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The Darkness and Black Stone Cherry co-headliner Blasts Around the UK with Robe

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A rock-tastic double bill of art house chaos from The Darkness and big-rock-show mayhem from Black Stone Cherry tore through the UK arenas like a whirlwind, delighting fans on a short but highly memorable co-headliner! This also united two lighting designers who were working together for the first time and 132 x Robe moving lights plus three RoboSpot systems supplied by lighting vendor Zig Zag Lighting!

Lighting designers Mark Scrimshaw (Black Stone Cherry) and David Garcia (The Darkness) pooled their specs, ideas and imaginations to create an overhead lighting rig that would work for both LDs and their respective artists, based on what Zig Zag largely had available from stock.

Throughout this process, Zig Zag's Neil Hunt incorporated their ideas into a single WYSIWYG plot until the final design evolved – ensuring everyone was “on the same page” when it came to the tight build schedules.

To give both LDs sufficient daily programming time, the whole flown system had to be clear of the stage by 10 a.m. each morning.

To this, both bands added their unique floor lighting packages.

With no video on the tour, serious pressure was on lighting, pyro and SFX to deliver all the thrills, spills and drama of two hi-energy sets offering great value for money both musically and for production values that looked totally different.

Black Stone Cherry

The shared overhead rig was populated with Robe BMFL Spots, Blades and WashBeams, Robe Spiiders and MegaPointes.

These were flown on three main trusses measuring 15, 16.5 and 18 metres wide to add depth and perspective to the stage space, plus two auxiliary pre-rigged trusses hung in front of the two upstage trusses to accommodate the BMFL Spots.

The numbers added up to 15 x BMFL Spots, 34 x MegaPointes and 32 x Spiiders, all chosen, together with 22 strobe zoom bars, to provide 'base lighting' needed to cover the stage.

The front truss featured 8 x BMFL Blades plus 6 x BMFL WashBeams which were paired up on the three RoboSpot BaseStations positioned side stage. A central BMFL Spot enabled The Darkness' to project their logo onto their backdrop.

The upstage 'backdrop truss' was a pre-rigged product, complete with moving LED battens on the downstage cord for illuminating the cloths and to help facilitate the changeovers, with The Darkness lame backdrop tied onto the bottom of the upstage chord. Black Stone Cherry's backdrop was tied behind it on the top upstage chord.

BSC's backline was set up on rolling risers upstage of the backdrop, so as The Darkness exited stage left at the end of their set, BSC's gear was manually rolled forward and positioned in one smooth move.

The six front truss BMFL WashBeams running in three pairs worked out perfectly for highlighting the three downstage musicians of both bands, and everyone - artists and LDs - appreciated the steep angles and nice clean slices of light that looked so elegant and avoided anyone being inadvertently blinded.

For BSC, the follow spots were run in open white for max visibility, with dimming controlled via the grandMA3 console. Mark really enjoyed working with RoboSpots which he'd also used last year on a tour with Volbeat (LD Niller Bjerrgaard).

Across four of the seven in-air trusses, 33 x 4-lite 'classic' moles, plus another six on the floor for BSC and blasting into the audience completed the rig.

BSCs extensive floor package was arranged on 2 x 24ft floor trusses with an 8ft gap in the middle to accommodate the drum riser steps. The top of the truss was level with their set risers with fixtures over slung from the top rail including four BMFL Spots and 5 strobe /

zoom bars a side (8 and 10 in total), so Mark squeezed a complete wall of light effects across the mid stage area.

Six MegaPointes were added to BSC's floor package, three either side of the drum riser. Some risers were grilled to allow further lighting from below with three Robe LEDWash 600s a side, rigged in a flight-case for speedy set up. They also provided some ACL-style beams shooting off the top of the set.

Mark crafted numerous retro rock and big PAR can looks into the set leaning into plenty of instinctual 'beam technology'. The Spiiders, BMFLs and MegaPointes provided all the base beams, and with plenty of dramatic shifts, hard-driving power chords and big swirling rock ballads, this is a show he prefers to run manually for maximum impact. It additionally allows him to react instantly to the nuances of the band.

While many of the Robes were offered due to Zig Zag's large inventory which has invested steadily in the brand over the years, Mark confirms that they were all fixtures "I would use anyway."

He added that the Zig Zag crew of Paddy Sollitt, Tom Rawlinson, Richard (Beard) Hutton, Isaac Phillips and Kyle Black and rigger Damian Courage were "fantastic and a real pleasure to work with."

The Darkness opened, played their stonking 75 minute set, then a front kabuki dropped in and the changeover took place behind that cloth.

The challenge for both designers was coming up with a basic overhead production rig that would work for both, for which flexible fixtures were essential, making Robes a great choice.

Another task, with a rig of this size, was finding enough finessing time for which BST had an extra production day in Cardiff giving Mark a little head start after 10 days of visualising at home.

Mark and David thoroughly enjoyed the experience of working together and hope to be able to do it again.

Both artists had their own touring and production management on the road, with the overall production co-ordinated by Reuben Warnes.

It was a huge success and everyone wished it had been longer, as they were just starting to roll and get into the vibe ... when the final shows at London Wembley came up in a flash!

The Darkness

The Darkness had the slight advantage, production-wise, of playing first after the opening act which meant that all their floor set up was in place and the audience was ready for their rambunctious set, complete with pyro, fireballs and all the flash-bang you'd expect from a Darkness experience!

Kansas City based LD David Garcia has worked with them since 2014, when they were the first band for which he was LD, and before then had been a fan of their glam rock craziness for some years, so all the stars aligned fortuitously to bring their talents together!

He described working with Mark Scrimshaw as "very easy - each day was a joy!"

They shared the overhead rig as discussed above, based on a jointly evolved production design that they could both use - albeit very differently. The Darkness' floor package included 17 additional BLFL Spots, 15 upstage on the floor along the back, and one downstage on each side.

David's original design had specified Robe LEDBeam 350s' but when Zig Zag offered Spiiders, he was very happy, and very satisfied with the BMFLs - a signature Robe power fixture he had embraced right from when they were first launched.

He made the most of all the overhead BMFLs, Spiiders and MegaPointes which were positioned for creating optimal rock show looks.

The Spiiders were great workhorses for David. "Excellent for throwing colour onto the stage and out into the audience," he enthused, noting that they worked 100% all of the time, in spite of "a seriously good hammering, especially the zoom which I use constantly!"

While knowing they are tough lights, he is still always impressed at how well they sustain this heavy bombardment!

The formidable battery of 15 x BMFLs - the only Robe on the floor for The Darkness - properly kicked ass and helped get the energy levels peaking.

David appreciated the flexibility of the RoboSpot system which ensured the highly active band members remained lit wherever they were on the stage, a space they used extensively!

He also spent two weeks in pre-viz before the start of the tour. The Darkness MO will typically go straight into show without production rehearsals, which is what happened here, so David was well prepared.

It was David's first time working with Zig Zag Lighting, and as a crew chief and head rigger himself, he confirmed that the Zig Zag team "were all brilliant with a great attitude!"

The Darkness look set for a 20th anniversary tour of their first and seminal Permission to Land studio album later in the year, which everyone is looking forward to!

Photo Credit: Lindsay Cave









