

A FEAR CRY FROM YESTERDAY



The latest product of Howard Ungerleider's long-term collaboration with Rush

By: David Barbour Photography: Todd Kaplan

Of the many elder statesmen of rock still to be found on the road, Rush arguably presents the most contemporary face. Maybe it's because Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson, and Neil Peart have been reinventing themselves musically for more than three decades. Maybe it's because they still have the stamina to entertain their fans with three hours-plus of fiendishly intricate performances. And maybe it's because of their long-term

lineup of new material (plus some old favorites) filled with trippy music and video sequences exploiting the band's oddball sense of humor. (There are onscreen appearances by Rick Moranis and Dave Thomas, as the McKenzie Brothers, plus those little brats from *South Park*, paying tribute to "L'il Rush.") Ungerleider, whose wide-ranging career takes in concert touring (his company, PDIFX.com, is currently out on tour with Tool), clubs,

hover in a series of configurations. A set of custom-designed blinders can bathe the audience with washes that equal the intensity of stadium lights. And, this being an Ungerleider show, there are dazzling blasts of lasers slicing through the air.

The entire design of the lighting rig is a complex, multilayered affair, a geometrically sophisticated blend of curves, squares, and straight lines. Indeed, the concept reveals how in sync the designer is with the band's creative vision. "Each of the S trusses is made up of several pieces on hinges—it's like a snake," says Ungerleider. "It was only after I came up with it that I found out the name of the album was *Snakes and Arrows*. I said to them, 'This is pretty strange—here's my system.'"

Indeed, one suspects, only Ungerleider could have come with this rig, which is distinctive verging on the bizarre. Upstage, two S-shaped trusses make their sinuous ways horizontally across the stage; placed on them is an array of moving lights, making alternate rows of High End System Studio Beams and Martin Professional MAC 2000 Washes, the latter with custom colors. Way upstage, behind the video screens, is a fireplace mesh backdrop, supplied by Cascade Coil of Portland, Oregon, which is lit by a set of Coemar Power Cycs, contributing their distinctively bright cyc-light look. Then there are the pods—imposing hexagonal structures that hover above the stage, containing four High End Systems x.Spot Xtremes with custom gobos, one Mac 2000 Wash, and one Martin Atomic 3000 strobe. The perimeters of the pods are covered with six Color Kinetics ColorBlaze 48s, which give them their uniquely glittering look. The pods are set on Chain Master Vario Lift hoists, from Show Distribution; as manipulated by Ungerleider, they come in at many angles, like a fleet of UFOs; at other times, they look like the gears of some infernal machine.



Ungerleider's pods fly in at odd angles to create unusual effects.

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Thus the *Snakes and Arrows* tour combines novel visuals with a solid

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There's one video screen for each member of the band; Dave Davidian controls the media with a Ross switcher.

And we're only getting started. Also curving above the stage in a modified S formation is a series of blinder units—another original conception. “They have three rows of MR16 zip strips placed between rows of ColorBlaze 72s,” says Ungerleider. “I had the MR16s wired, ten bulbs at a time, so I can do chases with them.” There are also sidelight units, attached to Vario Lift hoists, which can lower in to provide additional colorful side washes as needed—something of a first for Ungerleider. This is also a big followspot show, with six Lycian M2s plus four house spots. The impressive bursts of smoke are created by High End F100s and Reel EFX DF-50 hazers.

For anyone who's counting, the fixtures totals include 52 x Spot Xtremes, 32 Studio Beams, 37 Mac 2000 Washes, ten Power Cycs, 12 High End Cyberlights, 21 Atomic strobes, 16 ColorBlaze 72s, 30 ColorBlaze 48s, and 24 MR16 ministrips, plus one ETC Sensor dimmer rack and four 400A x 208V power distribution racks. Lighting gear was supplied by Premier Global, which has offices in both Nashville, Tennessee, and Regina, Saskatchewan.

Controlling the lighting is a pair of High End Systems Wholehog IIIs, the love-it-or-hate-it-console that has left a trail of divided opinions behind it. Ungerleider definitely falls into the love category. “We had very minimal programming issues,” he says, adding that the board has stood up to the rigors of the road.

With this rig, Ungerleider is well-equipped to induce what he gleefully calls “retinal fatigue.” In truth,

the designer, “And I'm using something like eight different height levels of lighting.”

Then again, could it possibly be an Ungerleider production without lasers? The designer's company, Production Design International, supplied a pair of 60W Laserscope YAG units, which cut through the atmosphere like a row of sabers, meeting the angled downlight from the pods at perpendicular angles.

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however, he's too clever an artist to do that. Thick bursts of hot colors alternate with spectral pod arrangements, which give way to startling bursts of hot curving white light. The rig's flexibility gives him a seemingly infinite number of angles, and he works them for all they're worth, creating a nearly inexhaustible procession of looks. “I love having five different varieties of beams,” says

The video, while not quite as complicated, is, nevertheless, not your usual concert layout. There are two sets of media servers playing different roles. Because Ungerleider says LEDs are labor-intensive to program—he's not alone in thinking that—he's running video through the Color Kinetics gear, using ArtNet protocol and a series of Catalyst systems. The video on the three 10mm

CONCERTS

Toshiba screens is fed by Doremi playback devices. (The screens are 11' 2" high; the left and right units are 14' wide and the middle one is 21' wide.) Serving as video director is Dave Davidian, himself a concert lighting designer of note. He's keeping track of three manned cameras, four POV robotics (two of them in light pods), which provide the IMAG. Then there's the video content, much of it produced by Allen Weinrib, Geddy Lee's brother. (Additional material was provided by the firms Derivative and Spin Productions.) Using a Ross switcher, Davidian keeps all the video imagery under his control. "It's all routed through Dave," says Ungerleider. "We control the Catalyst, but Dave controls the switching all through the show," running four channels of Catalyst



Left: Lighting and lasers at work together. Right: Lifeson and Lee jam.

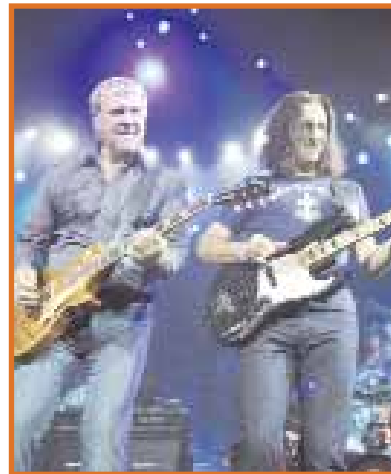
media and four channels of Doremi playback. Davidian also uses a Pinnacle digital effects unit to facilitate single panoramic screen effects and special colorization effects.

Screenworks provided the video gear.

Everything comes together to create a parade of wild visuals that evoke the song's mysteries without seeming pretentious or overblown. The fun begins with the first number, "Limelight," with imagery of paintings, bearing the *Snakes and Arrows* logo, flying across the screen, followed by

the appearance of a pram on a mountaintop, an unmistakable allusion to the film *Rosemary's Baby*. There's a burst of audience light and three pods fly in, bathing Lifeson in hot bursts of white light. The McKenzie

brothers introduce "The Larger Bowl," in which pods prowl the audience with green and blue washes. In "Far Cry," the lyric, "You can almost see the circuits blowing," cues a searing burst of pyro



controlled by John Arrowsmith, followed by a rainbow spectrum of colors from the pods and LED blinders. "Witch Hunt" features a dizzying display of smoke, lasers, and pod light. Pyro effects, supplied by Pyrotek, include 18 one-second gerbs in a chase effect and a eighteen 25' silver comets with tail, plus a concussion effect. In "One Little Victory," a dragon image appears to breathe fire; eight dragon heads and three fire balls are used in this sequence.

In "Malignant Narcissism," Peart's drum kit revolves to a video display of great vintage jazz musicians. During "Summertime Blues," you can amuse yourself watching stagehands tending the three rotisseries located behind

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Lee, who, lacking any extensive backline gear, fills the gap with unexpected props (On the last tour, it was a set of laundry dryers.)

Ungerleider says he had eight weeks to design the show and adds, laughing, "This is the first tour where almost everything arrived before the first shows." He programmed the lighting, working with Tim Grivas, an old hand at High End consoles. Of course, having come up with something so new, Ungerleider had to worry how it would pan out. "I knew it worked on paper," he says. "But we were programming and rehearsing at the Hershey Center in Mississauga, Ontario, a space with a very low trim—so it was hard to visualize. The first day, I was thinking to myself, is this gonna work?"

Clearly it does, thanks to the work of those already mentioned plus Ungerleider's associate, Matt Tucker; the crew chief, Rich Vineyard; and A.J. Seabeck, the laserist; and crew members, Greg Haygood, Randy Garrett, and, on video, Bob Larkin, Bill Quinn, and Nick Strand, and John Fletcher, Chris Sorenson, and Jacques Richard, who brave the heights each day to hang the show.

It's all in the service of another time-defying Rush tour. The band stays on this continent through September, then heads off to Europe for a month. But don't worry—Rush will be back. And soon. 🎸