



Lily Allen's
**LATE-NIGHT
THOUGHTS**

The singer's *West End Girl Tour*
is a strikingly theatrical and
intimate confessional experience

Photos and text: Steve Jennings



The staging was inspired by the album's narrative arc, in which Allen progresses from an outwardly successful and confident persona to a journey through hurt, confusion, and loss, culminating in self-analysis and a newfound maturity and clarity. Left: "For 'Just Enough,' the challenge was to light Lily within a bead curtain, a small, secluded space with a traditional floor light," Fleischle says.

Lily Allen's *West End Girl* is a concert performance and a play, a journey through the 14 tracks of her album of the same name, performed in order. It is interpreted with masterful craftsmanship, with a changing "home" stage set (along with costume changes) that shows the singer going through a range of emotions in different room settings. Along the way, we get inventive, practical set lighting, projected visuals on scenery (and Allen herself), and interactive props (including a refrigerator with pop-out legs). The Dallas Minor Trio, cellists, open the show with classical interpretations of Allen's older hits, with lyrics on screen for an audience sing-along.

**Anna Fleischle,
creative director/set designer**

Fleischle is a London-based scenic and costume designer for theatre, dance, and opera. She first met Allen when both worked in the West End on Danny Robins' *2.22: A Ghost Story*. "We then worked together again on Martin

McDonagh's *The Pillowman*, also in the West End, and last summer on *Hedda*, which was adapted and directed again by Matthew Dunster with Lily Allen in mind," Fleischle says. "The extended period across these productions brought us closer and gave time for many conversations outside of work—marked by shared ideas and our experience of pursuing a creative career as women and mothers navigating a patriarchal society."

Working on *Hedda*, Allen messaged Fleischer asking if she would listen to her new album and discuss any staging ideas she might have. "The album moved me deeply—not just the pain, but the honesty, willingness, and bravery in sharing feelings and situations we are taught to hide. I knew the album would touch a nerve."

This project came at the right time for Fleischle, who was exploring different ways of staging. "It is also the first time I have 'officially' been a creative director—and the ability to fully realize my vision has been a liberating experience," she says. "The fact that a woman placed her trust

TOUR TALK

in me to achieve the creation of a not very typical music performance is not lost on me.”

The staging was inspired by the album’s narrative arc, in which Allen progresses from an outwardly successful and confident persona to a journey through hurt, confusion, and loss, culminating in self-analysis and a newfound maturity and clarity. “I wanted to create something that would express this overarching arc, each song along the line having its own mood and expression but continuously driving us forward,” Fleischle says. The staging begins with a glamorous aesthetic, consciously referencing Allen’s public image. “I wanted to break this outward perception of celebrity and success, gradually dismantling it to reveal the unseen realities behind closed doors—where our struggles always meet. Then we gradually strip back the external facades until, in ‘Fruityloop,’ there is only Lily left on stage—her performance, her music, and her lyrics the only connection needed between her and the audience.”

Fleischle wanted each song to have its own language: “I tried to find visual metaphors depicting her internal world, emotions that all of us have experienced in some shape or form. There is something powerful in visual experiences. We often can’t put our finger on exactly what it is, but we instinctively recognize and understand it. The fact that our audiences, rather than questioning the absurdity of legs coming out of a fridge or [Allen] wrapping [herself] in cloths of printed receipts of [her] partner’s infidelities, have embraced these moments with such enthusiasm shows how visual communication can resonate.”

Fleischle notes that she and lighting designer Matt Daw collaborated closely on integrating lighting: “Matt’s lighting is instrumental in achieving the shift from a highly staged, theatrical feel to a contemporary, stark aesthetic, capable of holding traditional West End glamour and pop concert energy within the same evening. The lighting evolves with each song, and Matt’s ability to express emotional states through light allows the design to reflect the emotional core of the content.”

To achieve this, the designers incorporated a range of built-in lighting effects and illuminated props. Alongside LED light lines and dot formations, they create song-specific elements, such as the light sculpture for “Madeline,” a chandelier made of globe lights hung low, allowing Lily to walk through them. “These globes reveal images within them, creating a surreal effect, as though ‘the other woman’ were present everywhere,” Fleischle says. “The light globes were made by Dan Large, from [UK-based] Electric Foundry. For ‘Just Enough,’ the challenge was to light Lily within a bead curtain, a small, secluded space with a traditional floor light. Together with Gino Green’s video projection of ink dripping into water, Lily moves in and out of focus, a reflection of thoughts taking on shifting forms. In ‘Beg for Me,’ she appears to drift in a sea of domestic lights. For ‘Let You Win,’ a single light source is





"Anna discussed what types of projection and imagery would work best within those environments and how visuals could feel fully integrated into the performance," Green says.



Top: Note the pair of hands projected on Allen's back.
Bottom: One of the practical units supplied by Electric Foundry.



dramatically initiated by a chandelier crashing to the floor. The red light curtain cutting through haze in ‘Fruityloop’ establishes a stark visual to close the show.

“My desire to use non-typical stage materials meant that an extended sampling process was required,” Fleischle says. “The shag rug I had envisaged in an unusual raspberry pink was not available as a standard carpet material. This meant joining multiple rugs together and fire-proofing them. For the curtain material, the aim was to find something textured, such as dupion silk or a shot fabric woven from different colors. This was crucial in creating

depth of tone and a sense of lushness, as these materials make folds appear much more pronounced when lit. Finding this specific texture, particularly in a slightly unusual color, proved challenging. It was eventually sourced from a garment fabric supplier rather than a typical stage supplier.”

The props collaboration involved a detailed search for items that were significantly adapted to the stage. Lizzie Frankl, who runs UK-based Propworks, is a long-term collaborator with Fleischle, who notes that Frankl has a brilliant understanding of what an item needs to look like and

needs to do. “We used a combination of original vintage props, some needing upholstering and strengthening, and some contemporary. Some items required extensive reinforcement to withstand daily use, while others had to be altered to enable specific moments to happen. We cut out the back of the fridge to change the content from off-stage—and to function as a ‘portal’ for passing items to Lily. We also built a mechanism to allow a pair of legs to fall out and retract in a precise manner. A feather duster was adapted to disperse confetti and glitter.”

The integration of printed cloths into Lily’s performance (see cover photo) involved a detailed collaborative process, addressing both the artistic vision and practical execution. “I created the original design for each cloth, which was then further developed by a graphic designer,” Fleischle says. “Different fabrics were tested for appearance and functionality. The printing was done by Hadley, specialists in stage and costume printing. Our movement director, Meshach Henry, shaped Lily’s interaction with the cloths. I loved working with Mel Ottenberg, who did the styling for Lily. We had many conversations about the intent, and the looks created feel completely integrated into the show, while each outfit remains authentically Lily. The progression of the outfits, particularly in her gradual ‘stripping,’ suggests a shedding of protection and a move towards honesty and exposure—not ‘naked,’ but bare and raw, while maintaining elegance. This evolution culminated in a final outfit that conveys a confident femininity and maturity, reflecting a woman who knows herself and is ready to forge her own path.”

Matt Daw, lighting designer

Daw’s early work was in theatre before he took a sidestep into music about 17 years ago with Icelandic band Sigur Rós. “I have maintained a foot in both worlds,” he says. “There is a very satisfying cross-pollination between the two. I’m currently lighting *Teeth ‘n’ Smiles*, by David Hare, in London’s West End. It’s a play about a band and stars Rebecca Lucy Taylor (aka Self Esteem), which feels like a perfect meeting of theatre and music.

“This show is not about pointing lights at the audience and flashing them in time with the music,” he continues, “although we have our moments! I have, without doubt, drawn on my work in theatre and film as inspiration for this show. Our creative team are largely drawn from theatre. There is something inherently collaborative in the process of theatre making, and when that is transposed to music, in my experience, it makes for the most satisfying creative outcomes.”

Daw notes that, since Allen hadn’t released an album for roughly seven years, the original plan was for a relatively small show to tour concert halls around the UK. Then *West End Girl* came out and blew up. “From day one, we knew it was going to be all of the songs from the album in

order,” he says. “The album has a very clear narrative. Anna created an extremely detailed storyboard that was our blueprint in production rehearsals. The lighting relies on a lot of practicals. I’m using Astera NYX bulbs, Luna Bulbs, and PixelBricks—I’m a big fan!—which are great for hiding in the set.” He also has quite a few custom practicals, built and delivered by Electric Foundry. “Colour Sound Experiment provided a rock-solid lighting package for the show and delivered on everything I asked for, with great support along the way from our key crew, Ben Timms and Chris Brown. Anna is an amazing collaborator with tremendous vision. We had a lot of fun making this show. I’m sure that comes across to the audience.”

Marc Heimendinger, lighting programmer

Heimendinger’s first collaboration with Daw started early last year in Bradford, UK, for an outdoor show called *Rise*. “We never really stopped since then, with many various projects including the Self Esteem tour, *A Complicated Woman*; the Paris Fashion Week for Alexander McQueen; Lorde at Glastonbury; and many more. It’s a lot of fun because it’s always something very different!”

Heimendinger uses the grandMA3 console because he knows it well. “*West End Girl* is a hybrid between live music and theatre, and this console is perfect to handle it. The selection grid is great for programming loads of pixels easily, and Recipes are useful for quickly updating the show if the rig evolves. Luckily, the set list was confirmed before we started programming. We did a week of previz to work on some effects-heavy songs, but most of the programming happened during rehearsals. With many practical lights built into the set, we couldn’t properly render it in 3D and see the intended effect. Our brilliant video designer, Gino Green, made all the video content projected on the set. It all blends nicely throughout the show. When you can’t really tell what is video and what is lighting, you know the magic is working.”

Henri Charlton, lighting director

Charlton briefly covered the Self Esteem tour for Daw, but this was the first project on which they worked from the beginning. “The majority of my work is now in music, although I have had 15 years in theatre as a programmer, so this show fits nicely within my background,” he says.

The integration of scenery, lighting, and video is well-considered, so Charlton keeps the look consistent and straightforward despite the many scenes, including moments in which only one or two lights are used with a set piece: “This is where theatre discipline comes in with keeping our lighting fixture positions and focuses precise. The set is a box, so we often have to change the location of our followspots to make the shot while keeping the sightlines clear. This is the only time the set can be a little

tricky, but we always find a solution.”

West End Girl tours with its own lighting fixtures and rigging; it also uses a couple of front-of-house positions for key light: “This can vary depending on the layout of the venue, but we aim to use their balcony rails and advance trusses. If suitable fixtures are available on the house advance truss, I may use them for the opening act and one or two moments in the show, but this is a bonus; we can make the show work with our own touring rig.”

The tour has three flown trusses—two pre-rigs upstage and downstage with fixtures, then one mid-stage for scenery with DMX winches. Fixtures include eight Ayrtan Rivale Profile (seven on the back truss, and one on the balcony rail); 14 Martin Aura XIPs on the downstage truss; forty 1m Martin Sceptrons outlining lighting trusses and running vertically on the floor lighting towers; nine GLP impression X4 Bars on the upstage truss; ten Astera PixelBricks hidden around the set; four ETC Lustrs in the floor towers; two ARRI LED L7-C Fresnels on floor stands at stage right, three Wahlberg Winch 10s; three Wahlberg Winch 50s; two Robe iFORTE Spots with RoboSpot control; eight Astera NYX units for prop lamps; 300-plus pixels of custom RGBW LED built in the set’s fascia, under the steps, and along the upstage edge; 38 LED single-pixel RGBW LEDs hidden within the downstage steps with cabochon lenses; three LED neon strips above the set, and three flown LED chandeliers, all run by two MA lighting grandMA3 lights.

Dan Large, Electric Foundry

Large, who created the custom lighting elements, says, “The most unusual part of this project was getting 150 single-point, warm-white, high-intensity LEDs with micro lenses embedded in the set, all individually controlled. Matt and Anna wanted them to disappear into the frame of the set when not in use and then pop out as light blinders when needed. We custom-engineered a constant-current driver to give us the channels in a tourable format and then made us some fixtures to fit perfectly in 10mm holes. Other interesting things: a chandelier made of balls, with three channels of back projection inside to give an eerie ghost-face image that can move around, wirelessly. All LED tape on the set is our own 16-bit RGBW pixel tape, with really good color depth and smooth dimming.”

Gino Ricardo Green, video director

“Anna discussed what types of projection and imagery would work best within those environments and how visuals could feel fully integrated into the performance,” Green says. “Prior to technical rehearsals, we held a dedicated shoot. Not every concept made it into the final production, but the majority we discussed carried through into the live show.

“The idea of hands on Lily’s back during the song

‘Tennis’ was something Anna envisioned from the very beginning. She knew precisely the moment she wanted them to appear. During the shoot, we filmed the hands moving at multiple speeds, with different styles of entering and leaving the frame, playing back the specific section of the song the sequence was designed for. Having all those variations allowed us, during technical rehearsals, to test the different options against Lily’s blocking, lighting, and the live pacing of the song, ultimately helping us find the version that felt most emotionally connected to the moment.”

Front projection is handled by a Panasonic PT RQ35 unit with two Epson EB PQ2220B units for rear projection. A voile curtain positioned in front of the rear-projection surface helps to soften the images. Resolume is the media server. The Panasonic PT-RQ35 is a three-chip DLP unit, useful for achieving brightness, color depth and accuracy. “That is particularly important during ‘Ruminating,’ where we project directly onto the green front curtain. Because the projection surface has a strong color bias, we have to compensate carefully within the content. We introduce additional magenta to neutralize the green influence and ensure the final projected image matches the look and tone we established during previsualization and content development.”

Jack Eveleigh, front-of-house engineer

The *West End Girl Tour* is Eveleigh’s first gig with Allen. Her show, he says, is “a production that focuses on the lyrical context of the album. The challenge of not having a band is to create a mix that doesn’t inherently sound like karaoke. To match a raw vocal with a fully produced track and have it sit right. You’ve got to match the vocal production of the album as closely as possible so the audience can follow the lyrical narrative without losing the weight and emotional content within the music. There’s also the battle that comes from a lively crowd; it’s a good problem to have, but in a delicate theatre environment, there can be around 110/115db of screaming to compete with.”

Eveleigh says he has been “searching for a powerful little setup that will scale and let me take it anywhere, including a flight, hotel room, or a remote recording situation. I’ve currently settled on a Solid State Logic System T. It’s technically a broadcast/immersive music console; it’s the sibling to the Live Range, and is built on the same DSP architecture. It’s ridiculously flexible. I’m using a remote/flypack version, based on the Tempest Engine 1, TCA, and S500 fader file with some lightweight MPL I/O boxes for additional pre’s and a DirectOut Prodigy for my local ‘anything’ conversion, matrices, and basic system control. I’ve yet to hear my mixes sound as good as they have on the SSL Live consoles. When Tom Knowles and Sam Bath, from SSL, showed me the V6 Live and V4.1/2 System T updates to the GUI speed at the end of summer last year, I felt it was finally time to make the switch.”

For reverbs, Eveleigh has a Bricasti M7, the SSL

FlexVerb, an Eventide H9 for extra flanging and loop manipulation in quick-change segments, a Strymon El Capistan for tactile delays, and a CEDAR DNS Live, plus an API 7600 channel strip, which I toy with now and then.”

He says he loves the SSL Dynamic Automation System. “It’s a feature on the System T that lets you record all of your mix interaction live into your show file. Essentially, it’s the same as mix automation in a DAW but built into the console. It uses linear timecode, so you have to integrate it well, but as the setlist is the same every night, it’s suited to it. Almost every interaction I have with the console during the show is recorded, and the next day I can play that same mix back as part of my virtual soundcheck. On top of the multitracks playing back, my actual mix also plays back, and I can walk away from the console with all my mutes/fader changes, EQ, effects throws, playing back exactly as I performed the night before—or whichever night’s mix I choose to recall. For me, it’s game-changing, being able to walk around a venue, head up to the top balcony, etc., and listen to my own mix and how it translates. It’s also fully editable, so you could use it as an incredibly quick way to program mix changes.”

In a project involving electronics, pre-production is the most important technical aspect—getting all the electronics and patches locked in on stage will tighten up the mix no end, Eveleigh notes. “You can use snapshots to alter levels/processing, but why try to fix things in the mix if you have the opportunity to nail it in pre-production? It’s hard to focus on the emotional part of a mix if you’re spending time chasing wild levels or tone that didn’t need to be a problem in the first place. It smooths out so much, helps IEM mixes hugely, and means you don’t need as much gear for the show. I’m keeping as close to the album production as I can, using the SSLs in-console plug-ins, external reverb, and CEDAR DNS to clean up a little crowd noise. Also, VHD, Blitzer, and Fusion.”

The tour’s North American theatre leg uses house PAs. “The System T is my own, but we’re using Southby from the UK for control support, RF, network, and everything stage-side. They’re a great little company. I had been using a d&b XSL rig for UK theatres that needed it. [Tour manager] Giles Woodhead has put together a lovely group for this tour. The days can be fairly long due to venue access and building the set structure, but everyone takes it in stride. Also, a shout-out to Joe Saunders, my partner in crime. I trust him well and know the stage audio is in great hands with him there.”

Joe Saunders, monitor engineer

Saunders is mixing on the DiGiCo SD12-96 for the theatre leg of the tour. “I’m mixing 21 musical inputs of playback and a lead vocal to one principal artist mix—an ideal gig, some might say! We mic the Dallas Minor Trio and use pickups for some crowd singing separation. I’m also mak-

ing good use of the [Sennheiser] Spectera bidirectionality in having onstage crew comms run through my console with some nifty PTT buttons and lapel mics.”

Saunders’ main use of the DiGiCo effects involves a little widening and softening of the cello pickups, using a room reverb as a channel insert—“a trick I got from Jack,” he notes. “For outboard gear, I’m using a Fourier transform engine for most of my DSP running—TC Electronic VSS3 reverbs, Soothe Live, Fab-Filter plug-ins, and some SSL emulations. Soothe has turned out to be incredibly useful for taming some tracks that can be fatiguing due to Spectera’s perfect digital reproduction of its input. I’m blown away by its quality and ease of use.”

Allen’s vocal microphone is a DPA 2028 on a Sennheiser EM6000 body. “She’s so expressive and dynamic throughout the show, spanning a range of genres, and the 2028 handles all of that perfectly. Since Lily’s last tour was seven years ago, we started with a clean slate, including our capsule choices. For Lily’s in-ears, we are using UE Live custom IEMs. I’ve used them for three years now and love them. We’re using Sennheiser Spectera for IEMs and wireless microphones. It’s a brilliantly designed system; it sounds great, and it’s only going to get better with additional updates and devices. The simplicity of antenna placement and ease of coordination—with no pack syncing required—for the 20 [Spectera] SEK packs working as a mixture of IEMs, mics, and bidirectional, and being able to edit what they do on the fly is a touring engineer’s dream.

“The story she tells onstage with her music isn’t easy, and it’s an honor to be trusted by Lily to make sure she’s comfortable onstage night after night,” he says. “The biggest credit to the tour is that there’s no weak link, and everyone is a friend. I want to give a huge shoutout to the stage management team—Maciej “Magic” Chrzanowski, Cam Redshaw, Tom Vowles, and Colin Cousins. The days are particularly long, putting in the set and props in each theatre, but they’re flawless every show in their set building and scene changes.” The *West End Girl Tour* continues through November. 🎧

West End Girl Tour

Production Crew:
Creative Director/Set Designer:
Anna Fleischle
Lighting Designer: Matt Daw
Lighting Programmer:
Marc Heimendinger
Lighting Director: Henri Charlton
Video Designer:
Gino Ricardo Green

FOH Engineer: Jack Eveleigh
Monitor Engineer: Joe Saunders
Tour/Production Manager:
Giles Woodhead
Production Manager: Marty Moore
Production Companies:
Lighting: Colour Sound Experiment
Lighting Practicals:
Electric Foundry
Set: Ox Event House
Props: Propworks