

CANDY FORNIA DREAMIN'



Inside the surreal
and sugary world of
Katy Perry's new tour

By: Sharon Stancavage





The building's four-paned, symmetrical design was inspired by Andrea Palladio's Villa Capra, aka Rotonda, in Vicenza, 1668.

As an adult, there are certain phrases one doesn't expect to utter in conjunction to one's chosen profession—such as “whipped cream bazooka,” “cotton candy screens,” or “sausage chandelier.”

Of course, most adults don't inhabit the world of songstress Katy Perry. “It's not a bad world—it's Katy's head, and it's a fantastic place to be,” says Baz Halpin, director at Silent House Productions, who is the show director and production/lighting designer for Perry's current *California Dreams Tour*.

Halpin's transition into Perry's fantastical, color-infused world was gradual, as he explains: “When I started working on this, I would come back and tell Chris [Nyfield], the associate designer on the project, ‘She wants a cotton candy cloud; she wants giant gumdrops.’ And, at the beginning, there was the feeling of ‘She wants a what?’”

After about three months, Halpin and his team were assimilated, and

the seemingly bizarre requests became commonplace. “It just became the most normal thing in the world—a bazooka that shoots whipped cream, of course; let's get on it,” he says with a smile.

The show—complete with an unseen, Disney-esque narrator—follows Katy's adventures in the bright, confectionary land of Candyfornia. “Katy works for a mean old butcher and she hates it,” explains Halpin. “She has a cat called Kitty Purry—which she also has in real life—and she dreams of a better life, of getting away. There is also a baker boy who bakes cupcakes; he's her pseudo love interest.” The show's video content provides the basis for the narrative, and it follows Perry on a five-scene adventure that includes—but isn't limited to—mimes with a magic brownie; a living, dancing slot machine; a very, very young Elvis; and even a magic dress. “Baz has created such an innovative design—he's produced a show that has strong elements of narrative. It's almost like a musical comedy,” notes Pat

Morrow, senior vice president of Chaos Visual Productions of Burbank, Nashville, and London, the show's video vendor.

Halpin and Nyfield's ultra-colorful scenic design provides the basis for Perry's foray into Candyfornia. “The design of the show includes pink cotton candy clouds, gumdrop staircases, giant lollipops, candy cane railings, candy swirls, and all things sweet,” Halpin says. The Marley features a “blue-and-pink peppermint swirl” at the end of the thrust, while the upstage ramps feature red-and-white peppermint stripes. While the team at Silent House created the visual design of Candyfornia, the physical part of it was provided by ShowFX Inc., of Santa Fe Springs, California, who also supplied the soft goods. The rolling stage, provided by All Access Staging, of Torrance, California, is 86' wide and includes several lifts and the aforementioned 30' thrust.

Perry spends most of the show surrounded by dancers clad in sparkly, colorful, confectionary



Above: The Roy Lichtenstein look for “Hot ‘N’ Cold.” Below: One of the many special effects contributed by Quantum FX.

costumes—and, she, as well as the dancers, becomes airborne several times. She goes up in a swing during “Not Like the Movies,” and the dancers fly during “Pearl,” thanks to gear from Flying by Foy, of Las Vegas. “Katie does an unplugged section, and she flies on her cotton-candy cloud over the audience, singing ‘Thinking of You,’” explains Halpin. As the cloud, which includes a candy-cane safety bar, gets close to the seats at the back of the arena, the response of her fans is predictable. “If you’re standing on the floor, or in the cheap seats in the horseshoe at the back, it’s like you’re in a club, and, all of a sudden, she’s 10’ from you,” notes Morrow. “The fans go crazy, and it’s another way the production gives them the most for their ticket money.”

One of the biggest challenges for Halpin was designing a show that



started out playing theatres in Europe, went to arenas in the US, and then back to theatres on the Continent. “That’s a tricky thing to do, to keep adding on so it looks like a singular

concept,” the designer admits.

To keep the show in the one-size-fits-all-venues category, Halpin designed a deceptively simple lighting rig based on straight trusses. “I wanted

to create a show that was incredibly flexible,” he says. “All the trusses are 20’ HUD sticks, so that, if need be, they can be compressed by dropping the middle section.” The downstage is comprised of two curved trusses, and sidelight is provided by two 20’ trusses running upstage and downstage. “The sides can be taken down and run vertically, like an old-school Jethro Tull tour,” he adds.

Programming, which was done by Halpin and Bryan Barancik on the Martin Professional Maxxyz console, was complex, because there would be no rehearsal time when the show expanded. “I had to be very conscious when programming it, and had to think about what I would be able to clone and how I would be able to increase the size and make programming make sense,” Halpin says.

The programming dilemma had a twofold solution, he adds: “By keeping everything in 20’ sticks and lighting in groups, we were able to expand when the show got bigger.” The trussing is also a part of Candyfornia, and includes a fluffy, inflated cloud border.

The lighting rig, provided by Upstaging, of Sycamore, Illinois, has a variety of instruments, all chosen to get the most bang for the buck. “Up in the air, there are a lot of [Clay Paky] Alpha Beams, [Philips Vari*Lite] VL3K Spots, some Coemar Infinitys, and the usual smattering of four-light DWEs and [Martin Professional] Atomic strobes,” reports Halpin. The instruments provide every color in the rainbow, as one might expect.

When the tour moved to the US, says Halpin, “We added a whole bunch of Sharpys and more Alpha Beams.” The Clay Paky Sharpys—an incredibly bright, yet small and lightweight, automated lighting unit, featuring a 189W Platinum 5R discharge lamp, an interchangeable color wheel with 14 fixed colors, and an interchangeable gobo wheel with 17 fixed gobos—is a new favorite of

the designer. “You can’t go wrong with a Sharpys,” he says.

The workhorse of Halpin’s rig is the budget-friendly Martin Mac 301. “I have nearly 60 of them,” he reports. The units are also found framing the three LED walls ensconced in pink fluffy clouds. “The 8mm WinVision walls are really gorgeous and the clouds really integrate the LEDs into the scenic design, creating a cohesive whole,” Morrow notes.

The LED walls are a new addition to the tour—although, because of the flexibility that Halpin built into the design, video was always a part of the show. “We initially had three projection screens in Europe,” he notes. “Even in the smaller venues, we could get at least one video screen in.” Going from projection to LEDs wasn’t the easiest task, however. “Putting the clouds together with the LED walls was one of the biggest challenges for us,” Morrow admits.

The production also includes five Barco R12 projectors—four plus a spare—for left and right IMAG, directed by Richy Parkin. “Richy’s direction, along with his choice of camera shots, cuts, and the use of B-roll, really helps weave the narrative that Baz and Katy created,” comments Morrow. The video package includes a bevy of Sony cameras with Fujinon lenses, a Toshiba Ice Cube camera kit, and a lipstick camera, with video control by Sierra Lassen.

The almost omnipresent content for the show was created by Olivier Goulet, at Geodezik, “my longstanding partner in all things creative,” says Halpin. The images run the gamut, from the text in “ET” to the Roy Lichtenstein cartoons of “Hot ‘N’ Cold” to the Tim Burton-esque forest in “UR So Gay” and the animation in “Hummingbird Heartbeat,” which is reminiscent of the animated film based on the Beatles classic “Yellow Submarine.”

While the visuals are used to augment the songs, the narrative content dips into black and white occasionally, combining the essence of *The Wizard of Oz* with a bit of *Alice in Wonderland* thrown in for good measure. The visuals are run off of a Martin Maxedia media server. “All the video content is time-coded, but Brad, our lighting director, likes to be hands-on and operate it manually,” Halpin says.

Cotton candy scents and smoke bubbles

No candy-infused celebration would be complete without a variety of delightful effects, and Perry doesn’t disappoint. As the show begins, a scent wafts through the air; it’s the aroma of cotton candy, and it’s not accidental. “There are companies that do everything, I have found,” Halpin says with a chuckle. Other effects include pyro from Quantum FX, of London during the finale, Katy candy coins, and even ginormous, smoke-filled bubbles that bounce through the crowd.

Yes, smoke filled bubbles, which absolutely enchant the audience. “It’s a gag Katy saw somewhere—there was a Paris fashion show that had runway models walking down the catwalk, and there were smoke-filled bubbles dropping from the ceiling, and, when they popped, smoke came out,” explains John Huddleston, director of lighting services at Upstaging.

Of course, creating smoke bubbles for a one-off fashion show is entirely different from creating large, bouncy smoke-filled bubbles night after night on a world tour. “They initially farmed the job out to a couple of special effects companies and no one could do it, so they called me, and I said, ‘We’re just going to do it ourselves,’” explains Halpin.

So Upstaging took on the task, with one week to figure out a solution. “These days, you have to be able to respond instantly to bizarre requests,”



Above: Perry rises 15' in the air for "Pearl," a situation that challenges Peter Keppler, the front-of-house engineer. Below: Laser Design Productions provided the elaborate laser effects.

Huddleston says philosophically.

Creating smoke-filled bubbles isn't as easy as mechanically mating a bubble machine with a smoke machine. The bubbles themselves couldn't be too delicate. "For the actual wall of the bubble, we tried about eight different bubble mixes. We finally found a bubble mixologist on the Internet, who does bubbles for magicians and such, to assist us," says Huddleston.

Keeping smoke inside the bubble wall wasn't the only bubble-related issue, Huddleston explains: "We need to move them around, so we have different fan configurations to move the bubbles into the first row of the audience—if the solution isn't right, as soon as you hit it with a fan, it breaks, so we had to get the thickest bubble wall we could."

Although the vision of smoke-filled



bubbles dancing into the audience is charming, that isn't the only purpose of the fans. "You have to direct the bubbles, because they get slippery on the Marley, so you have to blow

them away from the stage," says Halpin. Huddleston and his team attest to the viscosity of the bubble mixture. "It was so dangerous—we were sliding around the shop like we

were on ice skates,” he says.

Then there’s the smoke. It can’t be too thin, because it won’t be seen. If it is too thick, it fogs up the stage. If it is too hot, it will cause the bubble to burst. Because of the time involved, Huddleston and his team decided to test a number of existing fog machines. “The last one we tried was the perfect combination—it was a cooler smoke, was less dense, and the smoke dissipated quickly,” he explains. The solution was the Martin Jem ZR44 Hi-Mass fogger. “We run the ZR44 set in steam mode,” he adds.

Huddleston and his team created four units comprised of a fan, the ZR44 smoke machine, a bubble machine, and a manifold. “They have to mix the fluid using distilled water every day,” he says. “It comes concentrated; they have to mix it properly, or they won’t get the right bubbles.” The bubbles, which are softball-sized, float across the stage during “Not Like the Movies.”

“The design of the show includes pink cotton candy clouds, gumdrop staircases, giant lolipops, candy swirls, and all things sweet.”—Halpin

Perry also finds herself surrounded by unearthly lasers, courtesy of Laser Design Productions, of Las Vegas—during the aptly named song “ET.” “Baz approached me at the beginning and wanted to use two lasers, and I knew that was never going to work on that type of stage,” says Lorenzo Cornacchia, president and lead designer of Laser Design Productions. After some budget wrangling, two lasers became five. “We basically went to three full-color lasers [one 13W full-color DPSS/diode laser and two 10W full-color DPSS/diode laser], and I also gave them two 3W green Yag lasers, which are basically used for filler,” notes Cornacchia.

A stage filled to the brim with candy-infused whimsy posed a

challenge for Cornacchia and his team. “We really had to think about where we put the lasers,” he says, “If we put them upstage and them on the ground, you’re not going to clear the dancers and you’re not going to clear the band members.” Instead, he placed the Yags offstage, while the three-color lasers are found above the stage. “We have two full-colors, right and left of the staircase, and they’re basically up about 10’ on a vertical truss so they can clear everybody. There’s one laser hanging upstage center, which projects down and hits the flap on the downstage edge.” The various locations of the lasers let Cornacchia and his team create “multi-levels of lasers,” he adds.

As for the song itself, Halpin says, “Basically, ‘ET’ is a super-futuristic song—it’s just about lasers and video content; the only lighting is from the floor.” It also features magenta lasers, which match the color palette of the show perfectly.

Laser Design Productions also provided the custom-cut candy confetti that rains down on the audience. “Once you do custom stuff, it could all get shredded coming out of the blowers, because they push it out at a rapid pace. You have to be careful,” Cornacchia adds.

Sweet sounds

The audio is handled at the front of house by Peter Keppler, a veteran of tours with Nine Inch Nails and David Bowie. “This is my first pop tour,” he admits. And, like every other front-of-house engineer working a show that has an audience comprised of young females, he has some challenges to face. “I have found that no matter how loud the mix is, they will always

scream louder than you,” he says. His perfectly natural reaction was to turn up the PA. “It just didn’t work, and I found that, instead of trying to outdo them, I just mix at my normal level.”

Not only are the young girls in the audience loud, they scream at a frequency that can be identical to that of feedback. “At times, I think Katy’s mic is taking off in the PA, but it’s just the screaming,” says Keppler. His solution sounds easier than it really is: “You have to try and get your brain to differentiate between the two sounds.”

Perry is on two separate microphones: the Sennheiser 5300 series RF on stage, and, when she’s in the air during “Thinking of You” and on several songs that are heavily-choreographed, a DPA 4088 headset mic with a cardioid pattern. “The DPA mic sounds great,” says Keppler. “I love it. I wish we could use the Sennheisers for everything, because they sound amazing, but some of the performance doesn’t allow for a handheld.” The Sennheiser sparkles like the rest of the set, and her mic stand is also covered in bling from top to bottom. Keppler says, “We have a ‘bling’ tech on the road with us—the very lovely and talented Erin Lareau. She’s in the wardrobe department and does all the men’s outfits, but she’s done all of Katy’s mics and mic stands, and practically anything else that glitters, too.”

For the band, Keppler uses a variety of Sennheiser products on the drum kit—except for Shure K137s on the high hat and ride. For the snare drum, Keppler auditioned the Telefunken M80, recommended by Jason Vrobel, his system tech. “As soon as we put it on the snare drum, I thought, this is really something,” Keppler says. “It has a far narrower and tighter pattern than a 57, and it sounds a bit more like a condenser mic in some areas.” In fact, he adds, “Don’t get me wrong; I love SM57s—but, so far, anything a 57 sounds good on, the M80 sounds better.”

CONCERTS

Originally, Keppler had a Shure 57 and KSM32 on the guitar cabinets, but the M80 has replaced the KSM 32. “This is the first mic that I’ve put on both of these instruments and said, ‘This is actually a significant step up’.”

At the front of house, Keppler is using an Avid Profile. “It has a small footprint, it sounds good, it’s an easy reach to all the faders, and it is capable of using plug-in packages that I’m familiar with,” he says. It has been his console of choice for the past five years. However, it’s not without its faults, he notes: “I wish the faders were of higher caliber—the failure rate has been pretty high, especially on NIN tours. Luckily, replacing them is not a very difficult task, but there could be improvements in the quality.”

The Profile works with Keppler’s favorite plug-ins, a function that was important for this particular tour. “I use plug-ins from SPL (Sound Performance Laboratories) and the Waves Mercury Bundle, which I love. And Crane Song Phoenix sounds great on the acoustic instrument DIs,” he says.

There’s also something somewhat atypical at the front of house with Keppler—a set of Genelec 1031a reference speakers. “Using headphones during a live show is, for me, a real inconvenience,” he says. “It means going from one listening environment into another—from open air into headphones and back again—it removes my hands from the desk, and it puts me in a different acoustic space.” The Genelec speakers help keep him in the same aural environment throughout the show, he adds: “I mix 103/104dB, A-weighted, but I can still get the Genelecs to cut over that and I can still hear what I need to if something’s got to be soloed.”

For Keppler, however, being a front-of-house engineer isn’t about the gear. “I’d mix on an old Tapco six-channel mixer if I had to,” he says. “It



Above: Halpin’s sketch of the full stage layout. Below: The cotton candy cloud elements.



doesn’t really matter that much—it’s more about the engineer, the systems engineer, and the monitor engineer.”

Keeping the band happy is the key to making Keppler’s mix run smoothly. “If the artist or band can’t hear what they need to hear, the performance is going to suffer,” he says. “If the performance suffers, I can’t fix that.” Manny Barajas is the man behind the monitor desk, keeping the performers happy. Keppler says, “He’s doing such a great job with Katy and the band. I

don’t have to worry at all.”

For the tour, Keppler is road-testing the new Clair Global i-5b PA. It’s the PA’s third tour; it’s also been on the road with Roger Waters and Bon Jovi. “It involves the elements of the i-5 system, but it’s all in one box,” he says. The main PA hang consists of 14 i-5bs per side, working with six Clair BT 218 subs on the ground. The side hang is comprised of eight i-5 and six i-5bs per side. “The integration between the front and side hangs was felt to be better with the same driver

