

Lighting & Sound America

\$10.00

plasma media

Machine Gun Kelly:

The Mainstream Sellout Tour

ALSO

Maverick City Music on Tour

Inside MAINRÖ

Yaamava' Theater

Hard Rock Live in Sacramento

Sennheiser XS Wireless
In-Ear Monitoring Set



MAN^{VS.} MACHINE

Crafting a
personal statement
for Machine Gun Kelly's
new tour

By: Susan Trevelyn
Photos: Steve Jennings

“[THEY] wanted to elevate their production level; it’s their first time playing arenas and they have been growing quickly. They wanted a team that could execute a large vision and tell a good story.” So says Eric Gorleski, of Trask House, the design firm behind Machine Gun Kelly’s current tour. “Colson [the singer’s first name] is also in film and TV, and he was looking to bring that type of storytelling to concerts,” he adds.

“While in development, he expressed his constant frustration with how the media portrays him,” Gorleski continues. “No matter what he does, the media never writes positive stories. Sometimes it is lighthearted or easy to brush off, but sometimes it actually hurts.” So, the theme of the concert production transformed into “his battle against the Internet and, ultimately, the battle for anyone who feels they get put unfairly into boxes.” (Ironically, it is titled *The Mainstream Sellout Tour*.)

Therefore, at the start of the show, “Machine Gun Kelly [MGK] is trapped in the box that the world and the Internet have created for him,” notes John McGuire, of Trask House. “He doesn’t know where he is, so he calls the rescue squad to pick him up. We took inspiration from all over the place and made ourselves a special-forces GI Joe playset.”

Kelly is rescued by a helicopter. “SGPS did the metal frame,” Gorleski says. “They have a new foam partner in Vegas [Las Vegas Props] who did the actual sculpting of the helicopter, the hard coating, and the initial painting. Keith Greco came in and did the last little bit of scenic painting; we decided to add a tail number and a kill number.” A Robe BMFL Spot, controlled by the company’s RoboSpot system, is attached to the helicopter in addition to FAA-accurate colored strobe lights.

Kelly is rescued by a helicopter. “SGPS did the metal frame,” Gorleski says. “They have a new foam partner in Vegas [Las Vegas Props] who did the actual sculpting of the helicopter, the hard coating, and the initial painting. Keith Greco came in and did the last little bit of scenic painting; we decided to add a tail number and a kill number.” A Robe BMFL Spot, controlled by the company’s RoboSpot system, is attached to the helicopter in addition to FAA-accurate colored strobe lights.

The helicopter takes Kelly to “a coin-rolled, off-axis stage that’s pointing in the wrong direction,” McGuire says. “It brings a sense of chaos.” Gorleski adds, “In the creation process, we were doing iterative sketches, looking at different compositions, and the steeply angled, off-axis circle came up. At first, we thought that you couldn’t rake a stage that severely and walk on it.” However, a rake of 14° proved to be workable. “It was pretty ridiculously steep-looking but not totally uncomfortable. There are flat cutouts in it; that also helps exaggerate the perceived angle, because you’re seeing these cut-ins and have a reference plane.

“The 40’-diameter circle stage sits on top of a roughly 40’-by-44’, 6’ 6”-high rolling stage from SGPS that lets us build it away from the lighting rig so we can roll the stage in. There is a lift in the rolling stage; MGK has a bunch of different guests for opening acts, so it affords them the

ability to join, if they want to use the lift, or leave using the lift.” Both stages were fabricated by SGPS.

The Internet looms over the upstage area in the form of TV Man, a 29’-tall, matte black, puppeteered inflatable, with articulating limbs and an LED tile face. “The torso is actually in two pieces so that it can be festival-, shed-, and Europe-friendly,” Gorleski explains. “If there isn’t enough trim height, we can choose not to inflate the legs. There is a void in his torso so he can bend over the stage and not get an inflatable scrunched stomach. All the R&D work was done with the Inflatable Design Group; Sean [McEachern] over there is awesome.”

TV Man’s movement is “handled by the automation guys from SGPS,” Gorleski says. “Daniel Sturman is probably the best automation programmer we’ve ever worked with.” McGuire adds, “We’re using winch motors from SGPS, and a Raynok automation system. It works great.”

A fierce battle ensues, and TV Man unleashes hundreds of media spider robots throughout all the video surfaces, forcing Machine Gun Kelly to call back the helicopter. In a complex bout, the helicopter fires pyro comets at the moving TV pods while TV Man attacks the stage. Even with the help of the helicopter, Machine Gun Kelly can’t defeat TV Man; that’s when another inflatable appears. “We realized we needed a female character in the story,” Gorleski says. “Colson can’t defeat TV Man, and she raises up as this 20’-tall, high-gloss [figure] in a relaxed, but curious, pose. Colson asks her who she is, and the first words of the song ‘EMO Girl’ [are] ‘I am a god.’ She appears and brings love, energy, and positivity into his world so that he can defeat and deflate the Internet.

“When we get the presence of the female deity, a distorted black-and-white checkerboard backdrop appears,” Gorleski continues. “It changes your relationship to the space because, all of sudden, there is white upstage—we aren’t just in a void. The drop is an optical illusion; it looks like it’s moving.” It was fabricated by Sew What?

In terms of video, monochromatic scenic TVs are placed onstage, on the stairs, and TVs in automated pods overhead. “They are disguised and devoid of content for the first part of the show,” McGuire says. “The automated pods [each comprised of a single ROE Visual CB5 tile] are kind of an extension of TV Man; they’re like clusters of alien babies.” Each of the automated pods includes Altman Lighting 18” scoops.

Video, provided by Screenworks, includes two Barco UDX-W32 32K laser projectors. “We have two giant-ass IMAG screens,” McGuire notes. An extensive package includes long-lens, jib, rail, handheld, and PTZ cameras. Screen content, provided by Mike Moro and his team at M99, is controlled via two Hippotizer Boreal+ MK2 media servers.

Lighting

"There is a certain reality of doing production in a post-COVID, but-still-reeling-from-COVID, world," Gorleski says. "We're not doing 30-truck shows right now. You're not going to successfully pull that off. We're doing asymmetrical lighting; it helps make a bigger-looking show using fewer lights. If you look at it, you would think there are hundreds of moving lights and tons of stuff, because everything feels full. We are getting that fullness from unexpected angles. The low sidelight truss is raked so the downstage is high, so [those units] aren't just doing sidelight focuses. They're able to tilt and pan out and do audience-attack focuses as well, so you get more bang for the buck from those positions."

Fortunately, he adds, "In this time, when it's impossible to get gear and staff, our guys at Christie [the tour's lighting vendor] pulled a rabbit out of the hat for us. We have a ton of [GLP impression] FR10 bars and [Martin by Harman] MAC Ultra Performances that are hard to come by."

Robert Fuller, programmer and lighting director for the early part of the tour, notes that the most-used unit "would have to be the Mac Ultra Performance. Their brightness

and optic speed are pretty amazing. I found myself going to them quite often during programming. They are so clean and crisp. The optics are so fast; anything we do with the zoom or the focus, they are dead on. There's also a fresh pack of gobos to play with, which adds a new element to the show."

"We have the first new [ETC High End] Cyberlight LEDs off the line," McGuire says. "It looks like the old Cyber with a clean black case; it's the big old mirror with a badass LED light engine. There is a green you can get from a Cyberlight that you can't get from any other fixture, it's just so piercing and fierce." The are 24 in the rig. "They have a really cool gobo function," Fuller says. "It's a wheel that does stop-motion animation. And the color wheel stuff is very vivid and very crisp." Also used are Chroma-Q Color Force 72s, Claypaky Mythos units, and GLP JDC1 strobes as well as four hazebase Arena Base hazers and five Martin JEM ZR45 foggers.

Previsualization, including extensive automation cuing, was done at Trask House, using the 3D show platform LightConverse. "For the longest time, LightConverse has had the support to do full automation programming,"





Previous spread: "The two-hand mic stand was made by DAS DesignWorks out of Oklahoma," Gorleski says. This spread, left: Strictly FX provided a wide variety of effects for the show, including flames. Above: The helicopter features a metal frame by SGPS. "They have a new foam partner in Vegas [Las Vegas Props] who did the actual sculpting of the helicopter, the hard coating, and the initial painting," Gorleski adds.

McGuire says. "It's a data-accurate, time-accurate, in-console show flow information that we hand to someone to work with." Ben Wingrove, Trask House's previz designer, worked with LightConverse to create a new fixture for the Cyberlight. Despite LightConverse being located in the Ukraine during a tumultuous time, the company's support never wavered.

Regarding the set list, Fuller says, "There were 42 songs when they came into rehearsal, and we're at around 32 songs now. [Kelly] only does verses out of some songs and bits and pieces out of others. Basically, there are 28 full

songs and then snippets." Fuller programmed them on an MA Lighting grandMA3 console running MA2 software.

Special effects

"Strictly FX provided our effects," McGuire says. "We have a very good relationship with Strictly and have been working with them on some very cool things." The show features six double-barrel confetti units, four confetti cannons doing a custom-cut pink tomato confetti, four Ultratec LSG MKIIs, six moving CO2 jets, eight [Le Maitre] Quad Pro Flame units, and eight articulating Wave Flame units.



This spread: The Internet looms over the upstage area in the form of TV Man, a 29'-tall, matte black, puppeteered inflatable with articulating limbs and an LED tile face. "All the R&D work was done with the Inflatable Design Group," Gorleski says. Movements are handled by SGPS winches and a Raynok control system.

"We use pyro as a storytelling device," Gorleski notes. "We tend to like some of the stranger, weird stuff, not just your normal comets and mines. We have some gerbs, mines, and comets but we also have some weird mortar hits with reports and flash pots with bang and sparkle. When the helicopter is in the battle scene being hit, it explodes streamer bursts."

Audio

"The tour is a mixture of mostly the A-market North American arenas, a handful of the bigger sheds, and a couple festival dates," notes front-of-house audio engineer Dean Mizzi. "We're carrying a Clair Cohesion System [provided by Clair Global] to cover the tour; there are 56 CO-12s, 20 CP218s, and eight CO-8 cabinets. The standard arena configuration is 16-deep main hangs and 12-deep sides, with four flown CP218s behind the main hangs and 12 CP218s across the front of the stage."

He adds, "Both monitors and FOH are using DiGiCo Quantum 338 surfaces—sharing an Optocore loop with a DD4MR-FX and two SD-Racks for our stage I/O. We're

taking our playback lines digitally via the DD4MR. I like the DiGiCo workflow, and it made sense for us on this tour to go with the Quantums—the new engines have some added I/O which is great, too.

"On this tour, I'm using a single [Universal Audio] UAD-2 live rack for a handful of plug-ins," Mizzi says. "Mostly FX and a few instances of dynamics, and EQ chains. I'm using the Lexicon 224 for snare and tom reverbs, an EMT 250 on vocal reverbs, and a couple instances of the [Universal Audio Cooper] Timecube for a throw delay and vocal doubler. I really like the dbx 160-A and a version of a [Neve] 1073 [preamp/EQ] also over my drum busses," he notes.

As for outboard gear, Mizzi says, "I'm using a [Rupert Neve] 5045 [Primary Source Enhancer] and Shelford channel on Colson's main vocal. I like [Teletronix] the LA-2A [compressor] dynamic range on vocals—the Shelford Channel has a similar flavor to it, plus the added color from its other features. I also have a TUBE-TECH SM-2B [multi-band opto compressor] over the vocals." For processing the band, he's using a WesAudio Hyperion [equal-





"When we get the presence of the female deity, a distorted black-and-white checkerboard backdrop appears," Gorleski says. "The drop is an optical illusion; it looks like it's moving." It was fabricated by Sew What?

izer] and Dione [buss compressor], Alan Smart C2s [mix compressor], API 2500 [compressor], several UBK Fatso compressors, and a wide variety of gear from Rupert Neve, including a 5059 satellite mixer and a Master Buss Processor. "With the outboard stuff, generally speaking, I'm just trying to add some color and texture to the mix. At the end of the day, most guys are using the same consoles, so finding a point of difference comes down to the detail."

For vocals, he says, "We made the switch over to Sennheiser [MD] 9235s this year. The capsule has a tighter pattern, which helps a lot when your singer spends a good part of the concert in front of the PA."

"We've got a Shure B91/52 combo on the bass drum," Mizzi notes. "Across the three snares we're using a mix of [Shure] SM57s, beyerdynamic M201s, [Shure] Beta 56As, and [Sennheiser e] 904s. Toms are Shure B98 amp/cs, Neumann KM 184s, and TLM 103s for hats, ride, and overheads. We road-tested a few other varieties of mics and settled on the above for this drum kit. Our drummer plays a very low, very flat drum kit, so mic spill is a challenge.

Our main snare is literally at the same height as the two rack toms—so you end up with four mics in very close proximity in that area."

Also featured is a custom mic stand for Kelly. "The two-hand mic stand was made by DAS DesignWorks out of Oklahoma," Gorleski says. "We sent Aaron [Ford, a partner at DAS] a 3D model; he 3D-printed the hands and then painted the hands and mics to match."

Mizzi concludes, "I would say one of the mixing challenges with the MGK show is the span of genres in his catalog. Colson has intention behind all of his creative decisions—and it's important to him for those to be realized through whatever discipline you're responsible for. Most of his music is high-intensity, whether it's fast-paced punk-pop, sub-heavy rap, or melodic emotional ballads; the challenge in mixing the show as a whole is finding the elements in all those tracks that make it all glue together and feel like it's all a 'Machine Gun Kelly show'."

The *Mainstream Sellout Tour* continues in the US through August, then moves to Europe. 🎸