KYLIE’S KISS ME ONCE TOUR

KYLIE MINOGUE’S LATEST TOUR PRODUCTION, KISS ME ONCE, HAS BEEN RECEIVED WITH RAPTUROUS DELIGHT IN SOLD OUT ARENAS ACROSS EUROPE. IT’S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT IT’S BEEN 26 YEARS SINCE THE DIMINUTIVE STARLET BROKE THE CHARTS WITH HER FIRST EVER SINGLE, YET SOMEHOW THE RELENTLESSLY CHEERFUL, BUBBLY BLOND POPSTRESS IS STILL HAPPILY SPINNING AROUND THE GLOBE AND, FROM THE EVIDENCE TPi SAW, SHE WOULDN’T CHANGE A THING!

It’s surely this kind of optimistic delight in what she does, along with a remarkably strong stage presence, that keeps both her fans and indeed her production team coming back for more. Packed to the sumptuous lighting grid with sparkle, glitter, a multitude of glamorous costumes, quirky props and popalicious frippery, it’s clear that the production design for Kiss Me Once has been meticulously thought through. As a result the show is deliciously entertaining.

With 33 shows in Europe, including the iTunes festival, long term - and surprisingly relaxed - Tour Manager Sean Fitzpatrick has his work cut out. Fitzpatrick has been with the performer for 14 years and says this relaxed and friendly vibe radiates from Kylie herself: “Kylie is a perfectionist, but at the same time she doesn’t take herself too seriously, which makes touring with her an absolute pleasure.”

Fitzpatrick and Assistant Tour Manager Juliette Baldrey’s major focus is people logistics. It’s no small feat ensuring that the huge number of people involved in the production, which includes 17 performers and 48 crew, know exactly what they’re doing and where they should be each day.

“Getting this show on the road has involved some intensely long days,” said Fitzpatrick. “It’s not just simply going from A to B because Kylie has a number of additional commitments to fulfil during the tour including sponsorship engagements and meet and greets, some of which she requires our production staff for and some she doesn’t.”

Like Fitzpatrick, most of the production team have been working with Kylie for more than 10 years and that includes seasoned Production Manager Kevin Hopgood. “A lot of this team have worked for Kylie for a long time, although this year I have been joined by Lauren Sass as Production Coordinator. Since joining us, she has become indispensable. Beside myself, Lauren and Sean, Juliette Baldrey, Sean’s Assistant, has been with us for 10 years. Phil Murphy the stage manager has done 14 years.”

LIGHTING DESIGN
For Hopgood this consistency supported by improvement in the team only makes his job easier: “The core creative team is also still the same, William Baker has designed all Kylie’s shows for 20 years now, Steve Anderson, the musical director, has been around for a similar
time. The creative team are very close. However sometimes you need to include new people for fresh ideas. Rob Sinclair is one of those people. Rob has designed the lighting and the visuals for the first time and that’s been really successful - the man is a genius!”

According to Hopgood, Sinclair’s drive for perfection has been a motivating force: “Rob is one of those guys that won’t rest until he has perfected every detail. This can sometimes be a double edged sword because on the one hand I have to find time to make the changes, but on the other every single change is worth it.”

Indeed Baker’s Bauhaus style set provides the perfect canvas on which video and lighting can determine the various looks of the show and it’s a precision operation. Combined they evoke the feel of a sophisticated super club or a glitzy Vegas show. Lighting is stylish and layered to assimilate with Baker’s geometric design and Blink TV’s clever and seductive video graphics, which fill the VER supplied video wall upstage. The look is chic, uncluttered and multi dimensional, yet never upstaging.

By cleverly exploiting lighting angles and careful positioning of fixtures, within and around the set, Sinclair delivers an abundance of perspectives and looks. The design is so tightly put together that it’s hard to discern where lighting and structure intersect or where one ends and the other begins.

Built around the geometry of a broken grid, Sinclair’s design echoes the scenic framework that fills the upstage. Overhead a neat grid of Martin Professional MAC Viper Air FX deliver strong uniform down light beams of colour, while hung just below the main truss is a broken grid of VER Revolution Blade HD units. These create a full ceiling of neon effect lighting, which cleverly distracts the eye away from the moving lights while framing the stage and bringing focus back down to the action. Laser mapping from ER Productions is used to scan the outline of the frame set and does it so fast that they create unbroken lines of sparkling light giving the impression that every part is lit with LED. Sinclair explained: “I wanted the structure to look as elegant as possible and we couldn’t really afford to cover it with LED. Lighting it with lasers gives a really unique sparkly effect.
It’s also extremely bright. Best of all it uses lasers as actual lights rather than just the “oooh factor” - although we go for the “ooohh factor” as well!”

The VER supplied rig is augmented with a number of Philips Vari-Lite VL 3500 Washes rigged at the top and bottom of the video screen to provide key and wash light. Built into the set itself are a number of Martin MAC Auras, which provide more intimate, localised saturated colour washes and 50 Solaris Flare Strobes, which add an electrifying 3D aspect.

Upstage, Sinclair has specified 60 RGB Burst Box Spot laser lights from ER Productions bringing the total number of lasers to over 70. The stage-wide staircase is lit by LED tape with an opaque tube in front for diffusion. “I think the tubing comes from an industrial milking machine,” laughed Sinclair. “We wanted to diffuse the LED tape in such a way to make it look like neon and this really works.”

Light up props then add a lively dimension - everything from light up pink hoovers to tables and of course the ‘I should be so lucky’ bubble bath: “The table prop is amazing, in fact all the props made by Howard Eaton Lighting, are amazing,” said Sinclair. “The light up lips sofa, which opens the show with Kylie draped over it, was made by Mark Ward and his team at Asylum Models and Effects, and it’s a stunning piece of prop making.”

In charge of lighting programming and operating on tour is Louisa Smurthwaite supported by Crew chief, Glenn Power and his team: Craig Hancock, Jason Dixson, Urko Urrutia, Luke Pritchard and Hamzah Rattigan, who apparently sings along beautifully to ‘I Should Be So Lucky’ whilst operating a spot!

“We’ve got two of the new Jands Vista LS consoles on this show and I really like them. We’ve been putting them through their paces and using the new software, which as far as I know hasn’t been released yet. The new effects engine is great and the matrix effects work really well with the Blade lighting grid.”

The VER HD Blade is essentially a video unit and therefore takes a video signal. However Sinclair wanted to control the system as lights so VER supplied a piece of software called Node, which allows Smurthwaite to control it with DMX. “We were keen to avoid having to create content to do really simple things like wipes and chases across the grid. Now all we have to do is treat each Blade like a light and give each a DMX address.”

“The clever bit is that we can programme each blade individually, which means each one can be a different colour,” added Sinclair. “You can also switch Nodes to stop using DMX and take video instead. This means we can run Catalyst or any low res video through it, which makes it extremely flexible.”

For drama and effect Sinclair has specified ER Productions RGB Burst Boxes, which give a diffracted laser look. “These fixtures can create a single colour-mixed beam so we can deliver...”
white and any other colour you can think of from the same fixture,” explained Lawrence Wright of ER Productions. “We’re also using 11 scanning lasers, five of which take care of the scenic mapping. We developed a mirror system to enable us to scan down onto the B stage with the same five lasers. Finally we have six lasers on the set for normal scanning.”

Wright is using the latest Pangolin Beyond software and ER Productions has worked closely with Pangolin as the Kylie show is such a large set up. “We’ve got the Pangolin Beyond and a MAC Pro controlling the actual lasers and we’ve got a High End Systems Road Hog 4 controlling all the Burst Boxes. Everything is then time coded and linked together,” concluded Wright.

SOUND
Over in audio world FOH Engineer Kevin Pruce and Monitor Engineer Rod Matheson work closely together to deliver the distinctive Kylie sound. “We also work very closely with Musical Director, Steve Anderson,” added Pruce. “Particularly during rehearsals. It’s then that we set the levels and ensure the sound of each song is exactly right. Quite a lot of these songs have been part of Kylie’s repertoire for some time, but with different arrangements and numerous new tracks, which have a different sound, the show is dynamic and varied.”

In terms of console Pruce recently switched to a DiGiCo SD7 desk: “I made the switch for this tour because the monitor console is a DiGiCo SD7 and it made sense, given how closely Rod and I are working. We use an Optocore loop and we link racks, which gives us more flexibility.”

Pruce uses the Waves Multitrack Soundgrid for plug-ins with on-board processing. This comprises of Waves C6 multiband compressors, reverbs and FX for the vocals along with various other plugins on the outputs. Matheson uses a TC Electronic 6000 reverb and is using all four stereo engines: one for Kylie, one each for the two backing vocalists, and the fourth for special reverbs on Kylie.

Matheson says he has always been a fan of the DiGiCo console: “Specifically they are one of the best consoles for In Ear Monitors as the sound quality is incredibly high.”

All the vocal microphones are Sennheiser SKM 5200 series with 5235 capsules. PA is d&b audiotechnik J-Series, (64 J8’s, four J12’s, 16 JSUBs and six Q10’s) and all equipment is supplied by Eighth Day Sound.

The four-piece band, Kylie and the backing vocalists are all on In-Ear-Monitoring (IEMs). “The only fold-back on stage is a flown d&b V-Series used side fills so the dancers can hear the show in real time,” Matheson explained. “The mix is generated from FOH but comes via monitors so I can control the level.”

In fact everyone on stage, including the crew, is on Sennheiser 2050 transmitters with EK 2000 Series IEMs and all have a full stereo mix: “Every band member on stage has a switched talk mic,” added Matheson. “This allows direct communication with me, also direct communication with Kylie. There are mics backstage as well so specific crew can talk to musicians. Kevin Hopgood is in the loop plus everyone at FOH, so the system works like a massive intercom.”

When it comes to mixing for Kylie’s IEMs Matheson says he filters out most of the percussive instruments and increases the levels of the more melodic sound, which ensures her vocal sound is clearer. “Kylie’s mix predominately comprises her own vocal followed by backing vocals, under that would be keys and melodic instruments and then beneath all the percussion. It’s still a pretty solid mix of everything but it errs on the side of melodic and smooth. The band members have a similar mix except obviously their own instruments are above everything else. The backing singers have a similar mix to Kylie but their vocals dominate in their own mix.” All in all FOH and monitors are running close to 80 channels, counting all the talk-back and the intercom along with the audience mics.

VIDEO
Just next door to monitors backstage is the world of video and Video Director for the show is Richard Turner of Lucky Frog Ltd. “Will’s design demanded a high quality, large scale central upstage screen which is 1920 pixels by 864 supported by two smaller side screens. All comprise VER WinAir WinVision9,” explained Turner. “It’s derived from a mature and reliable product, which is well packaged and quick and easy to assemble. It’s also very lightweight so great for touring. Also the fact that the side IMAG screens are the same product gives a...
Below: FOH Engineer Kevin Pruce specified a DiGiCo SD7 desk; Andy Gray at Phoenix Bussing supplied six tour busses for Kylie, the band, dancers and crew; Built around the geometry of a broken grid, Rob Sinclair’s visual design echoed the scenic framework that fills the upstage.

PRODUCTION PROFILE: Kylie

more cohesive look.”

The screen is fed from the VER touring video PPU. “We’re using a Ross Vision 3 Vision Mixer. I’ve got four manned cameras four robo-cameras and most importantly a really great crew,” said Turner.

“I’m delighted to be working with Ed Prescott - Crew Chief and Gerry Correy - Engineer, who’s getting some really fantastic pictures from Sony 1500 Cameras. They’re joined by Mark Wilkinson, head cameraman, James Valpy on camera, LED and Playback and Tom Keane, an experienced ex-chippy and new to the video game, is great at building LED and getting some great camera shots. Last but not least Ed Moore - a genius cameraman and LED engineer.”

As far as content playback goes Turner says it’s a pretty straightforward timecode locked single HD channel from a mac-mini Aja IoXT running virtual VTR combinations. “Kylie looks at the recording every night - both the wide shot and the programming recording and then we get notes. She’s mostly concerned with ensuring the whole show is covered, rather than just her. She puts a lot of time and effort into everyone, so she wants her audience to see everything.”

When it comes to treating the live images, Turner said: “We don’t do a lot of processing. There’s a bit of black and white, a bit of colour and a bit of strobe. Gerry does a few camera tricks where he adds a bit of “electronic Vaseline” or emphasises certain colours. There are a few punky bits, where shaking the cameras and fast cutting with content, created by Blink TV, are the order of the day. However it’s mostly about beauty shots, which is easy with such a beautiful show.”

A TACTICAL, SAFE PRODUCTION

The Kiss Me Once production was pulled together in just six months and making sure that happened was Technical Manager and Show Caller Steve Reeve. “My first meeting was with Creative Director William Baker and Set Designer Allan MacDonald. Over a three-month period we took the staging concept through a number of redesigns and rescales. We worked closely with Nigel Tranter of Total Solutions, who was brilliant. We have dancers coming on and off stage all the time, various stage lifts in use, lots of costume changes along with a host of props and scenic elements to manage, it’s a very theatrical show.”

Tranter added: “Our brief was to provide a multi-level rolling stage 60ft wide by 32ft deep with additional wings 10ft wide by 22ft deep each side. There was a 8ft wide by 32ft long thrust down to a 40ft wide by 12ft deep B Stage.” The final product was finished in black hi-shine. “We supplied the tour with our updated Arenadeck Rolling Stage System which
PRODUCTION PROFILE: Kylie

is easier and quicker to build. There was a 4ft star lift in the B Stage. In the main stage all inline were two 12ft by eight ft scissor lifts and a central eight ft by six ft scissor lift. One of the key staging elements were the cross stage steps. These incorporated LED lit nosings and lamp fittings under the step treads at three positions across the stage for access to the risers. There was an Upstage Set structure designed to have an industrial feel. This was created from a series of channel sections and towered nearly 24ft above the stage level incorporating a platform includes a certificate for every truss detailing the equipment used to ascertain the weights and an exact description of the truss loadings. The report also includes a quick reference guide for every point in the show and even LCR’s insurance certificates.

Mojo Barriers installed 80 metres for the front of stage and an additional 80 metres of stock was then added, bringing the total to 160-metres, which will be used at all UK and European dates, culminating on 17 November at Zurich’s Hallenstadion

and allows easier and therefore more cost efficient transportation and installation.

“For Kylie’s tour it is being transported along with the show’s other production elements, negating the need to rent barriers from local suppliers at each venue and ensuring the same levels of safety no matter where you are in Europe.”

A SIZABLE SHOW

This show is sizeable as Hopgood concludes: “We have 14 Fly By Night trucks on the road, Tour buses are three for crew, one Artist bus for Kylie, one Band Bus, one Dancer bus all arranged through Andy Gray at Phoenix. Lighting and video is supplied by VER and Sound comes from Eighth Day Sound. As ever catering is crucial and this year it is supplied by Popcorn, Blink TV, who we have worked with for a long time, produced the video visuals. The set and props have been made in the UK with Total suppliers at each venue and ensuring the same

The production reflects that and as a result is as upbeat, lively, fun and sophisticated as Miss Minogue herself. TPI

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for dancers to utilise. It was critical for the upstage set to have minimal structure to prevent obscuring the LED screens which was achieved with a neat solution.

“Quite a lot of these songs have been part of Kylie’s repertoire for some time, but with different arrangements and numerous new tracks, which have a different sound, the show is dynamic and varied...”

FOH Engineer, Kevin Pruce.

The barriers, a mixture of straight and specials such as corners and gates, allows the production team - headed up by Kevin Hopgood - to create a configuration that includes golden circle, t-shaped thrust for a catwalk and extended front of house. As requested by Hopgood, Mojo provided a custom powder coated black system to fit the show’s aesthetics. Having worked with Hopgood for 10 years Mojo’s experience and two way communications ensured the project was delivered without a hitch. Mojo Barriers UK’s Kevin Thorborn oversaw the project from design stages. He said: “Our G2 barrier system was the ideal system for Kylie’s tour as it was designed specifically for the touring industry, launched just over two years ago for Madonna’s MDNA tour. It’s proven extremely popular since then due to the benefits it brings production teams - namely the fact that it is lighter, more compact

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Below: The Production Angels. led by Production Manager Kevin Hopgood; A grid of Martin Professional MAC Viper Air FX delivered strong uniform down light beams of colour.