

IN THE GLOBAL

The current Depeche Mode tour uses new technology to create an old-school vibe

By: Sharon Stancavage





Depeche Mode's artistic director and production designer—also a noted photographer, video, and film director—Anton Corbijn has a storied history with the band. “I started working with Depeche Mode in 1986 on videos and stills, and then on album sleeves and graphic design a few years after; *101* was the first sleeve I photographed and *Violator* was the first album I designed. I did some films for the *Violator Tour* and finally got involved with the stage element in 1993 for the *Songs of Faith and Devotion Tour* and have designed all the Depeche Mode tours since,” he explains. Over the past 30 years, Corbijn has created videos for a veritable music industry lexicon—from the Art of Noise to Nirvana to U2—yet he’s still closely involved with Depeche Mode. Why? “Because their music is very evocative and, for some reason, my imagery—be it design, photography, or film—and their music, are very supportive of each other,” he adds.

Spirit is the name of the band's current album, and Corbijn handled the artwork. He explains, “The idea for all I did was ‘spirit,’ and that is where the tour title, *Global Spirit*, came from, so that, and the songs I had heard, were in my mind when designing the album sleeve.



The lighting rig is asymmetrical, but balanced. Above: The boots imagery, taken from the group's new album, opens the show.

Consequently, the sleeve of the album is more the leitmotif for the content on the screens than the stage design.”

Regarding the touring production design, Corbijn says, “I oversee all elements of the stage, be it screens, the position of the drums, lights, even the choice of the song before they come on, and so on. This stage is very simple and not really that different from the last tour; the band is comfortable with the setup we had for the last few tours;

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Opposite, top: The video walls are comprised of ROE Visual MC7 tiles. Opposite, bottom: The left and right IMAG walls are in both portrait and landscape format. Above: The VL6000s upstage provide punch when the video wall isn't in use.

there is an element there that doesn't change but gets dressed differently."

The flag images in the album's artwork are reflected in a subtle way in the stage design. "There is still the flag—the LED screen, and the flagpole—the lit-up thrust," Corbijn explains. Unlike most thrusts, Corbijn's thrust is located on one side of the stage, rather than in the middle. Lighting designer Sooner Routhier adds, "Anton lined the thrust with Sceptrons; they go all the way upstage—so that you could turn them on; you get the flag look when you're in a higher viewing point in the venue." One hundred eighteen Martin by Harman VDO Sceptron 10 1,000mm units and four VDO Sceptron 10 320mm units are used to outline the outer perimeter of the thrust.

Corbijn adds, "It has to fit onto festival stages, outdoor gigs, and arena shows, so it is limiting in that sense." The tour began in Europe and primarily played in stadiums, a criterion that needed to be met as well. "The minimum stage size is 60' x 40'; the stadium stage is larger and in Europe is mostly supplied by StageCo [based in Belgium]

while the arena stages are supplied locally by the venues. The thrust, which varies depending on the size of the venue, is changeable from 30'—60'. We don't use it in amphitheaters," explains Tony Gittins, who has been Depeche Mode's production manager since 2006.

In Europe and the US, Creative Technology is supplying the "flag" LED wall located upstage. "There are actually two screens—one large one upstage [22' high x 52' wide] and one smaller strip [6' high x 52' wide] in front of it, which, combined, make one large image," Gittins notes. Both are ROE Visual MC7 7.5mm LED walls. "There is a catwalk between the two for Dave [Gahan, lead singer] to walk on, so he is within the larger screen," Gittins notes.

Video

Corbijn, who created the video content, says, "We tend to do eight songs that contain screen content, two of which will feature the band. The audiences love that and are counting on it these days," he explains. The show opens with the boots from the album's artwork walking onto the



There are two pairs of toms on stage left and right, filled with VL6000s and Nitro 510Cs.

LED screen. This led to a Jackson Pollock-like painting that deconstructs in time to the song “Going Backwards.” “I like to think we have a great opening with the boots marching to the intro music and then going into the ‘back-

wards’ painting,” he says, adding, “Yes, I did paint that myself, too—and it is all very dark onstage, in line with the mood of the album and its graphics.”

Other video imagery includes shots of domestic ani-



imals. Corbijn admits, “I had great fun shooting the animals for ‘Enjoy the Silence.’” Routhier has a different take: “Anton described it to me as ‘the whitest colored animals photographed at night, with very bright contrasting colors

on them.’ Then we [Routhier and co-lighting designer Robert Long] saw the content and said, ‘Yeah, there’s a cow on the screen and it’s amazing.’ It’s so much fun to watch; the way he edited it to the animals movements are perfect for the song.”

“Astronauts have come back over the years onto the screens for some reason,” Corbijn notes. “I shot some astronaut imagery with Dave for the song ‘Cover Me.’ Then there is the great dancing film for ‘In Your Room,’ which is a new kind of film for us, as is the documentary-style footage for ‘Walking In My Shoes,’ which deals with a day in the life of a transsexual.” The content includes artistically treated IMAG, and is controlled via a Green Hippo Hippotizer V.4. Programing was done by Manny Conde, with assistance from Brian Jenkins.

“I oversee all elements of the stage, be it screens, the position of the drums, lights, even the choice of the song before they come on, and so on.” — Corbijn

The stadium rig also included two Faber Audiovisuals Aoto M8E side LED walls. “The stage left wall is portrait-oriented and stage right is in landscape format,” notes Gittins. Corbijn adds, “I am not a great fan of IMAG screens—we only use these in stadiums—but I liked the asymmetry; there is a sense of some playfulness around these obligatory elements of a big show.” The production also includes five manned cameras and several robotic cameras, also provided by Creative Technology.

Lighting

Routhier says that during a video call with Corbijn, “Anton actually sketched out exactly what he wanted in terms of trussing on a piece of paper and held it up to the camera for us to see; I quickly memorized it, sketched it out quickly by hand, and then sent it out to our draftsman.” She and Long did some editing, and it went back to Corbijn. “Anton made a few changes and adjustments here and there, and had our artist, Andy Reuter, render it out. Anton saw it and said, ‘That’s what I want,’ and we were done. It was a really easy process, which is amazing, and Anton is so lovely.”

Due to the stage configuration, the trussing “lent itself to being an asymmetrical layout,” notes Routhier. There are eight trusses above the stage; at right are four trusses running upstage/downstage, angled slightly. At stage left are three trusses and one shorter truss, positioned stage left to stage right; they are in a kind of fan configuration. Routhier notes, “The stage-right side has two [truss] tail-ups with [GLP impression] X4s units, while the stage left

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trusses have the tip-downs with [Philips Showline] Nitro 510s, and those have pantographs. We use the Nitros [24 in total] as audience lighting on the downstage right pick-ups. They kind of look like stadium lights when they're all on. There's also a pair of toms stage left and right in the wings."

Although the rig is asymmetrical, it's still visually bal-

wanted lights that looked more industrial and old-school, but I needed to have a good fixture we could get a lot of cueing out of, since we were primarily relying on only lighting and video for the show. There is no scenic or anything to create a background, so I wanted lights that would actually give us the feel of a little bit of scenic."

The search for luminaires that were functional and com-



Each pantograph is home to a GLP X4S fixture inside a Fresnel body.

anced, Routhier notes: "It's industrial electro-pop, so it's not supposed to be clean and perfect; it can't be. It has to be a little bit disjointed, and there has to be some sort of interest in there in the air, rather than just straight flat lines that are always symmetrical."

As for instrumentation, she says, "Anton specifically

patible with Corbijn's aesthetic vision led Routhier and Long to the Philips Vari*Lite VL6000 Beam. "To be honest, I have not liked working with Vari*Lite fixtures for a very, very long time," Routhier admits; VL6000 changed that. "What I was looking for was something with an interesting face on the light that had an industrial vibe. So many

lights, because of physics, have cones or a flat LED face, and that was too modern. The VL6000s are somewhat searchlight in nature, but they also have that really cool mirrored lens with the cross structure in front of it. They're definitely my favorite light right now." Thirty-one VL6000s are located above the stage, with six in each stage left/right form. (For more technical information on the Vari*Lite VL6000, Mike Wood has a comprehensive review in the May issue of LSA.)

Also, notes Routhier, "We chose Claypaky SharBars because they have that industrial reflector look to them. It has that old-school Raylight reflector feel to it and that was really important to me." The SharBar is an automated LED batten that creates sharp mid-air beam effects as well as synchronous or asynchronous beams. "A little riser behind the band riser has a fascia of SharBars, and on top of it are VL6000s," Routhier says. "Directly behind the

Looking up into the rig, there seems to be 10 Fresnels hung off the pantographs; however, Routhier notes, "The 10K Fresnels are empty shells populated with a couple of GLP impression X4S fixtures. They add to the industrial feel of the stage. They look almost like eyeballs. When the pantographs lower, the X4S fixtures turn on inside the Fresnel for a bit of an alien robot feel."

The lighting rig also includes 31 Robe BMFL Spots, 32 GLP impression X4s, and 28 Elation Professional SixPars. In Europe, the lighting rig is provided by UK-based HSL Group Holdings Limited; the US lighting vendor has not yet been announced.

The look of the show is somewhat dark. Routhier notes, "The colors are very saturated, and we never really go into the pastel world. Congo is a color that runs throughout the 22-song show. "We ended up using it a lot; whenever we used red and there was red content on the screen, the



SharBars and 6000s is the video wall. We wanted to visually extend the video wall to the floor; obviously, with the band in front of it, you were going to miss it, and we wanted to have a lighting element that goes all the way down to the floor. The SharBars are actually a lot brighter than I thought they would be and they do some really cool effects. Brian Jenkins programmed the hell out of them."

In addition, Routhier says, "I called my contact at Robe and asked if he had anything for bright, punchy stadium light for eye candy, and he suggested the Robe MMX WashBeam." The unit features electronic strobing; six rotating, indexable, replaceable glass gobos; and four individually controllable internal barndoor blades; in beam mode, the zoom range is 3° – 65°, while in wash mode it is 4° – 54°. Routhier continues, "They make the show look a little bigger by extending out onto the wings, under the IMAG screens. I love them; and I'll put definitely them on another show." There are 16 units in the rig.

content disappeared a bit, so we went to the opposite color. Whenever there was blue on the screen, we'd go opposite because you could see the content better."

Associate lighting designer Brian Jenkins programmed the show on an MA Lighting grandMA2 console. Routhier admits, "There are a lot of cues, and that's all Brian." The vast majority of the show is time-coded for video synchronization. On the road, the show is being handled by lighting director Manny Conde, who is calling two front-of-house spots.

"The show in the US will be slightly smaller as we move from stadiums to arenas, but not significantly," Gittins says. "It's essentially the same show, which can reduce or expand to fit the venue. Things like the side screens and the thrust vary from venue to venue, along with how much PA we put in." Depeche Mode's *Global Spirit Tour* continues in Europe through July. The US leg of the tour begins August 23 in Salt Lake City and continues until October. 📶