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Robe Illuminates Mountains for Parrtjima Festival of Light

Festivals have fast become an elusive dream resembling gold dust in the Covid era – a much-missed environment for enjoying and sharing culture, ideas and social activities ... so the 2020 Parrtjima Festival of Light at Alice Springs in Australia's Northern Territory provided a rare reminder of the community, camaraderie, magic and imagination evoked by lighting art.

Moved from its original April slot to September, the 10-day event organised by the Northern Territories Major Event Company (NTMEC), and produced and curated by AGB, went ahead due to the state's highly successful Covid-19 management strategy.

Featuring a carefully picked collection of amazing and fun light artworks together with a spectacular nightly lightshow designed by Richard Neville from Mandylights delivered to a locally produced soundtrack, 80 x Robe MegaPointes were used to throw lighting and effects onto a section of the West MacDonnell mountain range.

The lighting equipment was supplied by Melbourne-based MPH Australia, who've been involved as event suppliers for moving lights, LED, and other specialist fixtures in conjunction with Mandylights, for the last four years.

The first year MPH was involved, their Robe BMFLs were utilised for the task of lighting the mountains. However, in 2018 these were all in Jakarta on the Asian Games, so MPH's founder and MD Matt Hansen made a decisive investment in the MegaPointes ... which do the job brilliantly due to their impressive brightness!

When the new Parrtjima 2020 dates were confirmed as going ahead, Matt and his team re-prepped everything in their Melbourne HQ – it had been two days away from loading for the original dates when lockdown was imposed – and the kit journeyed from Victoria by rail, while Matt and MPH's production manager Michael Parsons flew to Darwin, capital of the Northern Territory.

There they did the mandatory 14-days quarantine required for interstate travel from Victoria and New South Wales (or in fact currently any other Australian state) at Howard Springs Accommodation Village, a 3500 capacity compound originally built in 2012 for construction workers building the gas processing facilities at Blaydin Point.

Despite some dodgy internet connections and food, Matt was generally impressed with the experience.

After their 14 days was up, they flew from Darwin down to Alice Springs and started rigging for the Festival.

The MegaPointes were positioned on four scaffolding structures – 20 fixtures each – distanced 1 – 1.5km apart, and between 250 and 400 metres away from the base of the mountains. Width-wise their light covered an area of around 2.5 kilometres along the mountain range.

The nearby ground areas involved in the lightshow including the Festival site are traditionally covered by projected images plus some additional lightsources which this year included 12 x BMFL Spots focussed on the park area and fairground.

MPH also supplied around 200 other luminaires for the event – including some Robe LEDWash 600s which were used inside a giant inflatable sphere projection surface.

Data to the fixtures site-wide was run via Art-Net and ACN. The MegaPointes used a Ubiquiti point-to-point wireless ethernet (Art-Net over Ethernet) network comprising a central omnidirectional antenna located in the main desert park site and smaller nanobeams at each MegaPointe scaffold tower.

Parrtjima's 2020 lightshow was programmed and run on a grandMA 2 console operated by Mandylights' Richard Neville.

Like anyone who has been lucky enough to be working on any events so far in this pandemic era, Matt and Michael were delighted to be back on site, even though it meant quarantining and taking on the enormous caseload of additional paperwork and logistics related to ensuring they were Covid-19 compliant.

On site, they worked alongside two technicians who they knew from Cairns – also in NT so no quarantine involved – plus three local stagehands.

Matt stated, "It was just fantastic to be getting our hands dirty, putting up lights, running power – data to the MegaPointes was wireless – and generally working hard at a festival doing the things we love that we once took for granted ... and now nothing is certain!"

"It was also great to see the event unfold and be enjoyed so enthusiastically by the public! Some of the lighting art was fantastic and truly unique!"

On site everyone working 'backstage' followed the golden Covid rules of "hands, face & space" - wore masks, frequently washed hands, and practised social distancing.

Like everywhere else in the world, the events and live entertainment industry in Australia has been devastated by the pandemic. Businesses have received some government support to help them survive the crisis until it is deemed safe to re-start the industry.

"Events like this are a lifeline right now ... apart from the much-needed cashflow, it's the morale boost more than anything else. It will be interesting to see what the Australian Government has on their roadmap for the entertainment industry's road out of all of this!" Matt concluded.

Photo Credits: Mandylights, MPH Australia







