

ONE LAST KISS

The Final Tour Ever is designed to send the storied band out with a bang

By: Sharon Stancavage





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“The band requested the biggest KISS show they have ever done,” says Robert Long, co-production designer and manager of SRae Productions. “Given their past as innovators of showmanship, pyro, and stage gags, we knew this would prove to be an interesting undertaking. The biggest request was to modernize the show and keep them relevant with today’s bigger touring productions. The overall base look of this show is very big and intimidating, which is exactly what the band wanted. I’ve been told by several hardcore fans that they are in awe of how 4D this show looks and feels to them.”

As the press has reported, this tour, billed as *The Final Tour Ever*, delivers all the goods KISS fans have come to expect: According to Stephanie Hammett in the Spokane, Washington-based newspaper, *The Spokesman-Review*, “Lights, lasers, floating drum kits, pyrotechnics, fire breathing, blood spitting, guitar smashing, and a whole lot of fan appreciation: KISS’s farewell to Spokane will not soon be forgotten. A massive black banner emblazoned with the KISS insignia covered the stage. The arena crackled with anticipation as cheers broke out at every hint of activity behind the curtain. Sinister rumblings and ethereal, red lights filled the arena. Then, with an ‘All right, Spokane, you wanted the best!’ the curtain fell away to the opening notes of ‘Detroit Rock City,’ revealing [Paul] Stanley, [Gene]

Simmons, and [Tommie] Thayer descending from above on three suspended, octagonal platforms and [Eric] Singer upstage on a dais backed by a half pyramid out of which lasers, sparks, and fire streams flew. Lights ricocheted off of Thayer’s ‘spacesuit’ at angles and up into the rafters while Stanley’s eye-catching guitar, rhinestoned for the gods, sparkled continuously. The pyrotechnics were immediate, extreme and expertly timed, seamlessly creating a percussive extension of Singer’s drum kit.” The paper quoted Stanley as saying, “KISS doesn’t know how to fade away; we need to go away and explode, so this is going to be a supernova.”

Sooner Routhier, Long’s partner in SRae Productions, adds, “Robert and I tossed around about ten different ideas and landed on three finalists. Every design that we tossed around was completely different from the previous. The band picked the current design.”

According to Long, “The overall look of the stage is clean, accented by black-and-silver spiked borders. Each pod, the main screen, and the entire stage is outlined in the multi-layered, scenic borders. The back is a silver plate with a strip of LED tape to highlight the edge. Mounted about an inch above the back plate is a black border with silver spikes. It gives the stage a mean, rock and roll look that screams KISS and really matches the band’s aesthetic.”

The production also includes plenty of automation from



Movement, via pantographs, is an integral part of the lighting rig.

SGPS. During “Love Gun,” Stanley takes to the air to get to the B stage. “The Paul fly gag is 155’ long and he travels on a lollipop from stage left to his catwalk,” notes Ashley Zapart, show director and associate designer at SRae. “The catwalk spans 48’ over the front of house. The original design has been altered and he now lands on a circular star platform on two 12’ lifts.” The stage also has a drum lift that rises 16’ from the stage level.

During the finale, “Rock and Roll All Nite,” Simmons and Thayer take to the air over the audience via two crane arms attached to the left/right audience trusses. “Each crane arm mechanism has ten points, so the entire gag takes 20 [rigging] points,” Long says. “The gag is one of the band’s favorite ways to get out in front of the audience members who are not as close to the stage.” The show has 60 automation points, and 166 rigging points overall.

Video

Automation is also employed in the productions video. “There are several [17 to be exact] LED video pods above the stage that move in and out of the space via winches,” Routhier says. A massive Saco S12 LED wall is found

upstage, and two side screens are also employed. “We have created custom screen frames to emulate the iconic KISS Army banners that are usually hung at each show and utilize framing content for them as well,” she says. Long adds, “The projection screens were created by Rose Brand. The KISS Army banner IMAG screens are rear-projected on by two Barco HDF-W30 30K projectors per side.” Content control is via two disguise [formerly d3 Technologies] gx2 media servers.

Content for the video screens was provided by 4U2C, located in Montreal. “Once we got the 4U2C team onboard for content, we collaborated on show direction and found new ways to use the rig,” Routhier says. Video gear, provided by Solotech, includes two handheld pit cameras, two manned cameras at the front of house, and multiple robo cams.

Lighting

Movement, via pantographs above the stage, is also an integral part of the lighting rig. “The pantographs allow for us to constantly change the lighting rig throughout the show while offering another element of automation to the



The lighting rig includes gear from Vari-Lite, GLP, Martin by Harman, and Elation Professional.

ever-developing set,” Routhier says. “There are 20 total pantographs spread out throughout the air rig.”

The lighting rig, provided by the Las Vegas office of Christie Lites, includes 44 Vari-Lite VL6000 Beams, 126 GLP JDC1 strobes, and 66 Martin by Harman MAC Vipers. “The Vipers are our workhorse,” Long says. “They’re completely bulletproof and roadworthy. The color wheels are great, and they stand up to all our needs.”

The production also makes use of 252 Elation Professional Dartz 360s, located around the upstage LED wall and on the fascia of the set. The unit is a compact 50W RBG LED lamp with 16-bit continuous 360° pan-and-tilt rotation, 14 static-stamped metal gobos, six-facet linear and eight-facet independent rotating prisms, 0-100% linear frost filter for wash effects, high-speed electronic shutter and strobe, as well as electronic dimming. “The Darts are a new addition to this band and rig, which we focused on using as effects fixtures,” Zapar says. “Their compact size is great for carting around the world, while the amount of power they use allows us to create grand looks with mass quantities.” For followspots, the team is using a Follow-Me system.

Programming was done by Routhier and Michael

Cooper on an MA Lighting grandMA2 console. “You have to treat a lot of it like an old-school PAR-can rig,” Routhier explains. “We ended up beefing up a lot of our typical cues, adding ‘fancy pants’ timing and some embellishments, but it’s not cued out like a typical pop show.” As for specifics, she notes, “The opener—‘Detroit Rock City’—has some of the most complicated programming in the show. ‘Psycho Circus’ is quite bombastic as well. Each of the band member’s signature gags has specific, theatrical cuing that is unique from the rest of the show.”

Effects

“The band asked us to push the limits of anything they’ve ever done before and look at new technological developments in the live performance world. It opened unlimited doors for us to be able to create a modern KISS show for them,” Long says.

To push the limits, the SRae team tapped ffp-fx for the flame, pyro, confetti, cryojets, balloons, and smoke effects. “This is the first time we are working with KISS but there have been very intensive talks, demos, and discussions going on for many, many months,” says Nicolai Sabottka,

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In planning the special effects, “we went through many hours of footage—and I mean many hours—since they have been doing this forever,” Sabottka says.

managing director of ffp. “They wanted everything bigger and better than they had in the past but, at the same time, they were looking for moments throughout the show and less ‘fire every time we sing this lyric,’ which was what we love to hear; we feel is the most impactful way to utilize pyro and fire.”

Research was key to the special effects design. “We went through many hours of footage—and I mean many

hours—since they have been doing this forever,” Sabottka says. “We looked into ways to enhance this show from a special effects point of view. Gene has been doing his fire-spitting for over 45 years, so he has that down on his own without us, but Paul, Gene, Tommy, and Eric were all very hands-on in the creation of this show in terms of saying what they were going for.”

Effects design began last October, Sabottka says. “We



set up in The Forum in Los Angeles, where we essentially showed the band our menu of options and examples of how things could be used within songs; we went from there based on what they liked and other suggestions they made to us. What you see now is the result of what we believe is a fairly increased impact to their work in the past and also what the band and their design team told us to change to previous tours.”

One of the first things to resonate with the band was somewhat unexpected, Sabottka adds with a chuckle.

“There are four different prints of balloons, each of which has the KISS logo on one side; on the other side is one of the four different KISS member icons. They were a request directly from the band: One day, we showed them all our fire and pyro gags and they left behind a depressed pyro team, since they only seemed to like the balloons.” The latter bounce down into the audience during “I Was Made for Lovin’ You.”

In the end, pyro is a huge part of the show; it appears at both the top [“Detroit Rock City”], in the finale [“Rock and Roll All Nite”], and in six other songs. “This show has everything from jets to line rockets and everything in-between, and, from the beginning to the end of the show, there are over 1,500 pieces of pyro shot off,” Sabottka says. The pyro “is located on the moving video pods hung upside down, across the whole stage, on the masking trusses stage left and stage right and, of course, a little bit is hung on truss that goes out over the dashers in the arenas, from the stage to front of house and back.”

Also, Sabottka says, “There are four double-headed PFM flames, four LFG flame heads upstage that shoot some 60’ flames horizontally, 12 LFM flames that shoot 90°, and 14 G-Flames on the wings or side trusses to complete the mix.” “Detroit Rock City,” “Deuce,” “War Machine,” “100,000 Years,” “God Of Thunder,” “Psycho Circus,” and “Rock and Roll All Nite” feature flames. “All of our flames and wireless pyro for the finale are triggered from one desk [an MA Lighting MA Dot2] that is synched up, which helped eliminate any challenges there could have been had we been shooting the two separately.”

A somewhat overlooked part of the effects picture is fog. “At the top of the show, when that famous KISS Kabuki drops to a concussion, there is a lot of sensory overload, but the fog sets the scene of this cloud city that subconsciously adds to this larger-than-life personification of the members,” Sabottka says. “We have two giant dry-ice machines [ffp SuperIce] and six CO2-based low foggers [Look Solutions Cryo-Foggers.] The dry ice machines are used for three cues total throughout the show—once at the top of the show, once when Gene breathes fire, and once when Gene flies—and within those three cues we go through 800lb of dry ice.”

In addition, two types of streamer cannons—from Artistry in Motion and MagicFX—shoot Artistry in Motion streamers. Sabottka says, “There are 12 Artistry in Motion Big Shots in use for streamers that go off while Paul flies from the B stage back to the main stage in ‘I Was Made for Lovin’ You’.” Numerous cryojets are on hand, specifically, five MFX PowerJets and two MFX PsyC02Jets. Sabottka adds, “They are utilized between ‘Lick It Up’ and ‘Rock and Roll All Nite’.”

“Rock and Roll All Nite” is awash in effects, including lasers from Lightwave International. “When it comes to a KISS finale, you’re giving them the kitchen sink, especially



The tour makes use of a Cohesion CO-12 PA from Clair Global.

with this being KISS' final tour," Sabottka says. "It is going to be the last thing people ever see of this band on stage in their city, so you need to make it as bombastic and as big as possible."

Sound

"KISS has their own sound, it's a vintage sound; it's not necessarily modernized, like most bands would do. It's still kind of raw," says front-of-house sound engineer Adam Stuart. He has been with KISS on and off since 2011, at either the front of house or monitors. "They have specific sounds that need to fit in for the mix. Gene's bass is more a baritone sound than a low-end bass and having that sit in the mix is very important to him. He plays a lot of riffs along with guitars, and the separation is important. KISS is KISS, and keeping the original form is the biggest thing."

Stuart is using a Cohesion CO-12 PA, courtesy of Clair Global, for the mains and sides. There are 16 CO-12 each side for mains, matched with 14 CO-12s. "We have a rear hang for the 220 sold line, which we are using CO-10s," he says. "We're also using CP-6s as front fills; they're a self-powered Clair box. There are four for the whole front, and two for VIP fills."

For subs, Stuart is using Clair CP-218s. "It's a great-sounding box that has a lot of low end, so I don't have a

lot of subs," he says. "I have six on the ground cardioid; I started off with more and realized that I did not need them, since I had them turned down so much."

He adds, "I've used this PA many times and, with KISS, I don't need the extra supplement of low end. The PA has an amazing amount of low end in it. In the past, when I've used more boxes for coverage, they ended up being driven minimally. Less is more sometimes, and it's been a good result for me." This might be the only instance that "less is more" is uttered in reference to the current tour.

Stuart mixes the show on a DiGiCo SD7 console, adding. "I'm using the new Quantum engines;" it uses three FGPA [field-programmable gate arrays] and has expanded connectivity [local I/O, Optocore, UB MADI, DMI, and Waves], which is faster [up to 2,000 channels at 96kHz.] "Going with the new engine was an option from Clair, and I knew there were new products, so I was willing to work out any issues that would arise. The new engine is definitely faster; it's really improved in speed and, so far, it's been great. I haven't had any issues."

As for the SD7, Stuart admits, "It's been my go-to for a while. I love the SD7 for the sheer flexibility; I can lay out anything into any position, so I'm very comfortable with the layout of the console. I love the sound, and the ergonomics makes my workflow easy."



The many instances of scenic automation are the work of SGPS.

The automation feature of the SD7 is a draw for many front-of-house engineers, but Stuart says he isn't using it extensively. "I'm mixing everything on the fly, so having everything at my fingertips where I am comfortable with it is very important to me. My snapshots make approximate tempo changes and a few mutes."

Last year, a DiGiCo update removed Waves from the surface of the SD7. "Taking Waves off the surface has sped it up a lot and now they have better integration between the two platforms," he notes. "It's taken a lot of issues off the table and it's also opened up more plug-ins. Before, Waves had to map every plug-in for the SD7, and now that they don't have to do that; every Waves plug-in is available on SoundGrid now. There are also some extra plug-ins that weren't available before on the SD7 that are available off the console." He runs Waves SoundGrid off two Mac Minis with a Dell touch screen.

In terms of plug-ins, Stuart says: "I use quite a few SSL G- and E-Channel strips; For my kick and snare, I use G-Channel, and for vocals I use E-Channel." For guitars, he uses the V-EQ4 from Waves. "I love how those sound on guitars," he adds.

Stuart is a fan of Waves' H-Delays and H-Reverbs. "I use the H-Reverbs for a drum room verb, as well as vocal reverbs. In terms of H Delay, I have a slap delay and then I have a long delay for vocal effects."

Stuart also makes use of some unusual plug-ins. "In 'God of Thunder,' Gene has a moment where he says, 'I am

the Lord of the Wastelands.' It's supposed to be a demon voice, so I have a chain going for that. I use the Bass Pitcher Stomp [GTR Tool Rack] on Waves that goes into a Doubler 4, that goes into an H-Reverb and an H-Delay to get the demon voice. That's the strangest effect I do."

For outboard gear, Stuart has "two Bricasti M7s; those are drum reverbs—snare and toms. I use the one for vocal reverb for the song 'Beth.' Then I have three [Empirical Labs] distressors on the bass channels. And there is an API 2500 I use for a drum buss compressor. It's pretty tame."

For vocals, Stuart employs the Shure SM58. "The 58s just work, and they work very well," he says. Simmons, Thayer, and Stanley all use the 58s; for Singer, the drummer, Stuart went in a different direction, noting, "He used to sing on an SM57, because he liked the way his voice cut in his ear mix." The SM57 had an issue with the letter 'P' popping—which was a challenge to eliminate—so Stuart took another approach. "I tried the Telefunken M80. There is a lot more clarity in it than I was getting out of the 57. The Telefunken is a lot smoother, and it sounds better with the cymbals. There's also a lot of bleed for drummer's ear mix, and the Telefunken has a more natural sound."

Stuart has variety of mics on the drum kit: the kicks feature Shure Beta 52As and Shure Beta 91As while the toms have Sennheiser e904s. "For the snare top, I'm using a Telefunken M80 and for the snare bottom, a Neumann TLM 102," he explains. The ride and high hat are using Shure KSM137s, while the overheads have AKG 414 XLIIIs and

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the cow bell has an Audio-Technica ATM 25. Stuart adds: “The guitars are Audio-Technica 4050s, while the bass is a couple of DIs, and a direct of his head, for a wet effect.”

Since this is a KISS show, it involves more than a handful of theatrical gags, which means extra microphones for Stuart in a variety of positions. He explains, “Paul has the

that helps a lot. The 58s are just great; you get lots of gain before feedback.” Out in the house, Stuart uses a Shure Axient system with the 58s.

Before he was at the front of house, Stuart ran monitors for KISS many years; currently that position is being manned by Scott Diamond. “They are probably one of the



Seventeen video pods move in and out of the space via winches.

gag where he flies to a catwalk, and there are four mics on just the catwalk. It goes up to about 30', which is pretty much directly in line with the PA, so there's quite a bit of PA blowing into those. For the finale, Gene and Tommy ride crane arms that sweep out over the audience.”

Stuart's solution to the FOH/PA problem is twofold. “My guys are extremely loud singers by anyone's standards, so

toughest bands to run monitors for,” Stuart confides.

Diamond is on a SD7 with the Quantum Core with a Shure PSM 1000 personal monitor system. “The band is mixed on sets of JH Audio in-ears. Paul and Tommy are on both on Roxannes, Gene is on JH7s, and Eric is on JH 11s,” Stuart says.

The Final Tour Ever continues through the fall. 📶