


# Make Yourself Comfortable

Making a warm  
and inviting  
stage space for  
Lauren Daigle's  
new tour

By: Sharon Stancavage





Grammy award winner Lauren Daigle burst onto the Christian music scene in 2015. Her third album, *Look Up Child*, led to a tour that, like everything else, was halted in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Creative direction and production design for Daigle, who has crossed over into the mainstream, were handled by Nathan Alves and Seth Jackson, of The Darkroom Creative. “She’s a very warm, touchy, and emotionally connective person,” Jackson says, “and that was the stage she needed to feel comfortable in, so she could not feel hindered or held back at all. The biggest thing about this show was that it had to feel warm, it had to feel welcoming, and feel hardware-free. We took great pains to hide as much as possible every stitch of gear, motors, truss, and light fixtures to create this organic, living, breathing thing that she would inhabit.” Alves adds, “The original conversation centered around ‘What do you want your audience to feel like when they walk out of the room?’ She wanted them to feel like she just gave them a hug. Everything was designed to be as welcoming and emotionally comfortable as possible.”

The concept of an emotionally comfortable space is somewhat different from the usual production design, Jackson notes. “Most of our clients are very aware they’re pop stars, and usually the objective is the exact opposite: How do we create this larger-than-life world where they magically have control? [Daigle] came in and said, ‘No, I want to feel a part of these people, completely immersed with them; we’re all together, having this experience.’ It did shift the conversation immediately; none of the usual trickery or habits would work. Which is a great place to be, because that’s what stretches you and makes you think more creatively.”

The original scenic idea “was something soft, with no edges,” Alves says. “We started with: How do we get rid of all the corners? We went through many revisions, some because of the client and some because we wanted to make sure we got it right.”

Eliminating corners was a difficult task, Alves says. “As production designers, we want to do things that are efficient, that tour well, and come in and out of buildings easily. When you stop playing with squares, all of that is out of the window. We were excited to do it, but it was definitely challenging, figuring out how to make it feel soft without building something 100% custom. How do we make curves work? How much of this can we play on without having custom pieces?”

To create a non-angular feel to the scenery, Jackson says, “We cut the front of the stage off and made it a big, fat curve; we basically lobbed off the front third of a house

arena stage and stuck our own on the front of it. That gives us a curved seating area for the front rows; they kind of wrap in and around the stage, getting as many people closer as we could. They sold very far beyond 270; they were pushing it to the extremes of getting people on the sides and on the front.” The main stage is 52' by 32', while the curved downstage piece is a “40', half-circle 5' rolling deck.” Robert Achlimbari, at All Access [Staging & Productions], handled the rolling section for the front half of the stage.” Also featured are 12 risers, fabricated by the scenic department of Upstaging, under the direction of Travis Shaffer.

The risers also feature “Edgelight, which was provided by Scott Moore [Go Live Productions] out of Nashville,” Jackson says. According to its website, “Edgelight is a fully modular design solution for outlining stages, risers, and other production structures in high-quality linear LED strip.” Jackson says, “We covered every surface outline in this product. It was everywhere; we broke records with that. It’s curved around risers, the proscenium curves, and the front apron of the stage deck.”

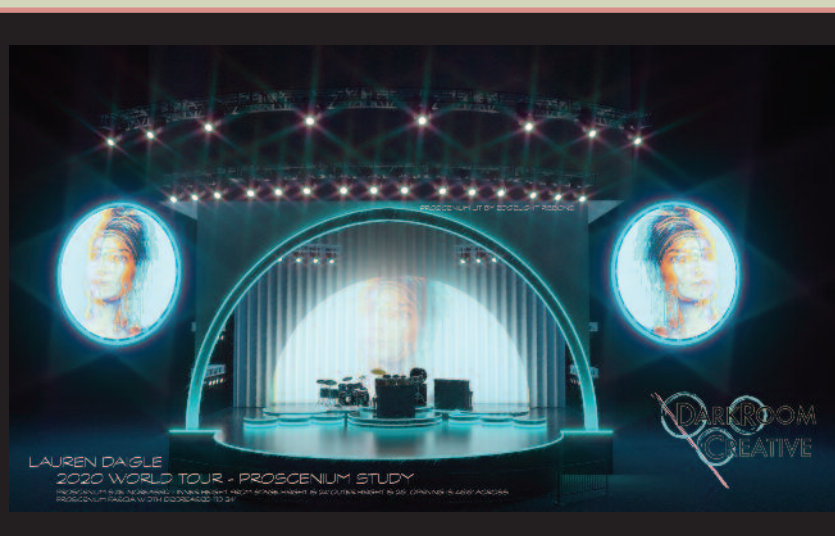
The scenic design included “two circular rings that are very low-profile in structure but are incredibly elegant,” Jackson says. “They are under [Kinesys] automaton control; they come and go as they please.” The rings, aka the halo, are each on four motors. Alves says, “For me, the high point of the show is when the halo comes down for the first time. There is this gorgeous bit of programming where Parker [Genoway, the associate lighting designer] figured out a way to make the halo come in, still light the band, and have everybody see this piece of scenery move. At no point are you distracted, even though there was this giant, gorgeous move that happened.”

Initially, many vendors saw the project as something of a challenge. “At the beginning of 2020, many people said, ‘We can’t take that on; we’re too busy’,” Jackson says, adding, “Oh, how things change. A lot of people turned it down or said, ‘It’s too custom; can you completely throw your idea out and use what we have in our warehouse?’ We said, ‘No, we cannot do that.’ It was quite the revisionist story all through November, December, and early January. But we stuck to our guns.” Upstaging was up for the challenge. “We had great support from Travis and Upstaging’s scenic department,” Alves says. “We would show up with random ideas featuring compound curves, and he’d say, ‘I can do that.’ Everyone else said, ‘Oh man, I don’t know if we can pull that off in the time frame that you have’.”

As for video, also provided by Upstaging, Alves says, “We got as much LED as we could afford—and to make it fill the opening upstage in front of our proscenium arch, we put a piece of royal curtain in front. We have drapes covering our LED screen, which turned out to be miracu-



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Left images: Courtesy of Darkroom Creative; Right photo: Garrett Lobaugh



lous. Basically, it softens the entire wall, and makes it feel bigger than it really is. We have never done that before. It was a chance that we took, and it came out exactly like we thought it would. Kudos to Shane and all the guys at Sew What? for taking this random idea I had and making it work." Jackson adds, "Shane and everyone at Sew What?

were unbelievable through this process; we were changing things and they were cutting seams at the last moment as things came into reality. It was amazing."

The LED wall consists of ROE Visual CB5 panels. "We used it last year," Alves says. "It just works and works well. We did most of the content in-house and brought on





Above and opposite, center and bottom: The concept of the design involved curves and an absence of sharp edges. Opposite, top: The scenic halo in action. The set's floor is covered with Harlequin Reversible Pro marley.

Simon Roberts as our video associate to lay in the plan with Notch.”

Also featured are two 20'-diameter circular side screens. “Rather than it being an afterthought,” Jackson says, “it

was important to us to pull the audience into the whole room, and for the thematic stuff of the stage to be carried to side screens. They have a scenic surround with the edged neon, and the same kinetic look as the stage. That



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pulled the whole arena picture in by making that choice to do the screen surround and do a round screen. It worked out very well for us.

"We also did a downstage drape that flew and also served as a front-of-house projection surface," Jackson says, "so we were laying another layer of video. It was the same semi-transparent voile that we used upstage. In fact,

the opening of the show is a combination of [Daigle] being seen in silhouette behind it, as well as front projection of her on it. There was a lot of little trickery with that drape that was fantastic. It is very ethereal, and it serves us very well." Imagery is delivered by four Barco UDX-4K32 laser projectors.

In terms of the media server hardware, Roberts says,





"We had two disguise 2x4pro units for the tour. They were able to handle both real-time Notch effects and prerendered content playback for the side screens, a two-projector blend, and an upstage 5mm ROE LED wall.

"Notch was used in nearly every part in the show visuals in some capacity," Roberts says. "Whether it was a simple split-color effect or real-time particle effects that

sampled the incoming video signal for color. Many of the things we used Notch for could have been prerendered in a traditional workflow, but using Notch gave us the benefit of being able to make changes very quickly, and had the added benefit of being 'organic' to each show. One of the main ideas behind the overall design from Darkroom was the desire to have very little 'clean IMAG,' and for each song to have a visual treatment that tied together the upstage LED wall and side screens.

"One of my favorite aspects of this show was the ability to incorporate tributes to several visual artists into the video for the show. For example, Lauren is a fan of the work of visual artist Olafur Eliasson. During the song 'Look Up Child,' we created a look that is an homage to his installation *Your uncertain shadow (color)* that implemented Notch lighting in a manner very similar to the actual installation. Another fun example was incorporating the style of Piet Mondrian with live colorized IMAG in the colored spaces."

For the lighting rig above the stage, Jackson says, "We built a touring fly house. We did a high grid that was then covered in black masking, that hung down 12' – 18'. All the motors, all the rigging, everything was behind that up in the fly house." To make the sharp edges of the square trussing disappear, Alves says, "We specified 120 linear feet of black drapes to wrap all the way around this thing." Jackson notes that there are "12 to 16 rigging points used to pick up the mother grid and about 24 [underhung] motors for the drape pieces, various lighting trusses, and then the rings."

The lighting rig "is really built around Robe BMFLs [Spots and Blades] and [GLP impression] X4 Bar [20s]," Jackson says. Over the stage are 25 BMFL Spots and eight BMFL Blades; the two downstage trusses have 11 Portman Lights P2 Hexalines and 25 Claypaky Sharpy Washes. Genoway also cites "a curved surround of Portman P2s acting as an audience glow." But, he adds, "The impressive zoom range of the BMFLs allowed for defined looks and soft pools. If I were to point out one light, though, it would be Lauren's single BMFL backlight. Appearing in most songs, it pulls her out from her big band and features her nicely."

"We purposely tried to step away from the usual side light," Alves says. "We were just trying to avoid anything that looked structural." Jackson adds, "At one point, we had lower side truss trusses, but the hardware got in our visual brain and we got rid of it. We just didn't want to see a hard edge amidst of all those soft goods, so we got it out of the way and hid it all. Even the floor lights are set in and tucked low below the stage deck." On the floor are four more BMFL Blades

"Very little of this is new gear," Alves says. "This was [Daigle's] first out and about, and so rather than going for lots of the newest and the best we wanted to go for some-





Imagery is delivered by four Barco UDX-4K32 laser projectors.

thing more economical. It's always more economical to take something out that's been sitting on the shelf for a year or two."

Genoway programmed the show on an MA Lighting grandMA3 console running MA2. "The show opener definitely incorporated the most programming," he says. "Trailing after a motivating intro video that ended in silence and darkness, we came out of the gate with huge energy, silhouettes to obscure what we were looking at, and sweeping lights out over the audience. The goal was to wake people up and get their hearts racing with excitement. The song is full of ups and downs; the lows were low, and the highs were high. In contrast, the least programmed songs were when Lauren brought the stool downstage and performed a few tracks just accompanied by keys and some quiet percussion. With a 60' x 40' white curtain directly behind her, we bathed it with a single saturated color and let the moment be."

Followspots were controlled using a Follow-Me system. "Follow-Me was flawless," Jackson says. "Nate and I were so pleased. It was Parker who fought for it to stay in the budget and I'm grateful he did. The angles are perfect. The

color temperature is exactly where we want it. The movement is smooth and natural. Also, with this artistic expression of hiding all hardware, not having truss spots and chairs in the air aids in that effort greatly." There is "one house spot for when [Daigle] wanted to get really close to the audience and wandered over to the stage edge. It was a trick Jeff Ravitz used to use on Springsteen when he had a big spot bridge with truss spots. He kept one house spot—just in case Bruce took off somewhere!"

As for the color palette, Alves says, "She enjoys big colorful bold statements. There wasn't any 'Please don't light this in this color.' Can you add more color? We never took anything away; it was always adding."

Both Alves and Jackson have nothing but good things to say about Upstaging, their primary vendor. "They just rose to the challenge," Jackson says. "They were very seasoned touring veterans that they set up for us, and it was exactly what we needed. It was a very young touring operation, and to have that maturity mixed in there was great."

Lauren Daigle has a limited number of shows scheduled beginning in February; check online for details. 📱