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The National Works with Robe in New Zealand

Products Involved

Spiider® BMFL™ Blade

Cincinnati rock band The National's touring lighting crew appreciated using a mix of Robe BMFL Blade and Spiider wash beam moving lights for their show at Auckland, New Zealand's Spark Arena venue, for which equipment was supplied by rental company NW Group / Oceania, and used to great effect to realise a touring version of Michael Brown's production lighting design.

The National played the Australia and New Zealand leg of their ongoing world tour in February and March in a show that embraces new material from two albums including the latest Laugh Track and continues through 2024.

The production is being co-ordinated on the road – like clockwork – by production manager Stuart Trenold and includes lighting and video crew chief Emil Hojmark from Denmark and lighting director Matt Greer from Virginia, USA who is operating lighting on the road.

Emil heads up the multitasking touring visual crew of four having started as The National's video tech 12 years ago. Production designer Michael Brown is well known for his creatively adventurous designs and penchant for producing different and interesting work, and Matt is responsible for delivering this art at each venue, which is smartly adaptable to accommodate different scenarios.

The fixture counts usually remain the same, but the kit can also vary when supplied locally, depending on what is available, as was the case for the two shows in New Zealand.

The National's standard rider spec includes Robe Spiiders and MegaPointes, "which are great, we love these fixtures, and MegaPointes are one of Michael's favourites – he uses them a lot," explained Emil.

Typically, they will utilise 35 x MegaPointes, rigged on custom frames with a video pod fixture hung a metre below each moving light, a meticulous design that needs precise alignment in

larger arenas.

This was the set up for the three US legs of the tour predating Australasia, and for Australia, but in New Zealand things were different.

Here they used a 12-metre wide by 5.5-metre-deep upstage video screen, with the MegaPointes replaced by the BMFL Blades, seven of which were rigged on each of four overhead trusses (total of 28), together with six Spiiders per truss (24 in total). The video panels were spread around the band on the deck in this iteration of the stage design.

“Spiiders are almost universally available everywhere that we are going,” said Emil, “so they are a constant that rarely changes.” He added that they were picked for their great coverage, good range of whites, excellent colour mixing and general versatility.

The production is carrying their own control package on the whole tour which includes one lighting console plus a separate one onstage for DMX video control over 4 robo-cams and playback sources.

Virginia-based Matt Greer’s creative career started while studying fine art at university and has included 10 years of basic training and venue work in and around San Francisco. He has been working with The National since 2021 when they re-started touring after the pandemic and has previously worked for Michael Brown with other artists including Death Cab for Cutie and The Postal Service.

He also mentions how fundamental MegaPointes are to the original design and what great lights they are generally!

He particularly likes how the colour range, including excellent pastels, has enabled the expansion of their scenes to include many gobo looks, both aerial and projected, sometimes combined with the animation wheel to match the style and texture of the video content which was produced by Ben Krall.

Spiiders are another popular choice based on availability and to suit the aesthetic. “We needed a powerful wash but one that wasn’t too physically large,” he noted.

Matt uses Robe fixtures frequently in his work and is always pleased to see FORTES, MegaPointes or LEDBeam 150s on a house rig or a rider. He also loves Robe’s Tetra moving LED bars although there are none on this design.

With a pool of over 100 songs to choose from to make up the set each night, the band are constantly adding new material, which keeps everyone alert and on their toes.

For Stuart Tenold, the level of support from all the lighting vendors on this leg of the tour was excellent.

From a local production and rental company perspective, NW Group / Oceania project manager Brent Greenwood, who co-ordinated the production supply for both shows – Auckland and Wellington – in New Zealand, generally appreciates the quality and reliability of Robe's fixtures.

Brent commented, "It was a great opportunity for the NW Group / Oceania to demonstrate its commitment to excellent crew and products by touring these shows back-to-back with a seriously creative lighting rig containing many Robe products. While New Zealand is a limited market with us being at the bottom of the world ... we can and do deliver killer shows meeting the highest spec'd riders like this one!"

In Australia, The National's Robe Spiiders and MegaPointes were part of lighting packages from Sydney-based Chameleon covering the Sydney, Brisbane & Melbourne performances, and Showscreens for the final gig in Perth.

Photo Credit: Louise Stickland



