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Progressing to LEDBeam 350s

Products Involved

LEDBeam 350™

Audio Progress is a busy and inventive audio, lighting and staging company based in Palmerston North tucked into the beautiful southern rural heartlands of New Zealand's North Island, about 150km from capital city Wellington.

The enterprise is run by Malcolm McKinnon, who founded it back in the 1980s, originally as an audio specialist, and since then, he and the team have built a solid reputation for delivering high quality productions for all types of shows and events, concerts, and festivals.

A recent investment in 16 x Robe LEDBeam 350s sees the first Robe moving lights to join the Audio Progress inventory, and we are sure they won't be the last!

The new fixtures - delivered by distributor Jands New Zealand - are being used highly effectively and efficiently to light an increasing array of televised and streamed events serviced by Audio Progress.

Malcolm found they needed a high quality, multifunctional moving light with excellent optics that was optimised for working with camera systems.

As a musician with an engineering background, Malcolm has an interesting combination of nerdery and creativity. When he first started the company in the 1980s, it wasn't possible to buy modern PA systems in New Zealand!

Lateral thinking kicked in, and he built one himself primarily using JBL components initially for his own band, which naturally had the best sound system in the area! Word soon ricocheted around the rolling hills of Palmerston North and as the PA sounded pretty awesome, he soon started receiving rental inquiries, and the business started to blossom and grow.

By the early 1990s, production technology distribution had finally made it to New Zealand, and manufactured systems started becoming available to purchase, by which time Audio Progress had a reputation for being something of a sonic excellence pioneer.

To cut a long story short, the company expanded steadily, and in 1999 Malcolm designed and built his own staging system to service the evolving work, especially for music and cultural concerts. This was self-contained, stored and transported on a flat-bed truck ... and once again broke new ground in the region! The company also moved into its current warehouse in 2001, as a home was needed for the stage, which is still working regularly.

They needed lighting for the stage, so the first lighting stock – PAR cans and generic fixtures – joined the growing kit inventory, as the tech and the production values advanced with the demand for moving lights. The first purchases in this department were made with limited resources and were therefore price driven.

For a while this worked well, then as the shows and events started getting more complex, involved, and were more frequently televised / filmed / recorded, Malcolm, a perfectionist in all technical disciplines, was becoming increasingly irritated by features like the poor colour temperature and the lack of focus of the cheaper moving lights!

“Golden Shears” – the world's premier shearing and wool handling championship staged in Masterton, capital of New Zealand's shearing industry – was a great example of where their other moving lights suffered from crawling reds, sketchy whites and additional aberrations which generally didn't look great on camera.

The shearers typically work on a raised platform – with an average shearing time of 90 seconds per sheep – and below this, the wool handling takes place, all of which needs good, consistent light.

“Clearly it was time for change! We needed superior optics and colour rendering to deliver our clients the best-looking shows, so I started looking around,” he explained.

He was aware of Robe as a brand already and had hired some LEDWash 600s for a Kapa Haka festival from Grouse Lighting in Wellington which worked very well. The OB unit filming the show loved them and Malcolm was impressed generally with the quality of the fixtures and the light output.

However, it was watching the LEDBeam 350 product video, that really set him on fire as he was immediately struck by the power and features of this compact and highly flexible fixture.

For due diligence, he looked at smaller fixtures from two other manufacturers as well for perspective, and organised a shootout – of which the LEDBeam 350s were clear winners – before making the decision to go with Robe.

He had also asked clients, colleagues, and acquaintances to get a thorough assessment of their needs and which fixtures best met all of these and thought the price of the LEDBeam 350s was good.

The first 8 arrived followed by another 8 giving a current system of 16, which Malcolm expects to be growing soon.

They are proving ideal for many applications including as front lighting for the stage, where the cantilevered front truss is only 2.5 metres in front of the talent.

He's absolutely delighted with the results, especially with the general adaptability due to the zoom and other Robe refinements like the manual hot spot control, plus of course, the excellent colour mixing and general output characteristics.

"LEDBeam 350s have made a massive difference to how we can light all our productions. The quality and engineering are excellent, they are easy to handle physically, and they work brilliantly on camera. Basically, they have solved all the issues at once! It's been a great investment!" he concluded.

Photo Credit: Louise Stickland

