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FLEETWOOD MAC

— *unleashed* —

A greatest-hits tour gets a thoroughly modern look and sound

By: Sharon Stancavage

For concert designers, one of the biggest challenges occurs when a band goes out on tour without a new album. New music can provide a focus for a tour; without it, the production designer can be left without a metaphorical rudder to guide the show.

Such was the case for Fleetwood Mac's current *Unleashed* tour. "Part of the issue with the band was that there was no new artwork or no branding identity to use as any kind of springboard for ideas," admits Paul "Arlo" Guthrie, of Toss Film and Design Inc. Nevertheless, Guthrie went into production with certain concepts in mind. "I wanted to somehow incorporate some elements from earlier on in their career as a

design aesthetic," he says. He also had some firm ideas on what he did and did not want from the lighting rig: "From the beginning, I also knew I wanted to incorporate PAR cans or simple imagery that would hark back to RDS projection and PAR can rigs." What he didn't want bucks the current trend in concert lighting: "Early on, I made a conscious decision that I didn't want to see any LED sources—I really wanted to get away from the very modern association, that kind of LED feel that is popular at present." Guthrie also looked to the members of the band for their ideas: "I've been designing everyone's separate solo outings, so we had to meld what we had been

doing for Lindsey [Buckingham] and Stevie [Nicks] into something all four wanted to have on the road."

There were extensive discussions, and even more revisions to the concepts favored by Guthrie as well as the talent. In the end, the designer created a beautiful, tasteful production that eminently suits Fleetwood Mac. The stage, designed by Guthrie and fabricated by All Access of Torrance, California, is brand-new. "We tour the stage—which a lot of arena acts do—for a number of reasons," says Guthrie. "We can set the lighting up off the floor while building the stage, we can drill holes in the decks and run cables underneath, and we can even have a patio area out back for quick-change tents."

The visual nexus of the set consists of six 24'-wide by 7'-high light boxes that provide the backdrop for the entire production. "Two of them are on the floor upstage, while four hang

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off Kinesys hoists; they're like big curved soft boxes. Inside, we have Martin LC Panels that provide the interior light-box effect, and then we project onto them with High End Systems DL.3s," Guthrie explains. The panels move throughout the show, transforming the stage. At times, they are also reminiscent of a California landmark: "If you took the Hollywood Bowl and cut six sections out of it, they curve that way in a bowl around the band. Two of them stand upright at the back of the stage, in a 7'-high upstage position. The other four are overhead, and move to different positions—it makes it look like a cyclorama, when they're softly, evenly lit."

Guthrie created the imagery for the light boxes. "Regarding the programming and content, because I know what I want and I think that I know how to do it the quickest way, I want to keep control over it, especially with a client who is demanding," he comments. "There was never going to be any wildly

complex 3-D animation or anything that would be very time consuming."

The six Barco/High End DL.3 digital lights that illuminate the light boxes externally are provided by Chaos Video of Los Angeles. "This tour is a living example of convergence," notes Fleetwood Mac's video director, Bob Higgins. "Lighting is involved with video, and video is involved with the lighting." However, says Guthrie, "It is

them as a camera feed," explains Higgins. During "Big Love," fans are treated to a shot of Buckingham's guitar, and in "World Turning," Mick Fleetwood's face appears on the light boxes. "His face is so fantastic that it works great," notes Guthrie.

Although most of the imagery within the show is textural, there are a few instances where it becomes a bit more literal. "The band really wanted

"I don't use a lot of color combinations; there are only two colors together at a time, with maybe some kind of projection texture that will add a third color. It's not a rainbow of fruit flavors or a bowl of Skittles." —Guthrie

quite a stark contrast between the internal LED from the Martin LC panels, which can create quite a bright, vibrant effect, to the DL.3s, which provide a kind of subtle projection on the face of it."

The DL.3s do more than just provide textual effects. "We also use

to incorporate some kind of imagery of the USC marching band with 'Tusk,' and we project that. For Lindsey's song, 'Go Insane,' I put together a combination of Saul Bass-style rotating elements—like in [the Alfred Hitchcock film] *Vertigo*—and images similar to a Rorschach ink blot



The curved light boxes are a kind of allusion to the curves of the Hollywood Bowl.



The light boxes are lit internally with Martin LC Panels; Barco High End DL.3 digital lights project onto them.

test,” Guthrie says. The imagery for both songs is created through a combination of LC panels and DL.3s.

For content playback, Guthrie chose the Mbox EXtreme media server from PRG. (The company also had a hand in supplying the lighting gear.) Curry Grant, PRG’s vice president of touring, coordinated the overall production package. “There’s a lot of great media servers out there, but the Mbox has same-layer cross-fading, which helps me out, and it is Mac-based, so, to me, it’s just a work flow and familiarity thing,” Guthrie explains. The Mbox also suited the nature of the project, he adds: “It was never going to be wildly complex media server playback; I just wanted something that was reliable and easy to use and familiar.” Indeed, the Mbox and LED panels are critical to the show, and are utilized from beginning to end.

Guthrie’s lighting package has a surprise built into it in the form of LEDs. “We’ve got 120 Barco LED PAR cans in the rig,” he reports. The units are a custom solution built for the tour, and provided by Chaos Video. “We took Barco O-lite panels and fitted them into an eight-by-eight

tray that sits in the back of the PAR cans; the yoke and everything else is the same. It’s all hanging in a pre-rig truss; instead of the bulb, there’s an eight-by-eight block of LEDs—when you look it, it looks like four trusses of PAR cans, which is a very iconic look for a lighting rig.” The LEDs also saved Guthrie and his lighting crew some time: “I knew that I wanted to establish that look, with the truss and a bunch of PAR cans coming out of it, and then I knew I didn’t want to deal with a hundred dimmers and focusing and gels.” The LED PAR cans unite new technology with a traditional concert approach to create a traditional, yet modern, look.

The rest of the rig is chock-full of automated fixtures, including a variety of Vari-Lite fixtures: 14 VL3500 Washes, six VL3000 Spots, six VL3500 spots, eight VL1000 Tungstens, and seven VL500s. Also on hand are five of PRG’s new Bad Boys. “I got a sneak look at the Bad Boys last year and loved everything about them,” Guthrie notes. “I was most impressed with the quality and attention to detail that had been put into everything about that light—the dimmer, the movement, the color, and

the optics are absolutely superb. I put five of them on the upstage truss in a backlight position and was blown away at their ability to cover the entire stage or the entire 60’ x 30’ backdrop. It is really exciting and refreshing to use a light that moves, responds, and works with such precision and beauty.” The rest of the gear list includes 14 MR16 mini-strips, six NILA lights, and six ETC Source Four PARs.

The show’s color palette is keyed to the origin of the individual songs. “There is a fairly big division between Lindsey’s signature songs and Stevie’s signature songs,” Guthrie explains. Moodier songs like “Rhiannon,” “Gypsy,” “Gold Dust Woman,” and “Dreams” belong to Nicks, while “Big Love” and “Tusk” are bolder. “Lindsey is more Mondrian, and Stevie is more Impressionist,” he explains.

Overall, the color palette is tasteful and appropriate. “I don’t use a lot of color combinations; there are only two colors together at a time, with maybe some kind of projection texture that will add a third color. It’s not a rainbow of fruit flavors or a bowl of Skittles,” he adds with a smile. The

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production is filled with lavenders, aquas, and golds, as well as bold reds and ambers.

To program the show, Guthrie used a grandMA from MA Lighting, distributed in the U.S. by A.C.T Lighting. "The grandMA has taken over the entire planet," he says with a chuckle. It's his console of choice for several reasons: "It's familiar, it's reliable, and our lighting director owns one."

The final component of the video page is the IMAG, provided by Chaos

Tour your own way

The man behind the front-of-house desk is veteran engineer Dave Kob. He's touring with a "Beta edition" of Clair Brothers' I-5 line array. "I believe we're the second or third tour out of the door with the new system, and we're doing a lot of field research," he reports. On the outside, the new I-5 looks exactly like its predecessor, the I-4. All improvements, both physical and electronic, have been implemented internally. The only obvious external

results thus far. "It's a work in progress, and we're still doing some tweaking, but it's definitely a big step in the right direction, and we're getting positive results," he says. At this point, Clair Brothers is compiling data from a variety of tours to see how different engineers tune the system; the company will then incorporate the mean values into the new system's software options.

The tour has twenty-eight I-5 loudspeakers and twenty-eight I-5B



Four of the six light boxes are controlled by a Kinesys motion control system, with 24 half-ton, 12 one-ton, and 12 two-ton motors.

Video. The video package includes a Grass Valley Kayak HD 300 M/E switcher, seven Folsom Image Pro HD image processors and a plethora of cameras, including four Sony DXC-D50Ws, two Sony BRC 300s, two Toshiba IK-HD1C ice cube cameras, and three XC 999 lipstick cameras. There are also two AV Stumpfl 12' H X 21' W screens placed in the traditional right/ left configuration, and "a couple of 18K Barco FLM 18 projectors," reports Higgins.

modification is the new hanging hardware, which is a vast improvement in flexibility, durability, and facility over the I-4 system. For Kob, the biggest change sonically is in the mid-range: "There's a lot more clarity and definition, which is most apparent in vocals and acoustic instruments. Also, the off-axis cabinet response is more even over the entire frequency spectrum; that makes for much smoother coverage throughout the arena." Kob is pleased with the

bass cabinets for the main line array, with two side arrays comprised of an additional sixteen I-5s; all are powered by Crown Macrotech 3600 amplifiers. There are also eight FF2 full range speakers spread along the front of the stage, and two BT-218 subs on the floor downstage center to fill in the front rows and make it, in Kob's words, "all warm and fuzzy up in there." As for the rest of the rig, he reports, "The low-end I-5B/BT-218 package is a perfect match for this



Guthrie lights Buckingham's songs differently from Nicks'. "Lindsey is more Mondrian and Stevie is more Impressionist," he says.

band. Fleetwood Mac's music doesn't need to have rolling thunder at 40hz and 110db. It's a full-range mix, but not overtly low-end heavy—nor should it be."

To mix the band, Kob is using two consoles: the Yamaha PM5000 for the

them, or you have an over-the-top number of inputs or need for outboard gear, then digital is the right tool for the job. I think if you check around, you'll find that a large percentage of FOH engineers doing live rock 'n' roll only recall basic fader,

Monitor engineers Rachel Adkins and "Team" Ed Dracoules are using two Digidesign Venue consoles to handle the band's monitor mixing.

For outboard gear, Kob has "lots of big, cool, expensive things," including Summit TLA 100s and Summit DCL 200s for the vocals and a Manley SLAM! for John McVie's bass. The effects list includes Lexicon 480L, Eventide H-3000, Yamaha SPX-2000, TC 2290 DDL, and Aphex 612 noise gates. While some engineers only use certain brands of microphones, Kob adheres to a different approach. He's using a Sennheiser e935 on Nicks' vocal, an Audio-Technica AT 6100 on Buckingham's vocal, with the other vocals split between e935s and Shure SM58s. The drum kits include a array of Beyer, Shure, AKG, Sennheiser, and Audix mics. "I've never locked into a single manufacturer or endorsement, as I feel there's no one company that makes the best microphone for all applications, I prefer to play the field and experiment. All the major brands are well represented here."

Fleetwood Mac's *Unleashed* tour ended last month; however, the band is scheduled to tour Europe and the U.K. starting in October. 📶

“I’m an unrepentant Analogasaurus. Analog sounds better, and I prefer the ergonomics of analog consoles over any digital control surface that I’ve tried. However, in a situation where you have so many changes and cues that you need total recall to execute them, or you have an over-the-top number of inputs or need for outboard gear, then digital is the right tool for the job.” —Kob

bulk of the analog inputs and a Digidesign VENUE with a Profile control surface for all the digital and the extra analog inputs. "I'm an unrepentant Analogasaurus. Analog sounds better, and I prefer the ergonomics of analog consoles over any digital control surface that I've tried. However, in a situation where you have so many changes and cues that you need total recall to execute

bussing, and muting functions, and use very little of a digital console's processing capabilities," he explains. Another key factor for Kob is the reliability factor: "In countless shows over the last five years or so, the PM5K has never let me down or even given me cause to be nervous. A digital desk is just a computer with elaborate audio interface software and a custom control surface."