

# God Save the Queen

By: Catherine McHugh

The QM2 makes a starring appearance in Cunard's 175th anniversary celebration



Ferries, sailboats, speedboats, and even jet skis jockey for positions on New York City's waterways, making them almost as busy as its crowded streets. But on the evening of July 14, Cunard and Quantum Theatricals managed to stop traffic in the middle of New York Harbor while they put on an eight-minute light show fit for a queen.

Tasked by Cunard officials to create "something different" (fireworks being so Independence Day) for its final stop on its 175th anniversary voyage, creative director and principal designer Kelly Easterling and creative team producer Jayson Raitt, both of Quantum Theatricals, pitched doing a live show in the harbor, and *Forever Cunard, the 175th Anniversary Light Show*

*Spectacular*, was launched.

"Cunard has such a rich history in New York. One in five immigrants to the United States came here on a Cunard ocean liner—imagine the feeling these people must have had when they sailed into New York harbor," Raitt says. "So we wanted to do something that would emulate that experience for today's New Yorker and

give them the feeling of a journey that felt a little bit bigger than they were.”

During the creative process, the team considered using pyrotechnics and even talked about integrating lighting of the Statue of Liberty. “Ultimately, we felt that using the backdrop of the ship in the harbor was really the angle and perspective that we wanted for the spectators.”

So, moments before the Queen Mary 2 embarked on her return journey back across the Atlantic, the mighty vessel paused in New York Harbor between the Statue of Liberty and Battery Park. At approximately 9:30pm, as spectators looked on from Battery Park, the show began. The 50 Chauvet Professional Legend 230SR beams installed along the ship’s promenade deck spectacularly illuminated New York harbor and the sky above. Four Clay Paky Mythos fixtures were installed on the shoreline.

“The Chauvet fixtures performed better than I had expected, which is a testament to the Chauvet Professional line,” Easterling says. “We had originally specified the Supersharpy fixture from Clay Paky because the quality of the beam and the brightness were important to us but, because there were a number of concert tours happening in Canada, we couldn’t get them.”

Those onshore and aboard the ship listened to a medley that evoked the span of Cunard’s 175-year history and watched as dynamic lighting effects punctuated the orchestral score. The designers’ biggest challenge was ensuring that the lighting and musical soundtrack on both the Queen Mary 2 and in Battery Park (which were about a half mile apart) triggered at precisely the same moment.

To make this happen, Easterling configured a GPS time clock with custom written software. When enabled, the clock sent a trigger to the ETC Ion control console located on Queen Mary 2 and another one in Battery Park at exactly the same time. The team also developed custom power



distribution systems and cabling to safely power and operate the fixtures.

Their efforts resulted in a fantastic spectacle as the lighting effects on the Queen Mary 2 were perfectly synchronized with the soundtrack in Battery Park. This was all the more impressive considering the challenges the moving vessel presented as a venue.

After loading the equipment in during the ship’s stop in Halifax, Nova Scotia (with production support from Solotech and Christie Lites and pro-

duction manager Shawn Fortis), the creative team worked closely with the ship’s captain and crew; closing down the deck, or any other area of the ship, was not an option. “It was in the middle of an anniversary cruise and a transatlantic crossing—those passengers paid a lot of money to be there,” Easterling explains. “So we had to be mindful of fitting in with the crew.”

Earlybird Visual provided the pre-visualization software (MA 3D, by MA Lighting). “We had some issues pro-



## CLOSE-UP: LIGHTING



gramming because the way the visualizer rendered the fixtures; they didn't necessarily always respond in reality the same way they did in the visualizer," Easterling explains. "So the rehearsals at sea were really impor-

tant. We made a few changes at sea in the days before the show, but when we saw the show on shore that was the first time we had actually seen it."

Easterling worked with lighting designer Richard Chamblin to program

the show. "It took a lot of time to focus the beams and make sure they were hitting correctly," Easterling explains. "Although it was in the visualizer, we needed the real time on the ship to do it. Fortunately, the schedule allowed us to load in the lights while we were in Halifax.

"We then had a day at sea and then we were in Boston and then there was a day at sea," Easterling continues. "So there were three or four nights where we could let loose—as much as the captain would allow. We couldn't be too close to port or too close to shore but, if we were in international waters, we could do whatever we wanted. We had a couple of really nice nights of weather with some great humidity in the air so we could really see the beams cutting through the sky. That was a great way to test the lights."

WorldStage and 4Wall Entertainment provided production support in the US; Jackson Miller served as the console operator on the Queen Mary 2 and Philip Vilar was the



Top Photo: Associated Press; Bottom photo: Quantum Theatricals

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shore-side console operator.

The weather for the show was nearly perfect: extremely high humidity supported the light beams but the rain held off. "We were looking at the Weather Channel every five minutes because it kept going back and forth between 90% chance of rain and 10% chance," Raitt admits. It was like an emotional roller coaster!"

Raitt and Cunard's UK team developed specific marine plans to choose the exact location of the Queen Mary 2 in New York harbor for the ideal viewing of the nighttime spectacular. Cunard held a reception at Battery Gardens, a restaurant, but plenty of spectators gathered near the shoreline to take in the event. To ensure the safe operation of the show, Raitt worked closely with several agencies, including US and Canadian Customs, Federal Aviation Administration, the City of New York, US Coast Guard, and the New York Harbormaster.

"Everybody had to be on board," Raitt explains. "We had to determine where the ship could actually physically go, so there was a lot of discussion about exactly where it should be positioned and how it could stay there. We had to clear the show 15 minutes beforehand with the tower at JFK Airport and with the FAA. When they approved it, they shut down the airspace and we started the show. Then we had to call them when the show was over and they reopened the airspace. So there were a lot of details to pull together."

"Cunard's leadership was great and they were really fantastic to work with," Raitt concludes. "We were really able to push for the vision that they were looking for, but also something that was very new and somewhat risky. We are storytellers; that's what we do. This show we created told the story of Cunard through lights and music as best as we could in an eight-minute show." 📶

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