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**Celine Dion**

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# Touring with COURAGE

Celine Dion inaugurates a new stage of her career  
with a freshly designed new tour

By: Sharon Stancavage

Celine Dion's core team has been with her for decades; therefore, one might expect that the design process for her current *Courage World Tour* might have been business as usual. However, says production designer Yves Aucoin, "This is the first show without René [Angélil, Dion's manager/husband, who passed away in 2016], so we were doing it a little bit differently. Normally, he was the guy making all the calls and

talking with her about everything. I was in more of a leading role this time." The rest of the creatives, he says, included, "Celine; Pepe Muñoz, who is her stylist; Scott Price, her bandleader; and her co-managers: Denis Savage and Dave Platel."

Under the circumstances, Aucoin says, "We wanted to do something fresh and something new, although we're playing a lot of the same songs. I came up with three set



Left photo: Denise Truscillo/CDA Productions. Right photo: Todd Moffses

"She wanted to be alone with the audience at certain points," Aucoin says. "She also wanted big extravaganza looks with the band at other moments. But these needed to be separated."



Due to the weight of the video stage deck, Tait engineered a custom truss that is installed underneath to ensure it would not deflect.

designs, to give her options. I've learned that if I do that, Celine has the opportunity to choose what feels and works best for her." Dion had certain requests. "She wanted to be alone with the audience at certain points," Aucoin says. "She also wanted big extravaganza looks with the band at other moments. But these needed to be separated."

To achieve Dion's requests, Aucoin—and scenic designer Eric Tendi—came up with a scheme that relies on numerous lifts, turning to TAIT for scenic construction services. "I came down [to Tait, in Lititz, Pennsylvania] with Charles Ethier, my production manager," Aucoin says. "We showed them what we wanted to achieve, even the type of lifts. I told them I wanted to open September 18, I wanted it to fit into this budget, and I wanted to see it working on August 1. After that, we went back and forth with emails and drawings to see if I was on target with the budget."

Tait engineered and custom-manufactured an automated mainstage featuring a modular lift system equipped with 20 custom-built (and trademarked) MOD LIFTS. These are modular, high-capacity lifts that, the company says, are almost infi-

nitely configurable. Each is a 42" square that can lift a payload capacity of 2,000lb at 1' per second. The lifts are engineered at that capacity with a 10:1 safety factor, reducing the risk of failure to nearly impossible, the company adds.

A stair lift, supported by four Mod Lifts, located at the center of the main stage, is 10' wide x 6.5' deep, and is fully surrounded with LED fascia. Due to the weight of the video stage deck, Tait engineered a custom truss that is installed underneath to ensure it would not deflect. The custom truss was required because the payload itself is so heavy that the span between lifts required additional structure. On several occasions, Dion is lifted 5.5" above the venue floor using the stair lift.

Located upstage, the 10'-wide x 8'-deep drum lift is also supported by four Mod Lifts. During the show, the drummer is lifted 16' above the venue floor to reveal a 6'-tall circular structure through which Dion makes a grand entrance. For the set piece that acts as both a stage deck and light wall (equipped with 20 Ayrton IntelliPix-XT units in a 5'-wide x 4'-high configuration), the light wall lift,



which is 10' wide x 3.5' deep, lifts 10' above the floor via two Mod Lifts. The light wall creates a silhouette effect by backlighting Dion in the drum lift structure. The video wall lift, located downstage of the drum lift, is 10' wide x 3.5' deep; it rises up, 10' above the floor, via two Mod Lifts, in sync with the drum lift; the video wall then lowers to reveal Dion inside the drum lift's circular structure.

Each of two band lifts is 14' wide x 8' deep and is supported by four Mod Lifts. Due to the width and capacity of each, Tait engineered a custom truss that is installed underneath the stage deck, again to ensure it would not deflect. The musicians rise 8' above the floor; when the band lifts lower back to the floor level, automated soft goods cover the lift area to give the illusion of an empty stage with the spotlight on Dion.

The lifts—as well as the video wall, light wall, and lighting pods featured in the design—are run using Tait's Navigator automation platform. "I always prefer to be on one control system," Aucoin says, "since I'm calling the show; it's a lot easier to know that it's one system and that everything talks to each other."

The stage's basic dimensions are 64' x 54'; also, two L-shaped ramps, Aucoin notes, run "into the bleachers. They are about 16' long and, after that, they turn 90° for another 20'. We like to bring her to the audience, so people in the bleachers feel connected." These function like B stages, allowing Dion to perform "All by Myself" and "Because You Loved Me" to different sides of the audience.

## Video

Aucoin's design makes use of several video walls.

"Upstage," he says, "we have a 110' x 22' wall, using Saco 6mm product, from Solotech, [the provider of lighting, video, audio, and rigging gear for the tour]. In front of that is a U-shaped screen with a Saco 9mm see-through product. It's about 110' long x 15' tall and is driven by the [Tait] Nav-Hoist. In front of that, on the downstage edge, is the square 'Instagram screen,' for IMAG; it is 18' wide x 15' tall and consists of Saco 6mm, the same product as the upstage screen.

"We are also using [Martin by Harman] Scepter 10s [LED video battens] that we feed with video and lighting from the [disguise gx 2 media server] or lighting console," he continues. "They are on the sides of the ramps, down in front of the main stage, and on different levels of the set." Part of the stage floor is covered with "[Theatrixx Technologies VLED] video tiles, built into the Tait deck and ramp."

The production is well-supported by video content from Silent Partners Studio. "With Gabriel Coutu Dumont and his team, we brought a new and fresh look," Aucoin says. "The mix of live image and video content works amazingly for some of the songs. When Celine talks, we use multiple camera angles in one big image; we show her to her fans from every angle." Mathieu Coutu is live video director. Notch video production software is also used, under the supervision of video operator Marc-André Tremblay.



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Aucoin and audio systems designer François Desjardins have also combined lighting with the PA hangs. "Over the years, the PA has created visual black holes, but we have now solved that with Sceptrans," Aucoin says.

## Lighting

"It took me a while to realize that I'm almost using only Robe products; it's just where I was at the time," Aucoin says. "We are touring with [40] BMFL WashBeams, [80] MegaPointes, and 16 of the new ESPRITES." The latter is a 650W WTE (White Transferable Engine) LED automated luminaire that features a static and rotating gobo wheel, an animation wheel, a prism, framing shutters and a 5.5° – 50° zoom. (See review in last month's issue.)

Also, Aucoin says, "This is the first time I'm using [Robe] Tarrantulas [50 in total]. The Tarrantula is the bigger, better, more powerful Spider." It is a LED beam/wash/effects fixture with a virtual color wheel, tungsten lamp effect, preprogrammed pixel effects, an optional beam shaper, and a 4° – 50° zoom range. "It's my go-to wash light. Because of the effects that you can do with it, it's also an eye-candy light for the camera." Also, he notes, "On January 7, we were the first to feature the brand-new Tetra2 from Robe. We'll be adding 15 into the original design." Tetra2 is a linear LED RGBW bar featuring a 4.5°

beam from 18 pixels to create sheets of light. It has a 4.5° – 45° zoom range, pixel control, virtual color wheel, tungsten lamp effect, and multi-colored flower effect.

In addition, Aucoin says, "I have [21] Chauvet [Professional] COLORDash Hex 8 battens, [20] Ayrton IntelliPix-XTs, and about 80 [TMB] Solaris Flares." The IntelliPix units are used to create the light wall behind the drummer. However, the designer says, his workhorse is the MegaPointe. "It is what I use for the architecture of the lighting; it's the one that I'm leaning on the most." For example, four pods, also controlled by the Navigator system, make use of these units. "A big pod downstage has 25 MegaPointes," Aucoin says. "It creates a nice cage effect. The other pods are further upstage, with a mix of MegaPointes and Tarrantulas, used for wash looks."

Aucoin, who is using Robe's RoboSpot remote followspot system for the first time, says, "In the beginning, understanding and programming it was a challenge, but I love it now. Every day, the lights are in the same place, and there is the same quality of light; I put the meter on it,





Aucoin is using Robe's RoboSpot remote followspot system for the first time.

and it is perfect. Using local followspots is a nightmare; this is a lot better." He uses three RoboSpots, which control eight BMFL FollowSpots for the front and four BMFL WashBeams for back light. "When I don't need a backlight on [Dion], I can use the WashBeam for something else."

Aucoin and audio systems designer François Desjardins have also combined lighting with the PA hangs. "Over the years, the PA has created visual black holes, but we have now solved that with Sceptrans," Aucoin says. Desjardins adds, "Yves and I worked this idea up while we were doing the residency at Caesars Palace Colosseum in Las Vegas, and Yves was able to present it to Celine during the design approval process for the tour."

The Sceptrans "are on the front, side, and flown subs," Desjardins says. "In all, there are six arrays with the Sceptrans. The mounting mechanism of the lights to the PA is clever; it was invented by one of Solotech's technical advisors, Martin Kyncl. Essentially, it consists of long plastic pieces that can hold two or three Sceptrans. The whole thing takes literally two minutes to set up and clip on to

the speakers."

In terms of power, Desjardins explains, "The Sceptrans are looped up to the loom on top of each speaker; they are linked to the distribution system on each side of the stage. The amps are flown in the air, and the Sceptrans' drive system is mounted inside the amplifier racks. The Sceptrans mounted along the speakers have worked very well; we also send video to them and that really completes the picture."

In addition to the Sceptrans, Desjardins says, "We also have a large number of [TMB Solaris] Flare Q+ units, which are used as blinders, on top of the arrays." Bringing the lighting onto the speakers "really highlights the value of the coordination you get working with Solotech as a 360° provider," Aucoin says.

Aucoin programmed the show himself on an MA Lighting grandMA2 console. "Celine has always been the show that I keep for me," he says. "Because I'm doing a lot of things on this, it's the moment where I can calm down and look for details. I have my time a





few hours a day, behind the desk, just on my own.” He adds, “We opened the show in Québec City, where we do one-third of the show in French and two-thirds in English, but we tour mostly in English. We had to put together 40 songs for the start of the show, which was a real challenge.”

### Special effects

When envisioning a new show for Dion, Aucoin says, “We always ask, Are the fans going to have the best of her? With the technology, we can manage a lot of things, but it’s always a question of her comfort.” Therefore, instead of pyro, flames, or confetti, the designer tried something different in terms of special effects: “I looked into drones—





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how they worked and what we could do with them." Conversations at Tait led him to Verity Studios, the manufacturer of automated drones. "Verity's first demo for a show, a few years back, was to the song from *Titanic*. One of the top people there is a fan of Celine, which I didn't know. They showed me that demo, and I said, 'Let's talk seriously about this: What can we do? Is it really tourable?

How complicated is it?'" Next, Aucoin says, "I introduced this to Celine, and she was excited about it. After that, we tested it in Québec City, made a couple of changes, and now it's a real crowd-pleaser."

In the drone scheme, he adds, there are "104 little units that have to know where the others are; we had to understand the space map and what we can do, which was a



## CONCERTS

challenge. It was more complicated than I expected in terms of the way the system works, and touring with it, but now it's behind us." The drones, each one bearing a white light, appear during "My Heart Will Go On," the first song of the encore, rising above the star and circling her like an arrangement of fireflies or a galaxy of stars.

### Sound

"Celine Dion is really different from other artists," Desjardins says. "She sings like no one else and her live performance bares an immense range of emotions, which people expect from her concerts." That the sound system is key to the production is clear: "If you're not able to deliver her feelings to the crowd, you miss the point of her performance. That's why we have put so much emphasis on designing and optimizing the system so that everybody, in every seat, can hear every subtle note of feeling in her voice. Having done a few shows with her—over 2,000—her performances always amaze me; a Celine Dion show is about connecting and making a difference in everybody's life for two hours." Dion and her management team thoroughly support Desjardins: "Over the years, we have never had any restrictions; so, we are lucky."

At the start of the process, Desjardins says, "I sit down with Denis Savage, the house mixer and manager, as well as Yves Aucoin. We look at the venues we are performing in, what kind of system we can have, and the various requirements. From that point, I try to find the best solu-

tion, making sure we are covering every angle, so that every seat experiences the show equally."

For the current tour, Desjardins designed a system using six hangs of loudspeakers from L-Acoustics: K1s and 2s at front left and right, K2s at the left and right sides, and flown bass arrays at right and left using K1-SBs. Two additional hangs, consisting of A15s, extend the coverage to the sides as needed. Two delay systems, made up of K2s, cover the top rear of the arena. Sub systems include KS21s inside the stage floor. In addition, KARAs, 5XTs, and X8s provide front fill. All of the speakers are run by the company's LA12X and LA4X amps. "L-Acoustics gives us a lot of flexibility in terms of their different enclosures with the K1, K2, and the Kara," he says. "Depending on the need, they have the right enclosure. And, in the end, it sounds really good and consistent. We also have two drive systems running simultaneously. We run one in AVB and one in analog, so there is full backup everywhere." The drive system consists of a Meyer Sound Galileo Galaxy and five Galileo Galaxy 816s.

Audio is controlled using a Solid State Logic SSL Live L550 console. "We have been using SSL's products since 2002," Desjardins says. "In fact, Denis and I also participated in the design of this console." Two additional SSL Live L550s are used by Dion's monitor engineer, Jean Sébastien Boucher, and band monitor engineer, Martin Paré.

As for outboard gear, Desjardins says, "We use a TC Electronic System 6000 for various reverb effects, a



Verity Studios drones, bearing white lights, surround Dion during "My Heart Will Go On."





Outboard gear is minimal, Desjardins says, because “the musicians are among the very best. They are aware of the quality of their sound.”

Bricasti M7 for string reverb, and an Eventide Eclipse [V4 digital effects processor] on the background vocals. It’s really minimal.” He has good reason for this approach: “We’re lucky on this tour; the musicians are among the very best. They are aware of the quality of their sound. And it’s first-class equipment, so the source is taken care of.

“The way we distribute the signal between the different microphones is also unique to Celine Dion,” Desjardins continues. “We use Millennia Media HV 3D-8 eight-channel mic preamps at the first stage. The analog signal is transformed to MADI with DirectOut Prodigy.MC converters and goes right into fiber. The longest cable distance between a microphone and a preamp is about 60’, so the audio stays as clean as possible for the longest time. When you have a really good source, a really good way to pick up that source, and a really good sound system to do the job, you don’t need that much transformation to make everything appear in your mix.”

Dion’s vocal mic varies from show to show, he notes. “We have a range. This allows her to select what she wants

for a particular performance. She still uses a [Shure] SM58 with a cable and also a wireless Axient system from Shure with all the adds; sometimes, the Shure transmitter is mounted with an SM58 head or a DPA d:facto 4018 head.” Backup vocals are also on the Axient system.

The drummer, Dominique Messier, is a studio owner and studio musician, and Savage works closely with him: “He pretty much chooses all the microphones on the drums. For the snare, we’re using DPA 2011s, which is unusual on a live setup. On the different kicks, Sennheiser e 902 and Shure BETA 52A; the high hat is a Neumann KM 150, and the toms/floor are also Sennheiser e 902s. The microphones on the drums are really high-quality microphones.”

“A good design on a great tour is nothing if you don’t have the perfect crew to tour with,” Aucoin says. “I’ve been blessed on this one. After years on the road, I am touring with the best group of people ever. It is a real pleasure to collaborate with such a talented team.”

The *Courage World Tour* continues in North America through April and then moves to Europe. 📶