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Robe Has a Laugh with Bill Bailey

Products Involved

MMX Spot™ Spiider®

Hailed as one of the funniest people on the planet, English comedian, musician, singer, actor, TV / radio presenter and author Bill Bailey is back on the road for his “Larks in Transit” tour which was first performed in Australia in October 2017.

Dave Farmer of THC Design’s, Bailey’s lighting designer for the last 7 years, added Robe to the mix in the form of Spiiders and MMX Spots for the current UK theatre leg of the tour, which kicked off with five gigs at Shepherd’s Bush Empire in London over the festive period. Dave took a brief from the artist ahead of the tour, and that was to make it simple and stripped back. He didn’t want any video, rather favouring a classic stand-up ambience onstage, with all the focus on him and his routines.

Lighting is crucial to a comedy show, and although many theatre and arena comedy shows have to rely on at least some element of IMAG video to get the artist up close to everyone even if they are at the back of the room, doing a tour without it was a refreshing departure and also meant increased pressure on lighting.

Dave took the backdrop they had used in Australia as a scenic starting point for the visual design. Originally this was a map of the world, which he re-imagined as a scenic circular globe suspended inside a circular truss and fitted into a cut out backdrop.

This brings an authentic 3D impression to the stage and to the audience, it looks like a complete globe.

Further upstage is a starcloth to add a bit of magic and sparkle and help the globe appear to be floating in space!

A lot of the routine and subject matter involves tales from Bill Bailey’s trips, travels and adventures around the world.

Dave added four vertical trussing towers to the design using the original backdrop artwork from Australia to provide a consistent theme across all set objects.

The lighting provider was Sonalyst, so there was an inventory of Robe available to facilitate Dave’s design.

Shepherd's Bush Empire and some of the other venues are tight for flying, and although they did manage to fit in the globe for the London showcase, Dave wanted compact, powerful fixtures that would work in the more challenging spaces ... as well as on the larger stages and suit the innate adaptability of the design.

That was his primary reason for picking Spiiders and MMX Spots. He thought carefully about every detail in terms of what he actually needed to achieve with lighting ... as well as what was actually superfluous!

Another factor was that all the kit had to fit into one truck.

The five Spiiders are positioned around the circle, together with four MMX Spots and three 4-lite LED blinders.

On the floor in front of the circle are three MMX Spots and two 4-lite LED blinders, and on each of the four vertical towers which are wrapped in the same material as the backdrop, are another four MMX Spots positioned on top.

The tower metalwork is highlighted on three sides by Satellite LED 'bricks' and they also have two FOH follow spots on the road.

Dave likes Spiiders for the brightness, small size, light weight and excellent colours.

Two are positioned - via angled pipes inserted in the truss - at 8ft high around the circle, two at 18ft, and the fifth at 20ft ... so all are close to the artist. They are running in the simplest mode as individual pixel control was not required. "They are a really good, solid LED wash light" he commented.

The MMX's - even though they are an older fixture - he still loves for the gobo selection and animation wheel, used for creating some subtle and intricate effects and for atmospheric looks.

"It was essential to have small lights on the circle to avoid them fouling the drape". Larger fixtures would also have had to be hung farther forward which would have made flying and balancing the truss more complicated.

In fact it's probably the least amount of lights he's used on a show for a long time, but both the design and the choice of luminaires is testament to the successful application of the 'less is more' principal.

Lighting is run from a Hog 4 console being operated for the tour by Chad O'Grady and Dave Baxter is the technician.

Bill is delighted with the design and the 3D effect, and everything got off to a cracking start after the first week with plenty of positive feedback and comments from fans via social media and some great press reviews.

Photo Credit: Lindsay Cave



