



The Grand Tour: Designing a Corporate Event with an Around-the-World Theme

Berkshire Hathaway Home Services held an event for 3,500 real estate agents at the Mirage Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, and the production company Corporate Magic pulled out all the stops to give it a distinctive profile. Stephen Dahlem, senior creative director of Corporate Magic, says, "It consisted of three meetings, two of which were devoted to business and messaging. They also support a charity, The Sunshine Kids, a children's cancer fund that many BHHS Affiliate offices donate money to. The final night is a celebration for those who gave the most; it's a fundraiser—they sell the seats and bring in celebrity headliners. This year, we built a custom 45-minute show for them. It was sort of a celebrity DJ night show with a cast of 22, including six heavy-hitter singers, a cast of dancers, aerialists, and other circus performers."

As the accompanying photos show, the production was distinguished by an ultra-wide design featuring projection screens. "The whole setup was about 250' long," says Dahlem. "We had 100' of screen at left and right, and, in the middle, a 20'-tall LED circle screen, mounted on a rotating base turntable, so that it could spin to reveal cast members and additional scenic elements. At the left and right of the turntable were three-tiered band decks, with a nine-member band divided on both sides. We had three projector stacks aimed at the screens at left and right."

Dahlem continues, "The concept of the show was that a hot, cool G5 airplane was landing in the room, picking up the audience and taking them on a worldwide trip to pick up the rhythms of different regions. When the plane 'pulled in,' we had an enormous wing projected on each of the wide screens. Then, with the help of the staircase, we revealed that everywhere we 'landed,' something exciting was happening—Carnival in Rio, a Fashion Show in Paris, New Year's Eve in New York City. There were seven destinations

in all and each had its own musical vibe—country, hip-hop, classic rock, dubstep. The opening was a fun mashup: Dubstep meets retro flavor meets Pan Am girls. We had multi-channel audio, with a live band, playing in sync with the video. At the end of the production, we 'landed' in Vegas, where the party never stops. That's where it turned electric: All the costumes were lit with LiveWire and LEDs; the stage look went UV and everybody looked dazzling. The audience was invited to come on down and, for 45 minutes, join in on the dance party.

As is usually the case, the time frame was hectic, to say the least. "From the time the client said, 'Go,' it was a six-

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month process, but we brought in performers from all around the US, and everybody came together for the first time on site in Las Vegas in our four-hour rehearsal.” Even in accounting for the unstable nature of live production, Dahlem seems unusually calm about the curveballs that came his team’s way. “The rigging was different from what we had been told. A front lighting truss had to be moved to a much closer position, which was a concern that this would interfere with the aerialists. Luckily, they are from

Vegas and we brought them in early, which allowed us to modify the production.”

“And then, if that wasn’t enough,” he adds, “the A1 audio guy got food poisoning right after the morning session. We were rehearsing until ‘doors,’ and when we started rehearsing, he had to bail. The A2 stepped into the designer position. We always plan for a backup, but when it is something as high-profile and tightly scheduled as this, it was the last thing you want to happen. Fortunately, he was awesome—



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and he totally delivered.”

“It was quite an undertaking for the amount of time available to us,” says Jeff Nellis, the event’s lighting designer. (Nellis is a partner of Unlimited Visibility Lighting Design, the New York City-based firm.) “We had five or six hours to rehearse a full cast, orchestra, all the audio work that had to happen, turntables, cars, and special effects.” Of course, preparation saved the day, the designer adds: “My programmer, Scott McCowan, uses [the previsualization program] Lightconverse. We set up a console in a hotel room at Caesar’s Palace and we banged through the show. Even with a pretty heavy attention to detail, we got a good sketch of the show in about ten hours.”

A production of this scale in a hotel ballroom wasn’t a simple matter, Nellis notes. “We brought in our own truss, but the room was extremely challenging because of a limited number of rigging points. It really constrained our lighting positions. There was so much projection in the room, and we worked hard to keep the projection rig separate from the lighting rig. And there was only one rigging point over the stage, and it was used for the aerial performers. We had to be creative to get lighting into positions that served the show best. This included placing units all along the full width the screens, on top, and also on the ground. We also made use of vertical trusses on stage, which were hung with [Martin Professional] MAC Auras. They filled in the space between the round vertical screen and the wide screens with some color and background; they also provided a continuously dynamic element. The workhorse, which





you can't see in the photos, was a large V truss upstage, which we hung with 22 [Martin Professional] MAC Viper Profiles. We also had a system of 30 Viper DX Wash units providing front light." He adds, "The Viper is fantastic light and the Aura is one of the best lights ever made—it's bright, with fantastic colors, is lightweight and low power. You can

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"We wanted to make sure that everybody in the room felt included," concludes Dahlem. "We wanted that 'wow' exploding from the stage to reach out and hug everybody. And we wanted to make sure that the visuals were big enough for the 3,500 people there." Based on the way everyone partied down, the mission was accomplished. 📶



use it for camera, eye candy, and background." Going by the numbers, the rig included 46 Mac Viper Profiles, 13 Mac Viper Performances, 34 Viper Wash DX units, 54 Mac Auras, and 24 Clay Paky Sharpys. ("You can't do a show without two dozen Sharpys," he laughs.) Lighting was controlled by a grandMA console, linked to the Dataton WATCHOUT system that called both lighting and projection cues. Lighting gear was supplied by Christie Lites.

Nellis describes the cueing as "extremely active. We ran the whole show off of time code to accentuate each hit, bump, and strobe. Knowing we were going to do it on time code, we worked on that level of detail in the studio to put in the structure to get in all those hits. There were probably 350 cues in this one-hour revue."

Vegas-based In Sync Show Production provided 88 Absen 5mm ASELD video tiles; the rest of the video gear, supplied by Alford Media Services, included four Barco HDX-W18 projectors, one Barco RLM R6+ projector, 14 Folsom ImagePro HD switchers and three Grass Valley

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