by a large company like Robe through NRG is admirable and you get a lot of insight into their fixtures as well as some invaluable experience into how a large production on a corporate event of this nature works" he comments. "It really helps students learn first-hand whilst studying, so they are far better placed to step straight into their career when they graduate. And I have met a lot of people who I hope will help me further my career. I definitely want to do more live events as a result of this experience."

Espen was supported in his role by Guildford School of Acting student Ben who comments that it was "really a very simple decision to make to apply for a role on the TPI NRG team. Although there was definitely extra pressure with this job because it was in front of so many industry professionals I admire and aspire to be like!"

"I've learnt loads and I have taken away a huge amount of insight into scheduling and the management of such a large event. The NRG initiative adds experience and learning that you can't get in a lecture hall. It teaches the importance of networking with fellow students and industry professionals, and is helping to draw the future generation of professionals closer together" says Ben.

Jasmine and Georgia collaborated on the lighting design, programming and operation for the important Robe VIP Lounge which was opened up to invited guests after the main awards. "This opportunity has exceeded my expectations and given me the opportunity to learn new skills I wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity to do so and I feel more capable and confident in my skillset as a result" smiles Georgia. "It was inspiring to hear people compliment my work in the VIP lounge and say they can see I have a future in the industry – wow!"

"My tutor encouraged me to go for this opportunity and it pushed me right outside my comfort zone" explains Jasmine. "When I met Ashley Lewis from Robe and Nicky Rowland from NRG at RWCMD last year, they were encouraging more female technicians to get involved. I admire this inclusive approach and it provided me with an extra boost to apply." "Plus Georgia and I had a chance to play with the brand new T1 fixtures in the VIP lounge, as well as operating the RoboSpots in the main ceremony – what a fantastic creation!" enthuses

Jasmine. "Nathan also encouraged us to go with our instincts on our designs given the tight timelines and this really gave us confidence in what was otherwise a slightly overwhelming challenge! Everyone was really supportive."

All the NRG team are delighted to have been involved. "Once more the experience far exceeded my expectations and it was extremely slick. In a word it has been amazing!" smiles Owen. "It's been unforgettable" agrees Ben, "this kind of industry engagement keeps you excited and passionate about going into the industry at the end of your studies." Georgia continues, "I have greater belief in myself because of this opportunity. I realise I have got the knowledge to fulfil any lighting technician role I put myself forward for. It's been exhilarating and enlightening."

As far as the overall NRG scheme is involved, all the students agree that it is a great initiative.

Alex has been part of NRG for quite a while and champions the programme. "I've attended as many socials as I can and have taken up as many of the opportunities which are offered through NRG as I can. It's great to be able to meet other students from around the country on different courses and to meet so many industry professionals who are happy to give advice and help on how to establish yourself within the industry. NRG offers the opportunity to learn valuable skills, provide insights into the industry, build a network and choose the right path to get to where you want to be. All I can say to my fellow students is get as involved as you can and as much as your timetable permits."

"Robe and NRG have grasped how important it is to involve young professionals in the industry and give them insight into what working life will be like after their studies," says Georgia. "It's a fantastic initiative to involve young talent in such high profile projects."

Owen agrees that "it's great to be able to connect with other young technicians at different stages in their studies, but also an incredible way to meet many industry professionals and get advice from them. It is really helping me fine-tune exactly which part of the industry I would like to head into when I graduate this summer. And as if that isn't enough, the experiences I have gained working on the TPI Awards has provided invaluable hands-on research to help me complete my dissertation on systems and protocols!"

Jasmine agrees. "NRG enables young technicians to engage with the insight, experience and knowledge of the industry professionals that NRG allows us to network with. Being part of the TPI team through NRG has been eye opening, inspiring and an experience that has 110% shown me that I have chosen the right career. And I'm inspired to champion inclusivity and more female students and individuals of ethnic minorities getting involved in NRG and technical roles in the production industry, and to promote overall diversity in the industry." "I would encourage any students to apply for this opportunity if they have the chance next year – the whole event is great fun to work on and Nathan, Andy and all the team are amazing to work with," adds Owen.

"Go for it – you have nothing to lose and it's a truly memorable experience!" smiles Georgia.

“Be ready for some hard work, but also some very fun work,” adds Espen. “And a massive thank you to NRG, Nathan and Andy for treating us so well and giving us the opportunity to be a part of a production of this scale.”

“I think that the NRG framework is a magnificent idea,” comments Georgia. “I was impressed with the way the programme is run and how the NRG crew members are treated like professionals and are as well regarded as everyone else on the team,” she adds.

“Absolutely,” agrees Ben. “The NRG and Robe team really did look after us and made the experience as rewarding as possible. So a huge thank you to them too!”

Mick Hannaford, Managing Director Robe UK continues to be impressed by the calibre of the NRG students who take on the roles at TPI. “NRG is now an established and growing community for the next generation of young technicians. This is the third year we have offered some NRG crew members the opportunity to get involved in this high profile industry event. It is an extremely important showcase for Robe, and so we are putting our faith in their skills and abilities. And every year they have exceeded our expectations. I am struck by their enthusiasm, their maturity, their energy and their knowledge. They are determined and they are focussed on their career choice. It provides a sense of confidence that our industry’s future is in good hands.”

Nathan has the final word. “Working with the young technicians who are engaged with NRG has been a pleasure – they have been inspiring themselves – with their energy and their determination. They brought fresh perspectives and vitality to the team and I wish them luck in their future careers.”

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