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Emotional Rescue



Creating magical moments for Twenty One Pilots' New Tour

By: Sharon Stancavage

"The show is designed to take you on a musical journey full of emotion," says Daniel Slezinger, production/lighting designer for Twenty One Pilots' *Emotional Roadshow Tour*. "It's Broadway, it's EDM, it's rock, it's alternative, it's a party."

It was through their former Nashville Club, 12th and Porter that Slezinger and his business partner Justin Roddick became involved with the musical duo known as Twenty One Pilots. Roddick, the band's live producer, explains, "In November of 2012, we promoted our first Twenty One Pilots headline show and instantly loved the band, the music, and the die-hard fan base. The band's agent, Jeff Kronos, introduced us to their creative team and managers a few months later. Together, we came up with a plan for an efficient, but effective, lighting design that could fit in a small bus trailer, but looked big on stage. During the last three years, we have been lucky enough to have a front-row seat to one of the most amazing success stories in the music business in the last 20 years—and it keeps getting bigger every day." Today, the pair owns the firm Concert Investor, which, Roddick says, "provides audio, video, lighting, rigging, staging, and effects equipment as well as custom video content, live recording services, and crew to the band through a close knit group of partner companies." He adds, "VER, SGPS, Accurate Staging, Tantrum, and Image Engineering all had big roles to play in the growth story of the Twenty One Pilots live show."

Conceptually, the production is a collaboration between several individuals, as Slezinger explains: "Tyler Joseph [lead vocalist and keyboardist] always takes the creative lead for his show and our job is to interpret his vision in the design. I work closely with [co-lighting designer/lighting director] Tyler 'Shap' Shapard and content creator Chris Schoenman, from Tantrum Content [located in Cincinnati], to create the show's visuals and theatrical feel under the direction of Mark Eshleman. Mark has been the overall creative director since the beginning of Twenty One Pilots. We have grown an amazing team that works very hard to achieve excellence in pre-production." Shapard adds, "Basically, it's conversation between a group of friends."

For the current production, Shapard says, "Tyler told us he wanted to be engulfed by video; that's how it started." The idea was solid; however, there were technical considerations, since the band would be playing a mix of large and small venues. He adds, "We needed a design that could fit in different types of rooms. We knew we couldn't hang a video wall every night, because in some rooms we

couldn't even hang the trusses. We had to figure out how we were going to have this video wall that engulfed them, but still have my lighting rig."

Then, he says, "We [Shapard and Slezinger] were at VER in Nashville, and a good buddy of mine, Mike Drew who was with Rascal Flatts at the time, had designed some carts with Accurate Staging for Little Big Town. They were really simple carts that went up using a crank and made a video wall." They became the visual starting point for the video-laden set.

Slezinger, Shapard, and production manager Daniel Gibson visited Accurate Staging's Nashville office. Shapard says, "We told them we wanted to have 16' video walls, but we wanted to cut out their centers and put in lights."

"The problem with the carts," Shapard notes, "was they were incredibly front-heavy because of the [Claypaky A.leda] B-EYE K-20s and [Robe] Pointes that we had on them, and the part that was incredibly front-heavy was the part that actually cranked up. So they put outriggers on them, and we added a bunch of lighting." At this point, the tour featured an 18mm Winvision LED wall, which is a fairly light, blow-through product.

As the tour moved into amphitheaters this past summer, a change was made. "The 18mm Winvision and 9mm Winvision have the exact same frame, which is really convenient," Shapard says. "It's just double the resolution. We took the 18mm product off, and we had to redrill some of the holes for the 9mm wall. This was a concept we figured out from the get-go; we knew we were going to do that on the second leg. We designed the carts for this amphitheater/large club tour, making them so we could take them to a new level for the next tour, adding production around it." Together, the six carts create a 48'-wide x 16'-high wall. "They used to make a semi-circle or a 'V,' but now they're just in a straight line," he adds.

In terms of the lighting built into the walls, Carts 1, 2, 5, and 6 feature four Pointes and two B-EYES in each of the cut-outs. Two Pointes are located on the top of each center cart. "That's to give us more of a wall," Shapard says, "so we can put more of a picture in there without a big cutout. Screwed onto the bottom of the cart are six [Philips Lighting] Nitro 510Cs as well as six [Elation Professional] CuePix WW2s. There are also six more Nitros hanging about 10' higher off the ground on the carts and another CuePix hanging 15' at the top of the cart." The greatest number of lighting units on a single LED cart is ten.

For arenas, the design team also added four 12' x 8' static 9mm Winvision walls hung above the LED carts. The

additional walls, as well as the 26' x 18' left and right IMAG screens, create a visual picture scaled for arenas rather than amphitheaters. Five 10' vertical finger trusses work alongside these above-the-carts LED walls as well. Each finger truss has four Robe Pointes; Trusses 1, 3, and 5 have a single Philips Nitro 510C, with an Image Engineering laser on Finger Trusses 2 and 4.

Lighting

The lighting rig includes 108 Robe Pointes, 56 Robe BMFL Spots, 12 Robe BMFL Blades, 14 Robe Robin 1200 LEDWashes, 28 Robe Robin 600 LEDWashes, 10 Claypaky Sharpy Wash 330s, and four Reel EFX DF-50 diffusion hazers. "My workhorse is the Pointe," Shapard says. "I love quick and snappy stuff; I love how fast the Pointe is. The shutters are fast and the pan and tilt are fast. It's the most versatile light I've ever used and I added another 40 to the arena tour. I have now 108—they're in the carts, behind the video wall, in the air, and also out in the crowd." Slezinger adds, "Shap and I are both huge fans of Robe lights, they have been the dominant fixtures used on all of the Twenty One Pilots tours. The Robe Pointe was a game-changer, giving you all the features of a normal arc spot fixture, but also having the optics to get some seriously tight beams that reach out into the audience. When you need the lights to mirror the energy coming from the artist, they can keep up." Eighty-three Philips Nitro 510C strobes are also scattered around the stage. "Strobes are a big part of my show, and it was hard for me to move from the Atomic 3000. The 510C packs a lot of punch and it is small," Shapard explains.

For the arena tour, the designers added two massive audience trusses, each filled with 20 Robe Pointes, five Robe LEDWash 1200s, ten 510 Nitro 510Cs, and five Elation CuePix WW2s.

The production also includes a B stage, supplied by the Las Vegas office of SGPS. The floor is comprised of Winvision 9mm LEDs in factory frames; it's surrounded by 12 Robe Pointes, two Nitro 510Cs, and 28 Robe LEDWash 600s.

When programming, Shapard says, "We divvy up the set, and decide who wants to do what." Looking at the set list, they make sure that the songs are divided between them, and there are no more than three songs from each person being programmed in succession. He adds, "This is a strategic way to keep our show dynamic."

Shapard and Slezinger have very different programming styles. Shapard explains, "Lighting designer and programmer Sooner Routhier is a good friend of mine; she taught me pretty much everything I know on the grandMA. She has an old-school feel and I think I'm a little more like that; my style is very flowy." Slezinger says, "I consider my programming for Twenty One Pilots more in the vein of 'theatrical rock,' meaning I try to highlight the big moments in an immense way. For higher-energy moments, sometimes

there are hundreds of cues that collectively tell the same story as the music...as if, for a moment, you could see sound and hear color. Then, at times, I bring the rig down to a single spotlight on the piano."

"Video and lighting complement each other with both timing and color scheme," Slezinger adds. "Fortunately, we had the time to pre-viz all of the elements to make sure they were aligned. With the help of a talented friend, David Perkins, we used Lightconverse to pre-viz the lighting and video together months before the tour started. Then we created a movie of the entire show in the virtual world, so that notes could be made before we entered rehearsals."

"One challenge was the amount of cues we have," Slezinger notes. "With the help of Thomas Krautschied, we utilized an app he developed to streamline our programming and time code timing. We then used Reaper, a time line-based audio-video editor, to mark our cues, label, and even color code our cues offline. We even had the ability to zoom in on the audio waveform and make sure our cues were lined up perfectly with each hit. Then, through a macro process, we imported our cue stacks into the console, which already had time code cues on the time code time line. By the time we were in front of the grandMA2 console, we could focus more on the creative aspect of each cue, rather than worrying about the timing logistics in parallel." Songs like "Car Radio" are not as cue-intensive, while "Polarize," which took almost ten hours to program, is considerably more complex. Slezinger notes, "There are sometimes as many as 1,000 cues in a song, so time code is essential to create consistency."

Shapard runs the show on the road. "The grandMA2 has been the console of choice since the first Twenty One Pilots tour," Slezinger says. "It's very reliable and can handle anything you throw at it, including multiple programming approaches within the same show." This time out, Shapard is carrying four NPUs as well.

Shapard notes that it is the job of the production team to create a series of memorable moments. "The fans are there to hear the songs, and to see Tyler and Josh, but when they walk away, they will talk about the things that happened at the show. I don't say it's a concert; I say it's a theatrical performance—and it is."

To that end, special effects have been part of the production in all iterations. "We use Image Engineering. They're from Baltimore, and that's also something that came to us through Concert Investor," notes Shapard. Brett Tillett, vice president of Image Engineering, says, "Daniel Slezinger, Daniel Gibson, and Tyler Shapard really have a strong understanding of special effects, and knew what looks they wanted to add to the tour. It was great working with such a talented group who had a strong vision of what they wanted to accomplish using the special effects," Tillett adds, "They really wanted a system that would be fully integrated into their show." Currently, the



IMAG and lighting take over when the LED screens on stage go dark.





CO2 jets, lasers, and confetti from Image Engineering are an integral part of the show.

show features six continuous-flow confetti horns, four on the downstage edge of the stage and two at the front of house for the finale. Also featured are 16 Sigma CO2 jets, also on the downstage edge of the stage plus eight units on the B stage.

"TOP [Twenty One Pilots] has been using confetti and CO2 jets for a while," Tillett notes. "For this run, the lasers were the new addition. Tyler and Daniel really had a vision of how to incorporate the lasers into their set and utilize them as focal elements for some songs and complementary elements to the lighting package for other songs," notes Tillett. There are six Light Vector 40W full-color lasers; two hung on the upstage center truss, one each at stage left and stage right, and two on the finger trusses. "We utilized our Beam Composer software to design, program, and operate the lasers; Beam Composer allows the lighting designer [and the lighting director] to design, program, and operate the lasers straight from the console utilizing the grandMA2's effects engine and allowing for seamless integration into the lighting rig."

Sound

Front-of-house sound engineer Shane Bardiau is carrying a Meyer Lyon PA on this tour. "There are many logistical reasons we decided to go with the Meyer rig," he says. "One is because the boxes are self-powered and take up less space in the truck and backstage areas. We chose Lyon over LEO, its big brother, to accommodate the varying sizes of venues."

Also, Bardiau says, "The Meyer rig is perfect for TOP because they have a very energetic atmosphere. This PA has headroom for days, without it struggling or sounding loud, which I love." The main hang is 20-deep Lyon, with 16 Lyon-Ms over four Lyon-Ws per side. The sides are 16-deep Lyon, with 12 Lyon-Ms over four Lyon-Ws. Subs include three Meyer 1100-LFCs flown in a cardioid configuration per side, and six stacks of two in a sub arc across the front of the stage. Front fill is comprised of a single Meyer MINA on top of each 1100 stack, and four UPJ-1Ps for utility fills.

"I've been mixing TOP on a Midas console for about two years now and it has been a great desk," he contin-



Lighting inside the LED carts includes Robe Pointes and Claypaky A.leda B-EYE K20s.

ues. “It is very analog-sounding, which works well for the drum sounds I’m going for and other things, such as the piano that Tyler plays. This year, though, we’ve made the switch to DiGiCo [the SD5]. I like the flexibility and clarity of this console. I can add the analog sound I’m used to anywhere I want, while leaving other channels crisp and clear. Nothing against Midas: I just wanted to switch things up and try to improve my mix by adding different sounds that I didn’t have before.”

Bardiau is also a fan of certain plug-ins: “In my opinion, they add character. I’m currently using a variety of compressors like the API 2500, SSL Master Bus, dbx 160, and the H Comp. I also lean on the Waves C6 for a few inputs. In a couple of songs, I put a guitar drive pedal plug-in on Tyler’s bass for some added effect. I also put a MaxxVolume plug-in on his vocal. It really gets it to pop out front and feel like he’s right in your face.” In fact, there’s a full Waves setup at the front of house with a Waves Soundgrid Extreme server. “I strongly believe that if you’re using a digital console, you keep everything digital, so therefore, no outboard gear for me. I do everything digi-

tally inside the desk.”

Working with Bardiau is VER system engineer Kenny Sellars. “Shane and I work closely to create the sound of the show,” Sellars says. “He knows the music and the big picture, whereas I focus on the little things. I may mention the bass isn’t translating well in the room and ask for a specific frequency to be taken out. This allows Shane to push and pull, creating a dynamic show, while I fine-tune the edges. It’s all about working together to understand the sound and the room as a whole.”

Bardiau uses a specific technique to help place Joseph’s vocal within the overall mix. Sellars explains, “On the console, Shane runs two mix groups separately from each other. One mix has all of the instruments and music, without vocals; while the other is all of Tyler’s mics. The music group has a Waves C6 compressor inserted on it, with one band set up as a sidechain to the vocal group. The sidechain band is set to cut out 400-1.6kHz around 2dB — 3dB when Tyler sings. This creates a pocket for the vocal by cutting out competing frequencies. In many other shows, the main vocal is pushed much louder in the mix to

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achieve intelligibility. This can create an unbalanced feeling for the audience and distract from the music. In our case, the vocal does not need to be as loud, which allows it to sit within the music and still be intelligible.”

Bardiau’s microphone package can be summed up in one word: Shure. “We have the KSM9HS on Tyler’s vocal. It’s such a good microphone for his voice and it really translates well in his range. Tyler really likes the KSM9HS, so everyone is happy,” says Bardiau. His microphone package also includes Shure Beta 91s, 52s, 57s, 98s, KSM 32s, and 137s. He adds, “They’re all the classics. I love them.”

Many of the show’s memorable moments happen in the house. At one point Joseph disappears, re-appearing in the audience. “It’s not terribly challenging, besides the fact that he’s far away from the stage on a wireless mic and

the opening act to have two [DiGiCo] SD9s with the core2 upgrades. Technically, we can run the entire show on the SD9s; they will be up and running during our show with a scene ready to go.” Slezinger adds, “Brent Dannen, executive director, audio, at VER, has been a great audio partner of Concert Investor, helping make sure the sound gear and crew is solid. Tony Macre, who runs VER Nashville, has played a key role since the beginning, helping us scale all production from clubs to arenas.” VER also provided the lighting and video equipment.

“It’s a whole team of great people who make this show happen, not only in audio, but in every department across the board,” Bardiau says. “I cannot speak highly enough about my audio team. They pull off wonders every day and have the best attitudes while doing so. It’s never really easy—I don’t know how they do it. I give all credit to



d3 Technologies' 4x2pro media server handles the tour's video.



Video imagery is provided by Tantrum Content.

wireless ears,” Sellars says. “Early in the day, we walk the microphone and an in-ear belt pack up there to make sure they’re operating properly and that we are not exceeding the range of the antennas.”

Any time Joseph is out in the audience, including at the B stage, there’s the risk of feedback; however, Sellars notes, “Tyler is one of the best about not letting that microphone leave the edge of his lips. There are no feedback issues with him. It’s actually super-easy to deal with his vocals, which is very pleasant.”

“From a sound standpoint, we’re going to great lengths in regards to redundancy and backup plans,” Sellars says. “We have spare engines, input cages, wireless mics, and ears. Everything has an emergency plan. We even spec’d

them; without them, my job wouldn’t be so great.”

“The fans actually play a huge role in the success of the live show,” Roddice says. “It’s the one audio-visual effect of a show that money just can’t buy, and I’ve never experienced the amount of fan participation in my 17 years in the live event business. Twenty One Pilots’ fans are so engaged and engaging that is infectious. They all know the lyrics to every song and typically sing loudly and in the right key. The experience of being in that kind of environment is hard to explain. It’s simply magical.”

Twenty One Pilots’ *Emotional Roadshow Tour* is in arenas in the US until early March; it then moves to the Pacific Rim. 📺



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