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Robe Catches the Spirit of Glastonbury 2023

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Robe moving lights were in action across multiple stages at the 2023 Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts, including in three key 'creative' areas of the massive site at Worthy Farm, Pilton, Somerset in the UK.

These were the spectacular fire-breathing Arcadia Spider 360-degree arena, the eclectic, fabulous and funky Park Stage, one of the most popular Glasto zones, and the BBC Introducing stage which showcases some of the hottest rising music stars and some cool unique pop-up performances.

Theresa Gibson, head of marketing at Robe UK commented, "The magic of Glastonbury Festival never fails to disappoint, and this year was no different!

"Fields of back-to-back live music, dance, comedy, theatre, circus, cabaret and contemporary art forms filled the sunny skies of Worthy Farm for miles on end! As one of the biggest events in the global festival calendar, we were excited once again to have a series of our latest fixtures deployed on key stages across the site, including Robe's new IP rated iPointes and iSpiiders - a first for the iconic Arcadia Spider, one of the most-loved stages and Glasto landmarks!

"It was brilliant to be back onsite working with the fantastic Arcadia team and the SWG Events crew - technical provider for the Park Stage - and catch some of the new talent at BBC Music Introducing, both of which featured a variety of Robe fixtures including the highly popular LEDBeam 350s and a Glasto debut for the TetraX for alt-J's set on the Park Stage!

"Reuniting with industry friends and colleagues both old and new down in the fields of fun is all part of the very special magic and memory-making that the event delivers every time!"

Arcadia Spider

Robe's iSeries of IP rated moving lights were a big hit with Arcadia this year.

The lighting rig was designed by Dave Cohen from design studio MIRRAD and co-ordinated by Arcadia's technical manager, Katie Davies. New this year were nine Robe iSpiiders and nine iPointes, used together with 12 additional standard Pointes ensconced in the giant arachnid's legs and six more on its belly, all ideally placed for producing mind-bending dancefloor effects in the space below.

The nine iSpiiders were rigged on three podiums and used to light up the sky, accentuate the geometry and dynamics of the spherical performance area radiating out from the centre, and to up-light performers.

The 9 x iPointes were rigged on the six PA towers and three crane points. They created impressive sky-scanning effects, blasting super-sharp beams into the night sky that were clearly visible from across the site, beckoning revellers to join some of the best late night Glasto entertainment vibes.

In addition to these Robe luminaires, approximately 80 custom Anolis LED architectural fixtures are inbuilt into the Spider's metalwork, located in the legs, face, eyes, eyebrows, body, inside the DJ booth, and in the belly, all run by remotely located Anolis ArcPower drivers. This allows 48V low voltage cables to be run throughout the Spider structure, eliminating the need for additional mains cables - for a safer system - and reduces the physical size of the Anolis fixtures.

Katie explained that these Anolis fixtures were installed when Arcadia started touring the Spider in 2016. Arcadia's creators Pip Rush (artistic director) and Bert Cole (technical director) specifically wanted the architecture illuminated and highlighted as a standalone feature, and the Anolis units have proved inherently reliable. They have worked first time after several international moves around the world - which is an involved and lengthy process for an art piece as complicated as the Spider.

When specifying lighting for the Spider, Katie highlighted how elements like tourability, local availability and rider friendliness are all critical, together with Robe's commitment to sustainability which is in tune with Arcadia's own green strategies.

Added to that, there is the "fantastic" long-term and worldwide technical support which Arcadia has received from Robe when working in the UK and elsewhere.

“Our partnership with Robe continues to thrive, allowing us the creative flexibility and technical certainty to bring out the best in the Spider. Robe's ongoing support is invaluable, both at Glastonbury and at our international shows, and as we look to explore new frontiers for next year, we look forward to working even closer together,” commented Pip Rush.

Dave Cohen worked alongside Louis Hodgson also from MIRRAD, and the two shared operating duties for Arcadia artists not bringing their own operators or lighting directors.

Highlighting the renewable and sustainable aspect of the resources for running the Spider – made from recycled military and industrial machinery parts – was important this year. All their generators ran from recycled biofuel as did even the Spider’s famous flames, which are now produced utilising refined waste cooking oil, replacing the propane gas of previous years.

“The Spider has always been a symbol of positive change, repurposing what was once the machinery of war into a unifying totem. Now with a recycled fuel source, it has that same spirit of transformation running through its veins,” stated Pip and Bert.

Headliners this year included the amazing Chemical Brothers (Friday); popular UK grime artist Skepta performing a DJ set with Jammer on Saturday and drum ‘n’ bass wizard Shy FX on Sunday.

For Katie, some of the most enjoyable moments are “definitely the crew, meeting new people and reuniting with others, together with the incredible community spirit and vibes that keep everyone coming back,” she elaborated.

Involved since 2011, she also mentioned the harmony, inter-departmental creativity and essence of collaboration that exists and has encouraged and enabled the Arcadia phenomenon to grow organically.

Robe NRG (Next Robe Generation) student Jack Barlow from Confetti in Nottingham worked onsite supporting the Arcadia team, including during the build and break down periods, which offered excellent insight and great first-hand experience as he pitched in on a variety of tasks including running the lighting console, patching, and rigging.

He also assisted in assorted other technical areas of the Spider over a two-week period on this, his first ever festival, almost guaranteed not to be his last! Jack also supported Robe at PLASA London last year and at the 2023 TPi Awards and will be going on to work at Neg Earth Lights as a placement technician.

The Arcadia lighting and SFX crew comprised Matty O'Toole - SFX pump operator (Diesel Weasel), Jeb Hawkins - production manager & head of power, Rhi Pallister - power, Jack Barlow - Robe NRG, Charlie Knight, Jack Coffin, Nat Archer and Rupert De-Renzy Martin - lighting techs, Louie Hodgson - Saturday night covering LD / operator, Katie Davies - technical manager, Dave Cohen - LD, Stu Barr - dimmer tech, Tim Steer - FOH manager, Tom Rush - SFX manager, Lucas White - SFX operator, Nathan Purcell (SXF intern) and Sian Mole - lighting intern.

The Park

Located at a prime altitude on one of the festival's rolling hills offering panoramic views across the Worthy Farm site, The Park stage is one of the most interesting and creative performance areas that has always managed to retain its intimacy and friendliness since being launched in 2007. This is despite its massive growth in popularity and increasingly high-profile line up each year.

The Park stage production lighting spec included 32 x Robe LEDBeam 350s, 12 x Spider LED wash beams, and 12 x MegaPointes among other lights, designed by Mat Spencer who was also the lighting crew chief, with the kit delivered by SWG Events, long term technical provider to this lively environment.

This year the side trusses were upgraded with all LEDBeam 350s, a move based partly on the feedback from numerous touring LDs from 2022. Everyone was happy to have the additional power and punch of Robe's still compact LEDBeam 350, which is one of the brand's best-selling luminaires. It was also a very easy substitution to make from the 150 to 350 versions as the fixtures have the same channel count.

These and the other Robe fixtures were all chosen for their multi-purpose functionality and brightness as a large upstage LED screen meant they needed strong fixtures that would also register and provide quality key lighting for all the daytime slots. As a fully televised stage, this was another principal consideration when choosing lights.

Mark Bott was SWG Events' production manager on this stage. He commented that Robe is also "totally rider friendly". Reliability is another fundamental for them as the conditions are often tough with plenty of dust, wind and the dreaded Glasto rain which was happily upstaged by the sunshine for all the show days this year!

The biggest lighting challenge at The Park is ensuring the production rig is optimised for the many visiting LDs, who have a narrow window of opportunity to get their show ready,

although the introduction of a visualisation suite this year for the first time was hugely beneficial.

SWG Events' goal is always to provide excellent production values, first class friendly and knowledgeable crew and an all-round brilliant time for every artist and their crew.

2023 headliners included Fat Boy Slim (LD Abbiss), Leftfield – also LD'd by Arcadia's Dave Cohen, The Pretenders, Alison Goldfrapp and alt-J who brought an exciting music programme storming to a close on Sunday night.

Arcadia dimmer tech Stu Barr also worked alongside Dave Cohen to ensure all Leftfield's lighting requirements were met at The Park for their performance there.

alt-J's festival floor package from rental company Liteup, headed by Marc Callaghan, included 50 x Robe TetraXs and eight ESPRITES which looked amazing.

Mark Bott and his lighting crew all love working at The Park. "It may only be once a year, but WOW it is a very enjoyable project that produces so many memorable moments every year! It never disappoints and the camaraderie is brilliant!" he enthused.

Working alongside Mat Spencer on lighting were Alex Davies, Steve Billington, George Mitchell and Mason Chapman.

In addition to The Park stage, SWG Events also supplied technical production to several other Park areas like the Lands End Bar, the much-loved Stonebridge Bar, the Rabbit Hole and Sweet Charity.

BBC Music Introducing

Catching some of the best 'ones-to-watch' and potential future stars, the BBC introducing stage has long been considered a hotbed of talent.

This is another busy area for which SWG Events has supplied technical production for over 10 years. Mat Spencer again designed lighting this year, programmed by Callam Thom and operated by him and Peter Doyle. Joe Bailey project managed and co-ordinated all things SWG.

The production lighting design incorporated more Robe moving lights, with 12 x LEDBeam 150s, 12 x LEDBeam 350s – all chosen for their small size and powerful impact – plus six

Pointes and four PATT2013s.

The LEDBeams were a major part of the aesthetic, some rigged on vertical towers, with four LEDBeam 150s around the front of the stage in footlights positions, and four LEDBeam 350s on the advanced truss for front and key lighting.

The six Pointes were on top of the towers which curved around the back and sides of the stage, used for effective back lighting, silhouetting and aerals. It was a well-balanced, versatile imaginative picture where all the fixtures complemented one another and worked with great synergy.

The LEDBeam 350 is currently Callam's favourite. He loves the zoom and the impressive output.

The PATTs were handy as elegant scenic lighting props and ideal for enhancing more intimate acoustic moments and closing down the stage space when appropriate as well as looking cool in back-of-camera shots.

BBC Music Introducing also hosted several high-profile pop-up and special performances by artists following their main set elsewhere around the vast site. These included 'secret sets' from Raye, fresh from her Pyramid Stage performance, and from Manchester favourites Porij, also 'veterans' of BBC Music Introducing after a killer show there in 2022.

The action included awesome sets from Debbie, Lovejoy, Vlure and Deyaz the latter was one of Callam's personal favourites this year. However, like many others, his absolute sick showstopper of the week was DYLAN, who shattered the Top 20 with her debut mixtape The Greatest Thing I'll Never Learn at the back end of 2022 and has been supporting Ed Sheeran on tour with her distinctive high energy electro indie pop.

BBC Music Introducing has a constant buzz and is a hive of activity both on and offstage with stars like Stormzy and Louis Theroux among others spotted backstage.

Callam loves the friendly atmos, great energy and the chance to work with some outstanding upcoming artists.

"It is like a homecoming every year! We live here for a week, and it is so great to meet up with everyone again like you've never been away and hear all their experiences and adventures just like a long-lost extended family reunion!

“On the performance side, this stage is all about the music rather than showing off and being too flashy!” he concluded.

Also

Glastonbury is known as the largest greenfield festival in the world, and over 200,000 music fans made the pilgrimage to Worthy Farm for the 2023 event which included Pyramid Stage headliners Arctic Monkeys, Guns ‘n’ Roses and Elton John – making his Glasto debut and allegedly also his final UK live gig ever – with Yusuf (Cat Stevens) performing in the Sunday early-evening Legends slot.

Headliners on the Other Stage were Wizkid (Friday), Lana Del Ray on Saturday and Queens of the Stone Age who closed on Sunday, but this was just the tip of the iceberg in terms of performance and fun available across the approximately 450-hectare site offering over 100 performance stages and spaces.

These hosted virtually every genre of music, creative expression and attraction from circus and dance, to theatre, comedy, and cabaret to spoken word and installation, physical and live art.

In addition to those lucky enough to be there in person, the BBC reported record-breaking digital audiences for 2023, with over 40 hours of programming across its TV channels and over 85 hours of broadcasts on its pop radio network, plus content that has already been streamed tens of millions of times!

Viva Glasto!

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