

# Art and Metaphysics

Photos and Text by: Steve Jennings

Peter Gabriel's *i/o Tour* was an art gallery and experiment in AI-generated imagery



Richardson transformed the upstage circular video screen with a solar eclipse effect, lining the edges with GLP JDC Line 500s.

Peter Gabriel's recently completed *i/o Tour* surrounded its songs with plenty of innovative technology. The show, broken up into two ten-song sets, celebrated both the artist's hits along with the song list of his new album, *i/o*. The tour's innovative production design caused plenty of comment.

The Boston-based magazine *The Arts Fuse* wrote that Gabriel "gave recurring credit to his bandmates, first introducing each one as they opened the concert in an ersatz campfire circle under the massive eclipsing moon on a round overhead screen for 'Washing of the Water' and 'Growing Up'." The *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, added, "Under a glowing image of a full moon on a crystal-clear circular screen, Gabriel took the listener on a metaphysical journey of the human life (and death) cycle, the lunar cycle and, in one instance, the laundry cycle." According to the Southern California newspaper the *Daily Breeze*, during part of the show, "a stage-wide transparent scrim obscured a clear view of Gabriel and the band as they opened with 'Darkness,' from *Up*, and 'Love Can Heal' from the new album. Gabriel sang behind it, sometimes in silhouette [and] sometimes, as the spotlights shifted, like a ghost behind the screen. At one point, he seemed to 'paint' on it, moving his hand to create swirls and streaks of green and red light that followed his onscreen shadow as he walked the width of the stage. The bespoke artwork for each new song also added elements of happiness, sorrow, sometimes joy and laughter. 'Love Can Heal' included a moody painting of a couple cocooned in an embrace by British artist Antony Micallef. It was followed by 'Road to



The band appeared behind a stage-wide transparent scrim when performing “Darkness,” from *Up*, and “Love Can Heal” from the new album.

Joy,’ one of the most fun and upbeat tracks on the new record with artwork by Chinese artist and human rights activist Ai Weiwei, who contributed a piece titled ‘Middle Finger in Pink’.”

*Lighting&Sound America* got the opportunity to talk to some of the tour’s key players.

**Daniel Richardson,  
lighting designer, pro-  
grammer, and director**

Richardson says working with the star was a true collaborative process. “Peter is a genius with ideas firing off in all directions at any moment, which is exciting and inspiring. It started as loose meetings about the themes and concepts of the new album: nature, mortality, time, memory, and humanity. There was always a return to something circular. He liked the idea of a screen for each performer onstage, too, so this is where we went.”

Richardson sometimes transformed the upstage circular video screen with

a solar eclipse effect, lining the edges with GLP JDC Line 500s. “We needed the show to evolve, with new elements revealed and hidden, so it was clear we should put it on a Kinesys hoist system.” This allowed Richardson to create different configurations of the circular screen and nine vertical video screens located upstage. “We closed it down like a lid over the band in ‘Red Rain’ with the JDCs sparkling like red rain on a street; at times, it became a giant IMAG screen high above the band, blasting the audience in hit songs like ‘Big Time’ and ‘Sledgehammer.’ The circle was an amazing piece of engineering completed by the Belgian company Twenty Three with a screen provided by VSS and lights by Neg Earth. Video panels and lights all stayed inside the custom frame when traveling on custom carts between shows. This meant the show could be loaded in and out very quickly, meeting our demanding tour schedule.”

Once the basic design was pulled

together, show designer Robert Lepage joined the workshops in London where a dramaturgical narrative was created. “Robert was fantastic to work with; he is a master of drama and movement,” Richardson says. “There is a poetry to the way the video content and set pieces reveal themselves and unfold during the show, starting from a closed-down look around the campfire scene and expanding into new hits like ‘i/o’ with AI-generated colorful cell culture visuals by [the anonymous AI collective] Sagans.”

Gabriel loved that Richardson has a master’s degree in acupuncture and Chinese medicine, so, as the design progressed, they named the different screens Heaven, Human, and Earth, after the trigrams represented in the I Ching. These include the flown circle, the nine screens for each band member, and the downstage circular LED floor. “Along the journey,” Richardson says, “we added an upstage ‘other World’ area, a bridge for the perform-

ance of 'Don't Give Up' and solo cello performances during 'And Still'."

Gabriel and tour director Dave "T" Taraskevics have a long-standing relationship with Neg Earth, Richardson notes. "They have been doing a brilliant job of supplying lighting for Peter across many tours, so it was a natural choice. Neg Earth are the top company in the UK and their team was able to pull off a difficult and intricate show with automation and with most of the light being bounced off winch-controlled mirrors! The Ayrton Dominos provided brilliant power and the Robe Forte with HCF [high color fidelity] engine was a wonderful followspot and key light. Our crew chief, John Shelley, is an industry legend and was a pleasure to work with. I have never felt in safer hands."

The automated mirrors, on DMX-controlled winches, lined the backline and sides of the stage. "Each mirror had three winches, which controlled its height and angle, with an Ayrton Domino below to produce the light," Richardson says. "These came out of an idea that Peter and I spoke about in one of our very first meetings. We had this rule of 'no direct light,' a rule we liked to break, but, overall, we managed to side-, back-, and top-light the performers using these mirrors, manufactured by Moer Lighting in China, as the workhorse."

Another great showpiece was the semi-transparent projection screen, "painted" by Gabriel. It was fitted with BlackTrax BTBeacons and featured clever programming, using disguise and Notch, by Lewis Bailey and Ed White. "It's a unique effect none of us had encountered before," Richardson says. "It was inspired by Antony Micallef's artwork, produced for the song 'Love Can Heal.' [on the *i/o* album]. Peter has a deep love for art and many talented friends. For the new album, he is releasing a song on each full moon, and, with each release, there is an accompanying artwork based on the album's themes. We thought it would be amazing to

turn the show into an art gallery, showcase these pieces, and animate them to make our video content. It was both fascinating and a challenge to work with artists like Ai Weiwei and David Spriggs, among many others." The finger letters in "Big Time" [see page 32] came from Gabriel's friend Kai Krause, a bit of a legend in visual software realms, who is quite deep in the AI field. "Then visuals for the song 'i/o' were created by the French artist [collective] Sagans using [the AI image generator] Stable Diffusion and various generative video techniques, which was incredibly fresh."

The full lighting rig included 50 GLP JDC Line 500s, 31 Ayrton Domino-S units, 21 GLP impression FR10s, 16 GLP JDC1 strobes, 13 Robe FORTES, 13 Lowel Omni-Lights, 12 TMB Solaris Flares, and ten SGM P-2s, controlled

White, disguise programmer genius and bouncer of ideas, whose input during rehearsals was invaluable; Lewis Bailey, Notch artist, who understood Peter and knew how to play, making beautiful artworks of his own; Really Creative Media, who made content for a massive show in an unthinkably short space of time, and the visual artists we worked with, who deserve whole articles themselves. Then working with video director Ed Coleman on the show was a wonderful experience. Ed always had the shots Peter and I wanted in the show, beautifully framed and precisely executed."

### Ed Coleman, video director

Coleman was directly employed by Real World Tours, Gabriel's company; however, his association with VSS



A Kinesys hoist system created different configurations of the circular screen and the nine vertical video screens located upstage. "At times, we closed it down like a lid over the band," Richardson says.

by three MA Lighting grandMA2 Full - Size consoles.

Richardson has high praise for the entire touring crew, citing "Dave T and [production manager] Gary Trew for putting faith in the vision and seeing it through; George Sinclair, creative producer and general keeper of sanity; Ed

commenced at an early stage.

"During the initial technical weeks in February, VSS played a pivotal role on-site by overseeing the deployment of cameras and PPU, while enabling the exploration of a plethora of innovative concepts," he says. "These ranged from live cymatics to live



Gabriel sang certain numbers behind the scrim, sometimes appearing in silhouette and, at one point, seeming to “paint” on it, creating swirls and streaks of green and red light.

reflections and light refraction, each endeavor marked by its creative brilliance. VSS, a UK-based entity, specializes in furnishing colossal LED solutions and more, to immense productions on a global scale.”

Coleman says Adrian Offord, managing director, and Joe Makein, project manager, displayed a level of adaptability and expertise that proved invaluable in orchestrating an intricate and expansive setup. “Their unwavering support was manifest not only in the planning stages but also during the execution, where they seamlessly addressed any issues that arose, ensuring a smooth and unhindered progression. The VSS crew was guided by our crew chief, Andy Joyce.”

Big Noise Films, established in 2012, represents the fruition of Coleman’s entrepreneurial aspirations. “We operate as a nimble and independent production company, with our primary focus on the direction and production of multifaceted content, including cinematic multicam, branded works and documentary films, and a

diverse array of musical luminaries. The opportunity to collaborate with Daniel Richardson and Peter Gabriel was indeed an exhilarating prospect, one that I embraced immediately. It is always a profound honor when individuals I hold in high regard both endorse me and my work and invite me to join their creative endeavors, for which I remain deeply appreciative.”

Coleman says achieving a balanced 3:1 aspect ratio presented a formidable challenge, primarily due to the intricately tiered structure of the stage, which necessitated an unconventional approach to shooting. “This prompted us to employ a more stringent cinematic framing technique with our front-of-house cameras, deviating slightly from our typical IMAG style. Simultaneously, we introduced state-of-the-art Sony FR7 cameras onstage, enabling me to capture stunning up-close shots of the band. This innovative setup not only introduced an element of intimacy and dynamism to our coverage but also imparted a cinematic quality, thanks to the exceptionally

shallow depth of field that the FR7 cameras inherently offer.”

The video package included ROE Visual Carbon CB5 panels for the circular and IMAG screens; ROE Onyx BO3 panels on the set’s columns; Absen 5mm floor tiles in the deck; two Panasonic PT-RQ 35K 4K laser projectors; two disguise gx 3 media servers; two Notch graphics machines; a Ross Carbonite Ultra video switcher and Ross Ultrix router handling feeds from three Sony FR7 robos, two Panasonic UE-150 robos, nine Marshall mini cams, and 12 Shogun record units.

Coleman was brought onboard during the initial testing phase, which allowed him to actively participate in the camera operations as the show gradually grew. “These preliminary stages were marked by extensive camera experimentation, during the time in which Peter, Daniel, and Robert Lepage delved into various visual elements. The process was exceptionally enjoyable, and it played a pivotal role in shaping our cinematic approach. Peter, a true creative powerhouse,

played a central role in this journey, while Daniel skillfully facilitated the expansion and evolution of these concepts. Notably, this process persisted throughout the entire project to the very last show, underscoring Peter's unrelenting dedication to innovation and evolution, spanning from the musical aspects to the visual elements of the show and vice versa."

### **Richard Sharratt, front-of-house engineer**

Mixing at the front of house was Richard Sharratt, using the Solid State Logic L550 Plus console. He says it sounds amazing, and he finds the compact surface layout is great to work with. "When Peter Gabriel owned SSL [the firm was sold to Audiotonix in 2017], he was involved in developing the Live consoles, so it goes without saying that we would want to use them on his shows, which we have done since the consoles launched."

Sharratt's first Gabriel project was the *New Blood Orchestra Tour* in 2010-11. He then took over from Ben Findlay on the last leg of the *Back to Front Tour* in 2014, followed by the *Rock, Paper, Scissors Tour* with Sting in 2016. Sharratt's background is in theatre and one-off special events such as the London Olympics Opening Ceremonies. In 2017-19, he toured with Little Steven and his Disciples of Soul.

The main PA consisted of, per side, main hangs of 14 L-Acoustics K1s with four K2 downfills and eight KS28 flown subs, plus side hangs of 12 K1s, and 270 hangs of 12 K3s, 24 KS28 ground subs in eight stacks of three, and eight A15s and four A10s along the front of the stage. All are powered by 60 KA12X amps in two carts at stage left and stage right, driven by two L-Acoustics P1 processors at the front of house over a redundant AVB network.

From the selection of plug-ins available, Sharratt uses 32-band graphics, 10-band parametric EQ, de-essers,



Gabriel used a DPA 4288 headset and a handheld Audix OM6, both of which were new for this tour.

multi-band compressors, dynamic EQs, delays, reverbs, SansAmp, gated reverb, and denoisers. "My outboard consists of four Bricasti M7 reverbs—drums, band, BVs, and Gabriel's Vox—controlled by an M10 controller using MIDI from the console; [they're] the best, most natural-sounding reverbs I know." Sharratt uses 68 mono inputs, 39 stereo inputs, 12 stereo groups, 13 mono auxes, 19 stereo auxes, and 14 matrix outputs.

"Other than the handling of Peter's very dynamic vocals being a challenge, with his fader constantly under the finger and different vocal EQs for each song, the rest of the mix is pretty straightforward. There again, there's a big dynamic range both within and between songs. I'd like to thank our amazing audio team led by Fergus [Mount, audio crew chief] and Britannia Row/Clair."

### **Dom Shaw, monitor engineer, Peter Gabriel**

Shaw says the decision for all the tour's engineers to use the SSL con-

sole was mostly down to Dee Miller, who controls monitors for the band, and Sharratt, as they've been using them for some time. "However, due to Peter's longstanding relationship with SSL, I've always been comfortable on their boards both in the studio and live." He cites their "sound quality and consistency. My background is mostly in studio engineering and, coming off the back of using their consoles for Peter's new record, I found there was no massive compromise in sound when transitioning to their live desks. That for me was key in bridging the gap."

For Gabriel's headset mic, the DPA 4288 was introduced as a more lightweight solution because the artist's previous headset had been a little uncomfortable to wear. "As it happens, the change was universally appreciated as the capsule was much better suited to Peter's voice." The Audix OM6, which Gabriel used at his keyboard position and as a handheld when roaming, was also new. "It was brought on for its superior directionali-

ty, which came in handy when we had nine people onstage! Both of these changes were masterminded by Dee, Richard, and Fergus.”

Shaw says the SSL system has a fairly comprehensive range of onboard effects and, as he was only doing Gabriel's mix, a Bricasti M7 module was all that was required. “The inboard roster has all the usual suspects with some handy extras that feel more tailored to the SSL sound, and I particularly enjoyed using the SSL Bus Compressor.” He adds that Gabriel was very clear on what he wanted from his mix: “for it to sound as close to the record as possible, with his keys and vocals sitting obviously above this. With eight people sharing the stage with Peter, all with their own vocals, there was a fair amount of

drum spill that needed managing; however, the band were incredibly consistent in performance making that job much easier as time went on.” This was Shaw's first major tour, “in fact, my first tour full stop, so I'm happy and relieved it's gone so well! I have many to thank: Dee, Fergus, Richard, and the entire Brit Row team. They've been both kind and incredibly resourceful throughout the entire tour.”

### **Dee Miller, monitor engineer, band**

Miller, who handles the eight-member band, 40 years of life on the road teaches one how to interpret signals from musicians. “Luckily, I've been with Peter 20 years and know what each of the long-term band members want and worked it out for the new

members as well. At monitor world, my eyes should never leave the stage.”

Regarding IEMs, Miller says the band members all use Shure with Ultimate Ears molds. “Things are straightforward in terms of all just having stereo mixes, apart from drummer Manu Katché, who has one d&b [audiotechnik] M2 wedge and one in-ear. I'm mixing on the SSL L550 Plus and I use the onboard effects, which include four reverbs; there are no external plug-ins. The SSL compression and gates are superb.”

Other monitor gear includes eight SSL ML32.32 stage boxes, four shared between Gabriel and the band and four at the front of house; one Shure AD600 spectrum manager, six Shure AD4Q Axient quad receivers, six



The finger letters in “Big Time” came from Gabriel's friend Kai Krause, a legend in visual software realms, who is deeply involved in AI.

Shure AD2 handheld transmitters, 19 Shure AD1 body-pack transmitters, ten Shure PSM 1000 in-ears, and 20 PSM 1000 In-ear body-pack receivers.

Miller says the tour was always challenging as Gabriel was constantly evolving and the music has a lot of layers. “I have a great relationship with the band, world-class musicians who are extremely nice people to work with. We have quite a few long-term crew members, which says it all, but, with the new crew onboard, it was a great team. Audio-wise, the Britannia Row/Clair crew were outstanding.”

### Fergus Mount, audio crew chief

The tour’s audio provider is Britannia Row Productions, part of Clair Global, notes audio crew chief and front-of-house tech Fergus Mount, who prepped the equipment and supported Richard Sharratt on the SSL all the way through rehearsals and the tour. “For the European leg, the PA was all from the main warehouse in Twickenham, UK, and the North America leg was serviced from the Clair headquarters in Lititz, Pennsylvania. With regard to how the system is chosen, account manager Dave Compton had initial conversations with production and Richard Sharratt regarding costs and requirements. He then directed the design/engineering team at Britannia Row, looked after by Josh Lloyd in our case, to design a system that works for all the venues for the tour.

### The *i/o* Tour

Show Design: Peter Gabriel, Robert Lepage, Daniel Richardson  
Lighting Designer, Programmer & Director: Daniel Richardson  
Lighting Crew Chief: John Shelley  
Lighting Techs: Roland Greil, Peter “Kiss” Horne, Matthew Barnes, Zac Saleh, Vittorio Verte, Steph Felstead  
FOH Engineer: Richard Sharratt  
Systems Engineer: Ben Webb  
Audio Crew Chief: Fergus Mount  
Monitor Engineers: Dom Shaw (Peter Gabriel), Dee Miller (Band)  
Monitor Tech: Stephen Wharton  
Audio System Techs: Chuck Wells, Taylor Samuel, Tom Gardner (Audio RF Tech)  
Tour Director: Dave “T” Taraskevics  
Assistant Tour Manager: Brett Morgan  
Production Manager: Gary Trew  
Production Assistant: Michaela Trew  
Creative Producer: George Sinclair  
Stage Manager: John Adams  
Video Content Creators: Really Creative Media, Lewis Bailey, Jamy Kenny, Charlie Smith, Tyson Edwards, Eric Epstein  
Video Director: Ed Coleman  
Video Rack Engineer: Stuart Rowsell  
Cameraman: Simon Difazio (Lead), Peter Harries (Tech)

Video Crew Chief: Andy Joyes  
Video Techs: Gary Dunn, Claire Heat, David Ramola, Reinder Vandersteene, David Bartlett  
Media Server Programmers: Ed White, Josh Keys  
Kinesys Automation: Steve Kellaway, George Davies  
BlackTrax Tech: Sam Augustus  
Backline Techs: Chris Lawson, Michele Russotto, Fraser Latimer, James Hennin, Peter Mills, Dom Shaw, Matt Facey, Shawn Lobb  
Riggers: Steve Belfield (Head), Mike Dunn, David Townsend  
Set Carps: Graham Hatcher, Steve Greatorex, Richie Flanagan  
Visual Artists: David Spriggs, Cornelia Parker, Ai Weiwei, Barthélemy Toguo, Michal Rovner, Annette Messenger, Sagans, Antony Micallef, Tim Shaw, Henry Hudson, Maarten Baas, Megan Rooney, Steve Gris, David Moreno.  
Lighting Company: Neg Earth  
Video Company: VSS  
Video Content: Really Creative Media  
Audio Company: Britannia Row Productions (Clair Global)  
Stage Fabrication: Total Solutions  
Automation: Neg Earth  
Bespoke Touring Circular Screen: TwentyThree

This is then handed over to Ben Webb, the system engineer, and myself to prep and make work on the road.”

One task that Mount looked after was the archive recording for each show. “Peter is adamant that every performance or sound check is recorded and archived. We have a rack-mount 32GB NAS that was pro-

vided by the archive team at Real World Studios to allow us enough storage to back up all the show recordings from the tour. This also doubled as a virtual soundcheck system for Richard.”

The *i/o* Tour ran from mid-September to mid-October. The album will be released on December 1. 🎧