

# What's Next for Eurovision?

By: Steve Moles



The front-of-house position for Eurovision 2013.

## This year's edition promises plenty of innovation

Last year's Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) saw the host nation Sweden make a sharp left turn off the treadmill of bigger, better, brasher. Not for them the grandiose confines of a purpose-built performance palace in Azerbaijan (no matter how ropery the building may have been, you have to admire the country'schutzpah); nor indeed the gargantuan Düsseldorf Esprit Arena, the enclosed 55,000-person capacity football stadium that preceded Azerbaijan. No, the Malmö hockey arena was an altogether more modest affair, though no less exciting for those who attended or merely watched on TV. On that basis, you have to say they proved a point.

When the costs of staging the next

competition can appear so daunting, fear of winning becomes an unwanted influence upon a nation's choice of song. However, just when it looked like Sweden had shown the way to get everyone off the hook, the Danes have decided upon an industrial premises formerly used for shipbuilding. Now, no one doubts that the Danes are equal to the task, but the bigger question is whether or not it will be worth it.

While a shipyard doesn't spring to mind as anyone's first choice to stage a major international television event, its selection does have some advantages, as show director Per Zachariassen explains. "We want to tell the story in the show that we are

based in a shipyard, and it is not just a classic venue at all. First of all, let me just say, it is actually not a venue, it is just a hall; at the same time the host city of Copenhagen is building a venue, we are also creating a huge television show." Thus, the shipyard becomes part of the narrative, and, more functionally, the building serves as a shell, a blank canvas almost. "And that is complicated—yet the advantage of the building is that we can do whatever we want. There is a bigger advantage, I think, in that we have a lot of height that we have never been able to work with before. It's 60m [200'] above."

There are many sound engineers around the European circuit who will not be so enthralled by the height: Industrial buildings tend to be boom-



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Claus Zier, set designer.



Nicoline Refsing, creative director/content producer.



Kasper Lange, lighting designer.

ing, resonant canyons of echo space. “The acoustic is very challenging,” agrees head of production Kamilla Monies. “One challenge is to reduce the reverberation time. We are working together with a company on reducing the reverberation time using equipment such as fabric, Rockwool, and also newly developed tools.”

The newly developed tools sound intriguing, but apparently we will have to wait until we actually visit Copenhagen for the show to discover what they are. Of one thing we can be certain: With a TV viewing audience in the hundreds of millions, it is a given that reverberation will have been reduced to tolerable levels, if

not completely eradicated.

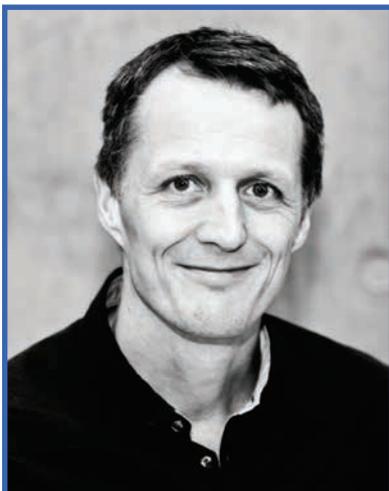
“Our head of sound, Claus Holm Pedersen, is definitely the best audio guy I know because audio—for me—requires discipline,” says Zachariassen. “Claus is really disciplined. He’s very well-organized; he knows every cable and every microphone. And he’s always looking for good people who can support him to make it even better. So discipline is probably the main thing we have been looking for as the most important element in the audio department.”

I called a good friend in the world of Danish pro audio, Lars Frederiksen, of Alfa Audio, who

confirmed Zachariassen’s choice:

“Claus Holm Pedersen is one of the most experienced and meticulous audio guys in the audio department of DR [Danish Radio].” It’s significant that Frederiksen should chose the word meticulous to describe Pedersen’s talents; not only does it endorse Zachariassen’s own comments about knowing every microphone, but Frederiksen offered this opinion before this Q&A session with the Danish production team was conducted.

But what of the design? We asked Zachariassen for some pointers. He says, “We have four different surfaces that we are able to produce content



Claus Holm Pedersen, head of sound.



Kamilla Monies, head of production.



Per Zachariassen, creative director.

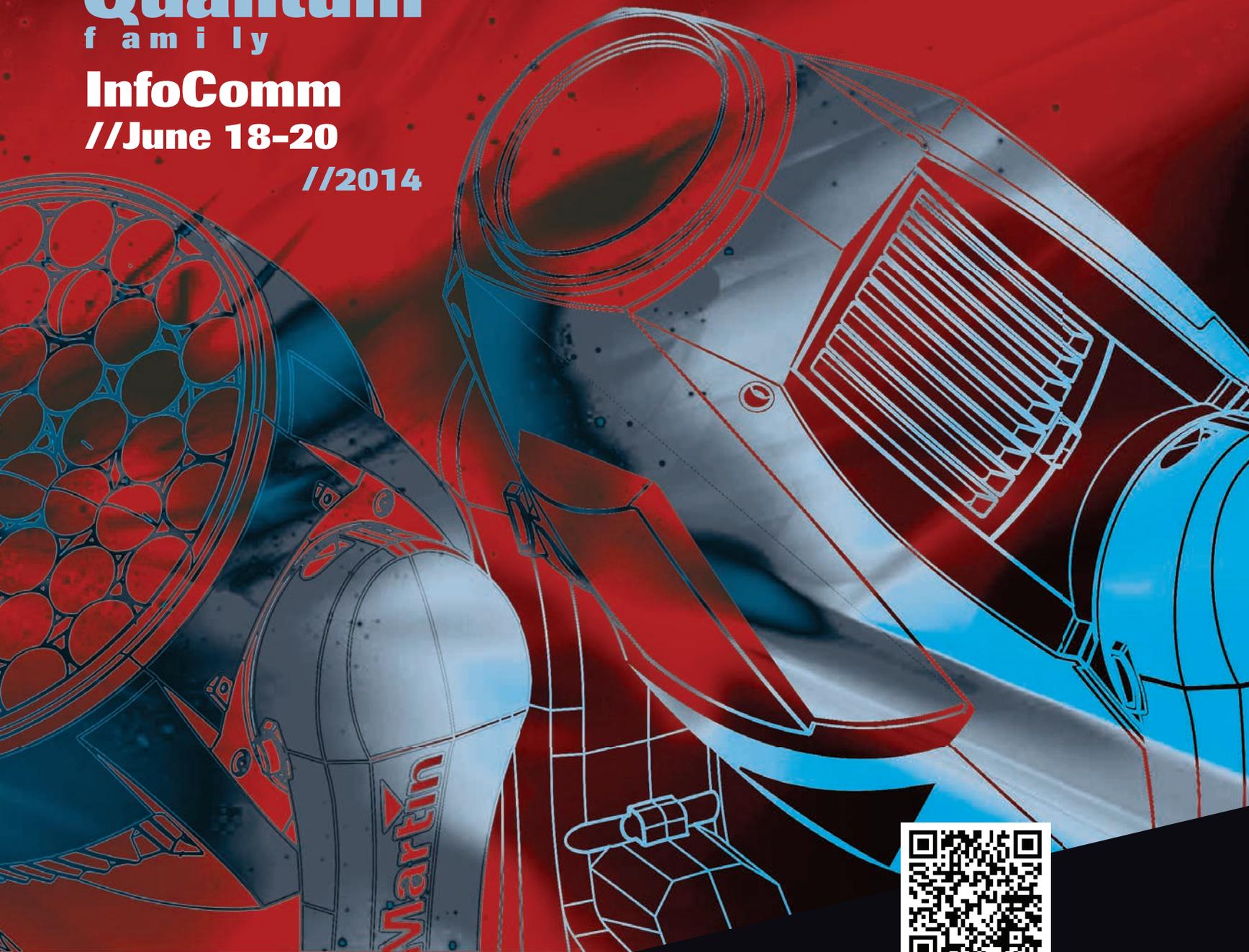
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on, so the stage can be transformed from act to act. We have a huge LED back wall. It's over 100m [330'] wide, and it's actually a classic back wall. On this, we can have all kinds of content and create all kinds of feelings ... The second kind of surface we have is the LED floor, which we also can put content on. Then there is the Cubus, as we call it, the third surface.

The Cubus is 18m [60'] tall and part of the stage design. We have LED panels on the Cubus as well. And the fourth kind of surface is what we call a magic film. It's a film that either can be transparent when you put power on it, just like ordinary glass, or if you switch off the power, it becomes opaque and you can actually project on it."

After Malmö chose to completely drop LED as a stage medium, that's a fairly emphatic reimposition of LED as a significant element of the stage set—and with projection, too. If nothing else, this show will look quite different from last year's.

"Our lighting designer is Kasper Lange," continues Zachariassen. "I've been working with Kasper for many, many years. He is definitely the best lighting designer I know. He really understands simplicity, which I'm always fighting for. Even though you have a lot of tools and a lot of power, you don't have to use it all. So the more you have, the more simple you have to keep it. That is the trick to making a nice show. It doesn't mean it cannot be spectacular. Of course, it can be spectacular. But you need to have a core idea and make that core idea even stronger. And Kasper is very good at that. If he wants to make this act red, it will become red, and there will not be any other color in the act, and that is, for me, simplicity."

And presumably that simplicity is reflected in the set design. "Set designer Claus Zier and I have also

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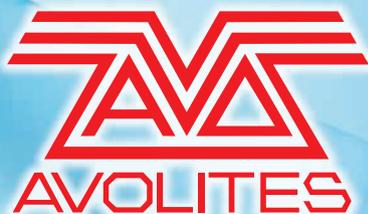
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been working together for many, many years," continues Zachariassen. "It is almost 20 years since we did the first project together. Claus is an architect. He's always thinking of what kind of shape and what kind of object is important to communicate before he starts building. And he thinks very much like an architect; that's what I like about him. He's looking for the idea first, and then he's adding layers to the basic idea."

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With that classic Scandinavian imperative of simplicity in design, might we imagine video content will bear considerable responsibility for differentiating between performers? "This is a new working relationship for me. This is the first project where creative director/content producer Nicoline Refsing and I have worked together." Not that Zachariassen appeared unduly worried: "I've heard many great things about her. She is based in London and has been working with a lot of really creative people in London for many years, doing a lot of high-end shows. I like that she has this combination of being very creative and very disciplined; she is very well organized. And at the same time, she is able to think outside the box; that is a really good combination."

That's probably as much as we're going to know in advance; perhaps the most tantalizing detail is the 60m [200'] of clearance. The fact that Zachariassen chose to mention it hints that we may expect some flown coup de théâtre (or should we say coup de TV?).

How have Zachariassen and Monies tied all the departments together to drive this along? "The whole development period was a very long process. For example, it took a long time to end up with the Cubus. Then new questions arose: What is going to happen in this Cubus? How is the stage going to work? And all these kind of questions, and that was a very long process," Monies says.

Zachariassen is more direct. "We have an overall value: the tagline 'Join us.' For me—again—it is about simplifying things, especially with vision because it usually has so many layers. And even though you are using a lot of equipment, it's still all about people. It's all about the people who control the equipment. For me, it was more about removing unnecessary layers and focusing on the core values of the show—the competition and the 'Join us' tagline. We look at the core values every time we take action or make a decision. And from that, it's easy to take creative decisions." 📶

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