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# BRITs Showtime . . .

words by Steve Moles

performance photography by John Marshall / JM Enternational

Well blow me down, "Folk Music is saved." That was the 8am headline to announce the BRIT Awards on BBC radio the morning after the event. Maybe it was the cut-glass accents of some members of Mumford & Sons that stirred the Reithian heart of the BBC? While I rejoice in the success of Mumford, and indeed fellow BRIT award-winning folkster Laura Marling, I think Seth Lakeman (to name just one) might take exception to the Beeb's glib assertion. More to the point, presenter James Cordon succinctly nailed it at event's end when he said: "This year's show is about music."

Without recourse to hyperbole about fabulous lights, dynamic sound - and what about Peter Bingeman's gorgeous set design? - I for one found this year's broadcast presentation the most fulfilling, balanced and enjoyable show ever; my attention never waned across the full two hours.

Several of the North American performers (let's not forget Arcade Fire are Canadian) made self-evidently genuine, saccharine-free references to drawing inspiration from UK artists - Celo Green name-checking Boy George was especially touching - and thus, though it is entirely the intention of the BRITs to pat the UK music industry on the back, the fact is we should all rejoice. The sheer breadth of musical styles on display demonstrated the unquestionable talent that appears to be seeping from every pore of the British corpus.

Take That aren't merely one step removed from a contemporary *Pop Idol* act, they've metamorphosed to a different genre. Adele, when she stepped on the vocal gas pedal, sent shivers down the spine of the O2 Arena that reverberated out through the TV screens into millions of homes (with Toby Alington's brilliant live mix topping the iTunes chart the following day). Plan B and Tinie Tempah, each in their own unique fashion, demonstrated an amazing ambition, fusing musical styles into something that, less well-handled, could have been the musical equivalent of brown paint.

To decry any of the performances for 'singing to playback' is to miss the point, and besides, Arcade Fire proved that when the BRITs wants to, it is perfectly capable of presenting a 48-input live band - and didn't they sound good?

## Kate Wright - Production

Wright has been in this show's production office since 1995 and worked closely with the sorely-missed Mick Kluczynski. The show has moved venues again: how much impact does this have on today's presentation? "Since '95 I've seen this show staged at Alexandra Palace, Earls Court, The London Arena, and now here, so we're accustomed to moving. Every venue has its issues but I have to say the team here at the O2 has been so pro-active to fit us in; when you consider that no venue has a show like this on a regular basis, maybe just one or two a year, then that really helps. I started work on this year's event back in July 2010 and the O2 have been nothing but fantastic. 'Q' Willis, their technical manager, was at Earls Court before, so he knew what to expect in terms of scale, if not the specifics; there were no surprises for him. Another advantage is that the after-show party is on the same level, right down the corridor for me, in fact. From my point of view that makes the whole thing much easier to administer."

"Looking at the show specifically, putting the presentation area in the middle of the hall is new and it certainly makes the format more intimate. The biggest pressure was one of time, we had a shorter load-in. The reduced time-frame was not through choice, the venue was simply busy and this was the biggest slot we could have. All the service providers put in more manpower to help us overcome the loss of time, but it's certainly not something we want to have to do every year. There are some things that require a finite amount of time no matter how many people you throw at them - rigging especially, and rigging the lights."

I asked, were you able to apply more pressure to artists for their special performance needs? Wright laughed, as did everyone else around the production office. I didn't press her. "What is a joy is the amount of space around the venue, the truck access, the parking. And there's no load-out curfew such as you have at Earls Court." The residential buildings close by EC makes the curfew rational, if not desirable. "Logistically that makes it much easier than before. If we had the Earls Court restrictions here we could never have done it." Tumbleweed blew silent through the streets of West London . . .

So to the technology and artistry. The layout in brief is this: the stage is conventionally end-on and presents as an open book; to stage-left is the 3D vertical structure of a curved, exploded Union flag, while to stage-right sits a more undefined, open performance area. From the centre, a walkway extends out to the centre of the floor area, a circular dais at its extremity. The surrounding floor area is dining only; the familiar token mosh pit in front of stage is no more.

## Chris Saunders - XL Video

It has to be said that in the context of this show, much of what appeared on the variety of video surfaces throughout the O2 is mainly for the appreciation of the in-house live audience. In some ways, that's a compliment, for however ephemeral the fleeting glimpses we caught on TV, what we did see fused seamlessly to the lit environment. Big, wide shots of stage are not the favourite cut of the camera director and generally contribute little to the viewer's appreciation of the event, other than to remind them of its scale. But how a portion of the whole impacts on the beady eye of camera is critical; Bingeman's design concept of the exploded Union Flag clad in LED video, took video truly out of the landscape view and into the unfamiliar. However hard those curved pieces must have been to rig (and let's face it, they must have been absolute buggers), the end result more than justified the effort.

It fell to XL Video to apply their expertise to these demands: I spoke to Chris Saunders about their approach. "There are six channels of playback," he began, "two run from the Grass Valley Turbo 2s, which are two channels each, and two virtual VTRs; all of them are HD. The Turbo is more a bespoke playback; we've bought into them recently, XL currently has 10." Saunders made it sound like they'd soon have more. "Its main advantage is they're networkable, so you can load a show on one and then copy across to other machines easily."

"The content all comes from the BRITs 'house' designers, Hello Charlie, they make the majority of the footage - the nomination packages, generic stuff and graphics. Then there is special content like that brought in for Take That and Arcade Fire; for Arcade their content is on the LED screens







Top, left: CeeLo Green and Paloma Faith;

Top, right: Tinie Tempah.

Crew, from top: Sound supervisor Derrick Zieba with the Midas XL8; Lighting designer Al Gurdon; Lighting crew chief Richie Gorrod; Monitor man Graham Blake.

on stage and all the IMAG projection as well. The projected images effectively add a layer on top of the LED, so the three-dimensional flats (the LED upon the exploded flag) is normally unlit, but they will project upon it."

This must be a relatively complex mapping operation? "We work with Hello Charlie a lot so we give them a pixel map and they process the video to suit what we're putting in. The external content comes to us and we adapt it as required, but even that is often straightforward. The Take That content comes from Tom Pattinson and we've done things with him and the band before, so the information flow is very good."

You have cameras and projection screens deployed, presumably for IMAG to the audience? "Nick Fry cuts the camera footage to the IMAG screens, he takes what our two HX100 HD cameras provide and he has feeds from eight of the broadcast cameras. We now have five IMAG screens projected on - that's up from the original three. They're a combination of Barco FLM 10 and 22k, depending on the size of the screens."

There's a not inconsiderable portion of video equipment outside the Arena - stealth screens lining the red carpet walk-in, and more beyond at the party venue: what's the management approach?

"As an operation we divide the responsibilities, I look after the control side, Paul Wood manages all display. For the additional kit outside, these systems are treated as self-contained. In reality, the most complex part of this show is the George Cross, the major element of the 'Flag' stage set. It's a bespoke build: Steel Monkey, who fabricated the set for Peter Bingeman, also built the screen support structure for us. The custom superstructure was addressed tactically, built in modular fashion to speed the fit-up. Although we never had the opportunity to try it out complete, we could part-assemble some modules to test it. Bingeman has done a very good job; it's a sea change in set design for this show and works really well." How so? "Formerly, you would see generic set pieces wheeled on and off for each artist; this year a lot more effort has been made with the content."

If this was differentiation by video content through record companies no longer having the spare cash to indulge their artists, I'm all for it. Saunders continued: "That means the base set design is critical. It does make it more demanding, but from our perspective more easily controlled." Saunders ruefully admitted a small downside: "It does mean you can't point the finger at a band's grandiose indulgence if things go wrong," but he seemed unconcerned by get-out plays. "It's much slicker and the flow of the show is much better, we could see that almost immediately when we started rehearsals."

It would be true to say that XL has achieved a certain critical mass when it comes to servicing shows of this nature: does that influence your approach? "For a company like us, you do end up putting in more equipment than first asked, but you have to if you want to feel comfortable about handling any eventuality. So yes, there's more than we originally specified, but then we can respond to pretty much anything and we're in a situation where there is simply no time to bring in extras."

#### Monitors - Graham Blake & Tristan Farrow

Like Wright in Production, Britannia Row has been servicing the BRITs for more years than they care to remember, while Derrick Zieba, alongside them as sound supervisor, is a well-known safe pair of hands for this style of event, if not the safest pair in the UK.

Before I spoke to Zieba I managed to grab a few moments with the Monitor department despite them being in the thick of dress rehearsals and unquestionably at the busiest end of the snake. Duties are shared between Graham 'Blakey' Blake and Tristan Farrow. "We do get more band monitor men coming in wanting to operate than they do at FOH; those guys generally watch rehearsal and then spend the show in the broadcast truck which is as it should be. At this end, if the monitor guy is unfamiliar with the desk they'll let us operate; depends what's easiest really. Avid Profile, DiGiCo SD7 and a Yamaha PM5D - enough choice to satisfy most tastes."

The radio system is prodigious - 48 channels of IEM, roughly half that number for radio mics;



Andy Lillywhite and Mark Saunders were there in support from Sennheiser, but it's Brit Row's freelancer, Barry McCloud who has his fingers firmly round the throat of this monster. "The Sennheiser Series 2000 system has proved very simple in this environment. It surprised even me when we set up back here behind all this stage set; the optimum antenna rig was just two, placed here behind us, a few rows up on the house seating."

With performers bringing in their own personalised 'bling' microphones there was the typical array of Shure and Sennheiser radio systems; for these, too, McCloud expressed little concern: "They're all rock solid," though there was a hint that they had perhaps been more time consuming in the finessing: "We got them all working just how we need them to be."

#### Derrick Zieba - Audio Supremo

Apart from the change of venue - always a consideration for a PA design - as the independent consultant to the BRITs and responsible for all aspects of audio, Derrick Zieba has the added challenge of an 'in the round' presentation dais at the heart of the arena floor, well downstage of where the main L/R system would hang. I asked him how these influences affect a design brief he has been addressing with consummate ease for the past 17 years? "It's an interesting challenge. Besides the move, we had less time to load-in here than we normally had at Earls Court, one less day. But there are

advantages at O2, more truck space in particular, and it is a good venue to work in. Nonetheless, it is challenging to take in a show this big to a new venue in less time. When we first loaded in we couldn't even think about the system in around the stage - it wasn't complete: at Earls Court it would have been built by the time we arrived. So in that respect it has required more management planning by myself and Brit Row. What helped most was that we had the same experienced crew we used last time, so everybody knew what we had to achieve, and the working relationship is already well established. That saves a lot of time. It's almost entirely to do with the quality of care, that's what Brit Row has provided and why they've been doing this with me for 15 years - that and the right people with the right attitude for the job."

And what of the venue itself? "Acoustically, this is far superior to Earls Court so I took the opportunity to change the PA and move onto what I consider to be the finest system available today, the L-Acoustics K1 system. That said, the considerations are still the same as when I first did this show all those years ago: back then, producer Andy Ward said to me, 'if you have an exciting band on the stage, then when you take a reverse camera shot you'd better have an excited audience stood in front of them. You don't want the cameras to see people chatting around a table'. That's the driving reason for a having a full concert system PA in the house; you must achieve concert level excitement.

## Crew Credits

#### Brit People:

**Production Manager**

Kate Wright

**Sound supervisor**

Derrick Zieba

#### XL Video People:

**Playback**

Richard Turner, Richard Burford

**Vision mixer**

Nick Fry

**Displays project manager**

Paul Wood

**Camera & playback project manager**

Chris Saunders

**Crew chief**

Paul Maddock-Jones

#### PRG People:

**Lighting designer**

Al Gurdon

**Crew chief**

Richie Gorrod

**Lighting designer (party)**

Ben Cracknell

**Crew chief (party)**

Lars Kristiansen

#### Brit Row People

**FOH**

Chris Coxhead, Josh Lloyd

**Monitors**

Tristan Farrow, Graham Blake



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## BRIT Notes

- Event branding specialist Sunbaba created some bespoke, digitally distressed Union Jack drapes for the 'BRITs 2011 with MasterCard' official aftershow party. Sunbaba's Jonathan Booth comments: "The most notable feature of the flags we produced was the application of high-res photography to create flags that looked distressed. The digital dye-sublimated print represented the most efficient way to produce a series of large flags with a handmade appearance within a limited lead time."

- PRG Lighting: Weird lights for Mumford & Sons (did you spot them?): eight Large Skyfans owned by Martin Nicholas (now trading as MJN Design, he is probably best recalled by LSi readers as the LD for Wet Wet Wet; these days he is involved in cutting-edge architectural and environmental lighting projects). There were also 40 strings of regular Festoon with dipped tungsten bulbs on the floor.

Mick Healey at PRG handles the project, including the Red Carpet and the aftershow party lighting.

Richard Gorrod flew back from Superbowl, arrived in the UK on Tuesday 8 February in time to supervise the pre-rig load-in, then Wednesday off for a Let's Dance meeting, before the BRITs main load-in on Friday 11 February.

Ben Cracknell is the lighting designer for the aftershow party & Red Carpet. Crew chief for these areas Lars Kristiansen.

- Brit Row Sound: Bryan Grant pondered the significance of PA system design for complex events. "The role of system tech and FOH engineer is much more of a partnership these days than before. The tech' delivers the system set, the engineer mixes on it. It provides consistency and means with a system like the L-Acoustics K1 that bands can travel lighter, do shows like this in the midst of a tour, and know exactly what to expect. So the boundary between touring and promo events becomes blurred."

While that certainly takes the stress out of the equation for the sound engineer in a turn-up-and-play situation, it does leave bands and solo artist vulnerable to ever busier schedules.



Left to right: Chris Coxhead, Derrick Zieba and Josh Lloyd.

Back then, that determined other things, like getting away from the standard lectern microphone set-up, using only handhelds helps keep the energy up in more ways than one. Therefore my aim is to give all the people in the venue the full concert experience, as opposed to the TV show experience. If you think about it, besides the audience in the tiered seating - a normal concert audience - the tabled area is full of the great and good from the music industry and a lot of them (not all) know good sound when they hear it. It's no time for half-measures."

"The dais for the presenters does present problems. It's in the middle of the hall so there is a delay from the main PA at this distance, in excess of what's tolerable for a presenter trying to speak into a mic out at this position. It's not so bad for the main host James Cordon because he's on a Sennheiser in-ear 2000 series system (the G3 'on steroids' system) so he's always on zero time to himself, but for the guest presenters who introduce the nominee sections it's a problem. Peter Bingeman didn't want any wedges on stage, or beneath it, so we've managed to get three plinths around the dais, pedestals really, and placed a Turbosound 308 on top. They're small but very powerful and it seems to work. The precedence effect works for the presenters so problem solved, but there are banquet tables all around and very close, so there is now a secondary problem for the VIPs sat at those tables because they can hear what's coming out the wedges and the PA. As ever, we've had to find a compromise in terms of level. Also we have to be very careful as the award-winners walk up the steps to accept their awards; they walk right through the field of one of the 308s and these little speakers are at r'n'r levels." Chris Coxhead, handling the presenter mics FOH, keeps a close eye on this and rides the fader accordingly.

"There are other problems to overcome, we have flown SB28 subs and more stacked beneath the forestage, we've timed them to align correctly but now find they are creating a subtraction dip just before the dais; it's a factor of the height of the flown system relative to the floor stuff, we will solve it, it just wasn't predictable."

The O2 tends to consume low end energy with appetite, so a muscular approach to subs is essential. Even though K1 can comfortably reach down the frequency scale it wouldn't supply the force needed for the room? "No, and it's the trouser flap that's needed. The other thing is because of the high trim of the PA we are getting reflection off the house VIP boxes up above; that reflects the PA right down onto the dais, so it's all pretty tricky, especially for Chris Coxhead out front. But this is not the only presentation position so there is relief of sorts; Cordon also works from onstage, to the side or the ramp to the dais, and out in the audience."

Did you consider a presenter PA ringing the dais above? "Unfortunately we're all out of weight capacity, even if we put the amp racks on the catwalk, but it could have created as many problems as it solved."

### Josh Lloyd - Mix Engineer

Lloyd, a long-serving Brit Row desk/mix expert, operates the Avid Profile and Yamaha PM5D and looks after the bands and solo performers. Don't be deceived by the photograph: whatever his youthful looks, Lloyd is a skilled operator. "Mostly it's Pro Tools playback tracks with lead vocal and probably two or three backing vocals live. But Arcade Fire is full band, and there are a few extra inputs from others - Plan B, for example. This year is a different complexion to last in that there are less bands playing live, more performances to playback; but that's just a reflection of the type of artists who are in the spotlight this year. Next year it will probably be different again and we'll be back to more live instruments."

How's the sound image in the room with the PA trimmed so high and only subs on the floor in the stage set? "The PA does look high, but this is an unusual room and actually trim is about the same height as for a normal concert. Relative to the set it looks higher and the set does in places get in the way, but mostly there's line of sight clearance to all seats. The three hangs of Kudo out in an arc across the back of the room fill to the distant upper seats perfectly, and the system set between these, and also the V-DOSC that covers the offstage fills, all creates a very smooth coverage with imperceptible

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# Equipment List

## Lighting - PRG

### Control

- 2 x Full Boar
- 24 x PRG Bad Boy
- 32 x Clay Paky Alpha Profile
- 24 x Vari\*Lite 3500 Spots
- 54 x Vari\*Lite 3500 Wash
- 42 x Martin Pro MAC 2000
- 8 x Vari\*Lite 2kW
- 54 x Vari\*Lite VL5
- 68 x Philips Color Kinetics ColorBlast
- 52 x PAR 64
- 16 x Martin Pro Atomic strobe
- 6 x Hungaroflash strobe

### Followspots

- 7 x Lycian M2 long-throw
- 4 x Lycian 1.2kW M2 long-throw
- 6 x Starklite long-throw

## Sound - Britannia Row

### FOH Speaker System

- 2 x main hangs of L-Acoustics K1 & dV-DOSC elements
- 2 x sub-bass hangs of L-Acoustics SB28 subs
- 2 x outer hangs of L-Acoustics V-DOSC
- 3 x delay hangs of L-Acoustics Kudo

### Distributed front cover

- L-Acoustics 108P in-fill cabinets
- L-Acoustics SB28 subs

### Radio microphones

- Sennheiser 5200 UHF hand-helds (presenters)
- Shure Beta 58a/87c hand-helds (performers)
- Sennheiser 5200/e935 hand-helds (performers)

### FOH Consoles

- 1 x Midas XL8 (presentations)
- 1 x Avid Profile
- 1 x Yamaha PM5D

### Effects racks

- Lexicon PCM91 digital reverb unit
- TC Electronic D-Two DDL digital delay unit
- TC M6000 mastering processor

### Insert racks

- DBX 160L compressor/limiters
- Summit Audio DCL 200 Dual Valve Compressors

### Drive racks

- Laptop computer with SIA SMAARTLive
- Dolby Lake management system

### Monitors

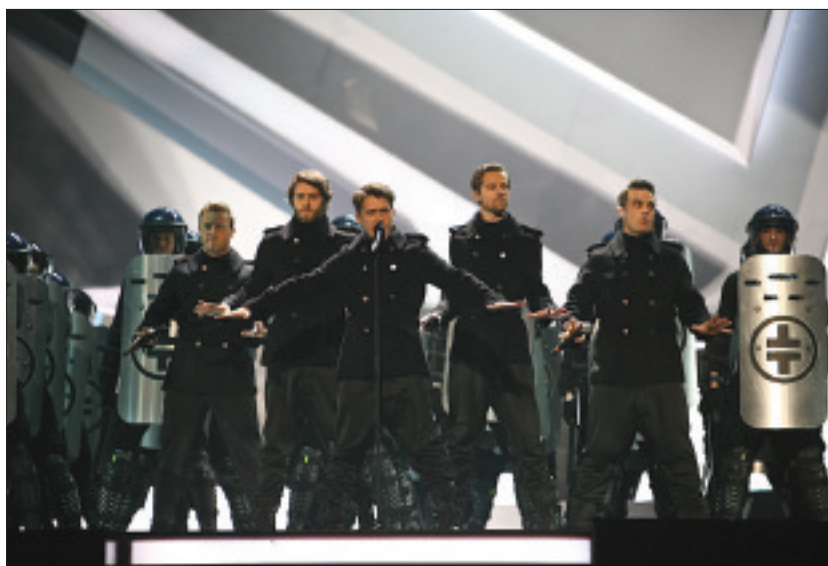
- DiGiCo SD7
- Avid Profile
- Yamaha PM 5D

### IEMs

- Sennheiser IEM systems each with 3 receiver packs

### Effects racks

- Yamaha SPX 900/990/1000
- Lexicon PCM 91



transition. In some of the more dynamic musical passages you might spot something if you knew what you were listening for, but it will go unnoticed I'm sure. The most distant seats are 95-100m from the PA. All the desks output through a Yamaha DME to manage signal traffic to the variously configured parts of Derrick's PA system; it also makes it very easy to manage mute/unmute at the desks."

With Chris Coxhead controlling the presenters and winners on a Midas XL8, FOH is beginning to look as crowded as it used to in the analogue era. "It was Adele who requested the PM5D. The XL8 we used last year and it provides several advantages, but I'll let Chris [Coxhead] tell you about that. When Brit Row first introduced the switch to digital desks we had a two-desk A/B set up; that saved a lot of space out in the house and proved a real advantage to Production. Now it seems there's a creep back to desk preferences again, except it's now all digital consoles, so it's still easier to manage, especially with the Midas stage box system. There are just 12 inputs on the Midas, but the great advantage of the Midas stage boxes is they fill the role of active split as well; if for any reason one of the other desks went down we could pull up any band onto the XL8 almost immediately, and yes, we have prepared for that. Some bands do have more than just three inputs, it can be as many as 12. Arcade Fire, the best example, are around 48 channels, but as I said, this year is generally easier than normal."

Zieba mentioned rock and roll levels: is that really what's being delivered? "I do like to push to see what headroom we will have on the night. Past audiences have been extremely noisy, and the audience seats here are all sold; there is also some 'audience tracks' if it's not noisy enough, but I doubt we'll need them. So the house can be loud enough to warrant r'n'r levels from the PA. The flown subs do put good energy into the high bleachers, something you wouldn't get just floor-stacked, especially in this room."

## Chris Coxhead - Mix Engineer

Derrick Zieba said you need to be especially vigilant with the presenter mics in the dais area? "To a degree, but the presenter is always

being moved about: Cordon is no more exposed than, say, the presenter at the MTV Awards. But there are a few issues: Blakey [Graham Blake, monitors] and Tristan [Farrow, ditto] both have feeds to the 308s around the dais if they need them for any reason, but that's a 'just in case'. It's all quite safe, unless one of them chooses to point a mic directly at a 308. The winner's mics are handed to them as they mount the stage so although they pass right in front of the field of one of these Turbosound wedges, we're ready."

Coxhead continues: "With Cordon, until I see what they try out in rehearsals I have no idea where he's likely to be; I just hope he's not right over a front-fill. Other than that, the mic reacts pretty much the same way wherever he is in the room."

Do you coach any of the presenters on mic technique? Not all will be used to using a handheld in front of a large concert PA. "Unless it's an issue we don't say anything. As a rule we make it so they don't have to do anything technique wise; they have more than enough to think about already. The presenter autocues keep them facing the wedges."

It's an awful lot of desk for 12 presenter mics? "Yes, but the presenter's part is greater, in terms of time, than that of the performers, and it does mean I've got very good EQ and I can more accurately take out anything that affects the room and it not feed to Broadcast. Yes, any other desk can do that, but this does it nicer, and you can hear the difference with the [L-Acoustics] K1."

Talking of which, how do you like it? "Until today I've only ever used it outdoors where I've been very impressed. Indoors it has fulfilled my expectations. You have to do less, the system morphing software is excellent; if I pull 110Hz out somewhere I'm not creating a phase shift elsewhere; that meant when Derrick and I first went through all the presenter mics, apart from applying the usual hi-pass filter, we just got through them so much quicker."

It's all about time - time between different elements of the PA and time saved through the



judicious and correct application of the technology. Zieba and the Brit Row team just make it look effortless.

### Lasers

With flame effects dominating the performance by Rihanna (and posing not a few headaches for the cameras), viewers could be forgiven for missing the lasers. Later, the National Press reported this oversight may have been due to the male fixation with ladies' underwear, though it's unclear who should take the blame. This was emphatically not the case later on when Tinie Tempah mounted the stage and managed to meld musical and lighting genres to his own special recipe.

Lasers were from by ER Productions, with high impact effects from a brand new 21W OPS RGB source, and some very potent work from a pair of more traditional 24W Green lasers. ER supplied eight laser sources in total, working to a dual recipe, providing detail in the near field that would impact for the cameras, while staging more dispersed effects into the auditorium for the live audience."

### Al Gurdon - Lighting Designer

Talking of the correct application of technology and making things appear effortless; the good offices of Richie Gorrod, lighting crew chief for PRG, proved more than invaluable on this occasion, as you'll see. But first I must open with an apology to lighting designer Al Gurdon. When he arrived as I stood out front chatting to the sound department he negotiated the riser on crutches. Whatever have you done? I enquired. "I slipped on some ice out in Dallas and broke my leg," he replied. It was only

afterwards, when I examined the flash photo of him I'd taken in the half house light of rehearsals that I realised how exhausted he looked. The break had happened only days before. The toll such major bone repair takes on the body was only too evident; this was one interview he could have done without.

"As far as the pros and cons of shifting venue, for my approach it makes very little difference. The shape makes no difference, the dais presentation area has always moved from place to place, so responding to all that with lighting is situation normal." He then added ruefully: "This situation has one advantage - the floor is flat and smooth, which makes getting around on my wheelchair much easier. Also, the lighting platform is low level, not up on a scaffold as was the case at Earls Court."

How do you respond to Peter Bingeman's set design? "Every set presents its own individual challenge, and putting into the context of the particular venue requires consideration. At a practical level I always work with what is available, it's a balance between money and equipment and you have to cover all eventualities."

Gurdon has Vari-Lite VL3500 Wash and PRG Bad Boy spots as his principal tools, with Martin MAC 2Ks for the audience lighting; there are over 50 VL3000 Spots brought in by the various artists, which in itself provides some differentiation. "You have to create the basis before you have the confirmed acts and their specific needs," says Gurdon. "My design is dependent on the set design; I collude with Peter Bingeman and then see what is needed. That determines a lot: light the people first.



## Equ. List cont...

### Wedges

Turbosound TFM 450  
d&b audiotechnik M2 and M4

### Side-fills

L-Acoustic ARCs  
L-Acoustic sub-bass

### Drum-fills

Turbosound TFM 450  
(1 x 15")  
Turbosound TQ425SP  
(2 x 15")

### Video - XL Video

PIXLED F11 LED Screen  
(20mx22m)  
PIXLED F11 LED Screen  
(11mx6m)  
PIXLED F11 LED Screen  
(5.5mx10m)  
3 x IMAG projection  
screens (main venue)  
Martin Pro LC2140 LED  
panels (party venue)  
Special projection system  
for Arcade Fire  
Barco Encore system  
Grass Valley Turbo 2s  
Virtual VTR  
2 x HXC 100 cameras

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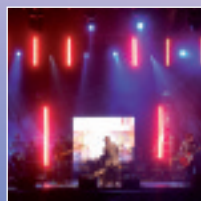
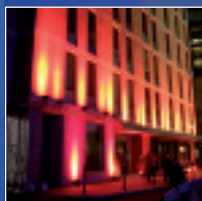
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# Lighting the way



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Actual performance is a strong influence. There is some heavy staging this year - Take That, for example, have almost 100 people on stage. You then have to find ways to light the set with variation. We always treat each act as self-contained, then add what is necessary to make it work for the cameras."

While Gurdon returned to directing his dwindling energies towards his two show operators I spoke to Gorrod who offered some clear advice on how to approach mega shows with truncated time-frames. "Normally I judge how we're doing by when the PA comes in; the loss of one day was not something we could completely negate by adding more manpower, we'd have slowed the audio in. I'm a firm believer in prep'ing as much as possible beforehand. We were able to effect a pre-rig day last Tuesday (a week before show day) when we rigged motors and trusses.

"I made sure we had all the audience lights cable looms, and looms for the stage trusses run on those trusses, with the trailing rack ends piled on top, so when we came in with the lights later in the week we could just drop them in. It's 130 metres from the far reaches of the auditorium; that's a lot of cable, the upstage cable picks are a ton each. As a rule of thumb I find anything you can do in the warehouse that takes an hour, will take two hours on site, so even little things like gels in house followspots, saves time. We deliberately don't address the intelligent lights, we do that on site: so long as you involve all your crew in the prep' process, give everyone clear plans and an overview of

the whole project, then it works. If they know the lamp type and position then it's a simple thing to dial in the address on-site, rather than spend time sorting lights to address specific positions as you would do with a touring rig."

Gorrod's approach is eminently rational: I took a cursory look through his rig plans and understood them immediately. "We spent a lot of time up in the central PRG resource at Longbridge, all 12 of my crew for the last two days, that way all the custom ends of the looms are checked and packed by them. PRG has a lot of five-way looms ready-made, five Socapex with three data lines included - generally in 50m lengths, though some shorter runs - so you just need to make up the fan ends. The other thing is experience; when you have a team who are used to working these types of shows, you gain time. Because there are quite a lot of these one-offs nowadays there's enough work to make a choice. There are crews who prefer to be home to their own bed most nights; and it's not just ageing road crew fed up with life on the bus, there's plenty of young crew who prefer it; so the experience is strong. You have people who all know each other and will all prep' to a common standard with which they're all familiar."

It was this element of certainty that allowed Gorrod to assist Gurdon at the Superbowl Half-Time show in Dallas the week before The BRITs. "Another thing is having a good stores master, Chris Henry is worth her weight in gold in that role. You want a 5m data XLR, call her up on-site, she'll know which box, where it is, often where in the box it will be. She runs the show

inventory from the warehouse during prep' and then does the same on site. As a box nears empty she'll reconsolidate the contents with another box; she runs a tight operation."

These all sound like well embedded strategies of advanced planning that you've used many times over the years, applying them here to regain that lost day; now the rig is in and up have you identified other areas where efficiencies could be made? "Next time we'll do the motor cable management as well, Outback provide the rigging and do a great job, but I see it will make sense for us to make up the hoist power looms and distro, so when we're shifting different parts of the rig we're not plugging/unplugging to do it. We also had no dark time before presenter rehearsals began to balance the followspots, so we had to do it under house lights. You can shield the meter to a degree but you still pick up that blue cast." Gorrod left that thought hanging; there's no real solution except to reinstate lost time.

The show is run from a Road Hog Full Boar and Virtuoso, each with back-up desks. "This is one area where PRG wins hands-down; the Series 400 data distro is great. We run on Art-Net as one big system so you can 'see' everything from anywhere; both desks have access to every light and you can patch to one or the other; it means Theo (Cox) can patch colour or intensity on the Boar, while Ian Reith on the Virtuoso does Pan & Tilt."

It was all beginning to sound too easy, when at that moment Gorrod was called away to a load-out meeting. If nothing else, this was reason enough to re-instate the missing day; for everyone there, and Gorrod was no exception, the gear went in, up, rehearsed, show, and out. A process without pause and no room for error. Of course, our industry always delivers, whatever the pressure; Al Gurdon's level of exhaustion may have been apparent in his face, but that didn't prevent him delivering a consummate show filled with light and drama, and without disappointment to the cameras.

#### Conclusion

On the evidence of this night's event, the coherent marriage of all technical and creative departments to forge a homogeneous whole, we're led to one conclusion: we have little to fear about the UK's ability to stage a truly world-class opening to next year's Olympics.

## After-Show

• The after-show party was staged in a huge (40m by 70m) tensioned fabric structure provided by Arena Group. Apart from the requisite dining facilities for the pre-and post-show parties, the structure also managed to absorb a London Routemaster double-decker bus -

a feature which proved extremely popular with the younger members of the US contingent. Arena also provided a number of rigid-frame temporary structures for the massive catering facilities provided by Kim Davenport and the lovely people at Eat Your Hearts Out . . .





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