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Depeche Mode at Manchester Apollo



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TEPECHE MODE

Live at the Manchester Apollo

words & pictures by Steve Moles











Credits

Production Manager: Tony Gittins Production Assistant: Helen Smith Stage Manager: Shawn Saucier Set Design: Anton Corbijn Lighting Design: Paul Normandale Lighting Director: Graham Feast Video Director: Jon Shrimpton FOH Engineer: Antony King Monitor Engineer: Sarne Thorogood Guitar Tech: Jez Webb Keyboard Tech: Paul Eastman

Drum Tech: Iain Robertson Wardrobe: Isobel Work

Head Rigger: James Heath

Lighting Crew Chief: Oliver James

Lighting Tech Dimmers: Robert Starksfield

Lighting Techs: Ricky Butler, Alex Johnson

Kinesys Operators: Dave Jolly, Donny McDonald

Sound Crew Chief: Chris Morrison

Sound Tech: Richard Trow

PA Techs:

Ben Phillips, James Covill

Head Carpenter: Andrew Pearson

Engineer/Playback: John Steele

Crew Boss / Camera: Robert Wick

LED Techs: Richard Stembridge, Joe Makein, Alan Bolland

Head Chef: Daniel LeFevre

Caterers: Jolene Collins, Mike Thomas, Chris Girt



On a day of unbearable sadness it was Depeche Mode who lifted the spirits of chilly Mancunians. While the nation mourned the retirement of Terry Wogan from the BBC Radio 2 breakfast show. and the people of the world threw their hands up in despair at the pathetic posturing of our leaders (remember the anodyne call to do, frankly, f***-all about climate change in Copenhagen?), Depeche Mode reminded us that things which remove hope only serve as a mirror to the prospects of good. How else do you explain the remarkably cheery latest album after the bleak resonance of their last offering?

It's a weird contradiction of popular music that bands whose music has that sad, introspective reputation (think The Cure, Depeche Mode, or from the modern oeuvre The Wrist Slitter Five) seem to give such pleasure to their fans. I met a 27-year-old San Franciscan in the front row this very evening who had flown from her native USA to attend every UK show the band performed. She was flanked by two young men from Devon, and all commented on how at the end of the show they felt elevated, transported to a realm no other band could take them to.

This heightened state was reflected in the crew: from production manager Tony Gittins down there was a genuinely positive vibe and it wasn't just the fact that this was their last show before Christmas. In fact, they should all have been a little delicate after the band threw an end-of-leg party the night before.

Video

This mood is no better exemplified than by Jon Shrimpton, the director of live video. Shrimpton is a son of York, a breed not known for their gaiety and lightness of touch, yet here is a fellow who manages a rare combination, being witty, sharp and irreverent. Yet these skills cloak a gritty professionalism.

"When the playback material runs, the kettle goes on," Shrimpton is off-hand, as I said, but he must be fun to work for: all his cameramen enjoyed the gig. "There were some points in the stadium shows we did where we had side screens that ran camera image while Anton's stuff was on the Mi-Trix screen." A reference to Anton Corbijn, the band's long-time collaborator and visual creative muse.

"His input does help pace out the show," says Shrimpton. "You want people at the back to see, but not be too reliant on the camera image; this makes a nice balance between the two. Just to look at, his footage is beautiful. Anton makes it very much a visual version of what the band are doing."

I asked Shrimpton to explain the hemisphere in front of the Barco Mi-Trix: "It's all Mi-Trix, same modules as the big screen behind it. That was the point, Anton wanted it to make sure it was the same colour temperature, same intensity, and have the same look."

There's a perfect example of why in the song 'Walking in my shoes' when the screen is filled by images of a solitary, rather sinisterlooking crow, with a close-up of a single crow's eye with its blue nictitating membrane flicking horizontally back and forth, filling the hemisphere: it's almost as if the threedimensional eye is popping out of the screen. Sometimes the hemi' surface is used independently; sometimes it's subsumed into the main screen

"Anton's content all resides on the two Catalysts, but we also use them to shape and colourise the camera work. I have seven cameras - five operated, two robos."

XL Video announced at PLASA09 that they had invested heavily in HD, but Shrimpton explains: "We went for the SD camera option, Sony D50s and Sony Remote BRC300s for the robos, because of the screen resolution. I'm especially proud of the robocams, they stick out from the keyboards on simple aluminium arms. A guy at the Rockhal basically made them for me out of stuff he had laying around." (The Rockhal, in Luxemburg, was the band's chosen rehearsal venue.) "I was as excited as a virgin at a Sixth Form Ball when I got them. It's very low-tech but very stylish. Fortunately, the cameras are not too heavy, maybe a couple of kilos each. From these positions I can pretty much pan around the whole stage," says Shrimpton.

Between the robos and some creative and willing cameramen, Shrimpton manages to feed a steady stream of odd, awkward, always interesting and sometimes just amazing images of the band, in the most unexpected array of positions throughout the Mi-Trix array. "There is some very specific framing: we have two cameras out front, and three in the pit - two static, one tracking. In rehearsals we did look around at camera positions. Really it's about listening to the song and adding a bit of salt and pepper."



Shrimpton revealed he is the son of a sound engineer: little wonder he has the ear for the songs and the slightly irreverent take on touring.

"I love messing about like we did in rehearsal. Anton does like the same show everywhere, but there is room to breathe, so as the tour goes on we gain more empathy with the music. I like to use feedback, where the camera is looking past the band member at the screen and the image multiplies. The way the camera reacts is beautiful, and because positions always vary slightly gig to gig, the effects change. Even a little positional change can have a big impact on that effect. Richard [Stembridge, Catalyst operator] just tickles the saturation and it goes bonkers."

Shrimpton controls from a Grass Valley Kayak DD switcher: "It's my raindrops on roses, and whiskers on kittens," he said, revealing the Julie Andrews side present in every Yorkshireman. "One of my favourite things - it's so flexible. For a nice broadcast desk meant to be stuck in a nice air-conditioned room, it's great. It has so many features that I can just mess with the menus and keep finding things. Fantastic." Though he wasn't revealing what he'd found.

How did Shrimpton get the gig? "I did some shows for Herbert Grönemeyer last year, one of Anton's acts, so he'd seen what I could do. He called me last February, me and four other directors - I'm glad I never knew who they were. He showed me what was involved, his basic ideas, and I guess he liked what I suggested."

While Shrimpton evidently holds the man in high esteem, you get the sense that he'd never let himself be overawed by any artist: he is at heart a doughty Yorkshireman.

Is he well looked after by XL Video? "Well, I do work for them a fair bit - I do all their Artfag shows. It's a family and it's nice to feel a part of it."

Lighting

The stage appears relatively stark. This is just an eight-truck production [Stage Trucks], which may be one reason the crew are so happy. The back wall is a landscape field of Barco Mi-Trix, with a Mi-Trix hemisphere centre stage, pinned to the top edge. (The Mi-Trix is 25mm pixel pitch: the main screen resolution is 672 x 336 and the hemisphere 224 x 224.) Four trusses running up/down stage above have hung beneath them lighting designer Paul Normandale's creation, the Wave truss.

"I felt there was still more I could get out of them," said Normandale. Readers may recall the Waves from Coldplay (see L&SI January 2009). If not, they're gently curved 2.4m sections of 2D ladder truss flown horizontally: there are four sections in each run articulate at the joints. Supported by Liftket chain hoists above, can perform a merry dance courtesy of a Kinesys motion control system. Whereas on Coldplay the curves flip-flopped to form a horizontal, snaking form, here, positioned curve-up, they form a graceful, arching backdrop in front of the Mi-Trix screen. Two trusses are also rigged up/down stage to the sides and trimmed barely 4m above stage level. Between them, the Waves, and the truss supporting the Mi-Trix, they carry the bulk of

the moving lights - a mix of Martin MAC 2000 Wash and Wash XBS with Fresnel, MAC 700 Profile and Wash - 66 lights in all.

That's what can be seen, but light show director Graham Feast, operating a Hog III, revealed that there is a lot more to this rig: "There are four spots in the house, and behind the Mi-Trix screen we have a rear truss with ladder arrangements hanging vertically: each ladder has MAC 2k Washes and I-Pix BB4s. There are also lots of PAR 36 four-cell Moles, usually in pairs rigged horizontally - and before you say anything about them looking a bit random, that is an intentional asymmetric look."

It's a typical Normandale touch: after I'd photographed the obligatory first three numbers I took a long, hard look at them. A simple enough ploy, breaking the monotony of the rectangular framing that trusses impose actually works rather well, in that at a subliminal level a punter probably doesn't notice, but it does subtly get us away from a standard audience abuse system of rigid symmetry.

"We spent three weeks in the Rockhal in Luxemburg programming the show," continued Feast. "In terms of lighting there's a great deal of interaction between lights and video. In rehearsal, Paul [Normandale] and Anton [Corbijn] would discus how the show should look visually; both had specific ideas about how and when certain parts of the system get used. Lighting-wise, I ended up programming a lot more than we use, but we easily thinned this out and refined the show."

Feast adds: "One of the most interesting discoveries has been the BB4s. Paul operates them in their most comprehensive mode, addressing separately all the parameters of each individual heart. What Paul wanted was difficult to describe, in the end I had to draw a map of all the BB4 cells and Paul would say what he wanted at each BB4 pixel. The effect is spectacular - a sort of visual rollercoaster."





Top row from left to right: Anthony King, FOH; Graham Feast, lighting director; James Heath, rigger and iBridle inventor.

Bottom row, from left to right: Sarne Thorogood, monitors; Tony Gittins, production manager; Jon Shrimpton, video.

It is indeed remarkable: it's the softness of the chase that makes the impact - it's almost liquid. "It did create some problems for us," says Feast, "it's an awful lot of data and initially it would make the desk crash, but we weren't sure it was the BB4s causing it. But the solution is simple enough, we run two separate [Wholehog] DP2000 units, two outputs each, for the 24 BB4s. It was a process of elimination to find the cure, but it was well worth the effort."

Inevitably it's the imagery of Corbijn that stylises the show, but perhaps not as much as you might imagine; in truth, I believe that's down to Normandale's sensitivity to Corbijn's zeitgeist. Normandale

iBridle

iBridle is an iPhone 'App' for Riggers, available from the Apps store: Developed from an idea by the tour rigger James Heath, aided and abetted by tech guru and keyboard boffin for the tour, Paul Eastman. "Paul is the software guy; I just knew what was needed," said Heath. "You input the distance off the beam you want the point and how high you want the bottom of the bridle and it does the rest. It's easy to input the values and the software also calculates the leg weights and the vertical and horizontal force on the beams.

> Available at www.iBridle.co.uk priced £4.99.

is one of those LDs who can make a lot from very little - Andi Watson is perhaps one of the only other UK LDs out there who is so imaginative - so in that respect, Normandale is an ideal foil for Corbijn.

"The lighting is taken from the cinematic feel that Corbijn has put upon some of the songs," continued Feast. "There are in fact just six songs from a set list of maybe 20 where Corbijn's video takes the lead role, and the lighting for them is fairly static. Other tracks are very much an interaction between Jon Shrimpton's image feeds and me."





Equipment List:

SOUND

FOH Control, Effects & Inserts

1 x 96-ch Midas XL8 mixing console

1 x Midas 96/96 hard disc recorder Manley Vox Box

Tubetech CL-2A 2-ch compressor Avalon 737sp tube compressor

TC M6000 TC Finaliser

FOH Speaker System:

(Main hangs)

L-Acoustics K1 elements

L-Acoustics DV-DOSC elements L-Acoustics K1 Sub bass elements

(Side hangs)

L-Acoustics V-DOSC elements L-Acoustics dV-DOSC elements

L-Acoustics ARCS elements (Rear side hangs)

L-Acoustics Kudo elements

Monitors:

1 x 96-ch Midas XL8 monitor console 24 x Turbosound TFM 450 bi-amped

Side fills:

L-Acoustics ARCs

L-Acoustics sub bass

Drum fills:

L-Acoustics dV-Sub bass

LIGHTING

Control:

Wholehog III desk and playback wing 2 x Catalyst Pro V4 systems Avolites Dimming & Distribution

32 x Martin MAC 2000e XB Wash

24 x Martin MAC 700 profile units

10 x Martin MAC 700 wash units

8 x 2k Richardson MoleBeam Projectors

26 x 4-lite Thomas DWE vertical blinders

6 x 2 lite Thomas DWE blinders

24 x iPix BB4 units

14 x iPix Satellite units

12 x Martin Atomic 3000 strobes & scrollers

4 x Lycian M2 2500W LTL followspots

Effects:

4 x DF50 smoke machines

3 x Jem ZR33 smoke machines + fans

200sq.m of Barco MiTrix screen

1 x Grass Valley Kayak PPU

5 x Sony DXC- D50WSP Camera channels

2 x 86:1 long lenses and robo cams

26 x 1-tonne CM Lodestar Hoists 7 x half-tonne CM Lodestar Hoists 17 x Liftket 500kg Kinesys Hoists with Kinesys Vari Speed Elevation units and Smart8 control 240ft MD 20.5" truss 128ft Slick MiniBeam truss 40 x Lite Alternative Universal Drop Frames Custom Lite Alternative 'Snake' Ladder



Note Feast eschews the term 'IMAG', and Shrimpton's output is far removed from that standard format. "As soon as Anton looked at those parts of the show in rehearsal it was apparent what needed to be done: we gave the Catalyst to XL to integrate with Jon's operation back there; it just made so much sense. We gave them two Hog IIs and the two Catalyst racks. That freed us to concentrate on the lights, leaving Anton to set the Gamma and set the timing to the music. Those two video elements, where Anton has set his films to the music, and where Jon has applied such an affected style to the live video - well, they've both done a fantastic job."

There is one other little Normandale'ism that shouldn't pass without mention: floor lights. With the entire moving light system overhead or besides, isn't he just left with spots for front light? "Well, Paul's always got Omni photofloods tucked in everywhere about the wedges. We also have 12 i-Pix Satellites on the floor for some colour, and then there are some Mole Richardson Beam Lights across the back. I think they have a 2kW element in them; they do make a great tungstentinged silhouette of band." Sadly, the latter was used after the first three songs, so no photos - but trust me, it's a highimpact effect.

Sound

Anthony King has taken over the reins at front-of-house. "The band came to see The Cure play Santa Monica Bowl; they knew Tony [Gittins] and not long afterwards I was selected for the gig." Truth is, there's no substitute for selecting the right people, and skill-set is foremost in that decision, but personality is also a significant factor, particularly on a tour that runs for almost a year. Lighting director Graham Feast also mentions it elsewhere, and it's one reason why this was such a happy touring ship. That aside, King is the very essence of affable, and why wouldn't he be? Amongst his kit from Britannia Row is some of the

very latest audio technology around. He's got a Midas XL8 out front, and hanging in the air is an L-Acoustics K1 system.

Although I've heard the K1 before, that experience was outdoors, so this was my first encounter in an arena. So too for King: what were his initial impressions of Christian Heil's new product?

"We started the tour back in April. Brit Row already had the K1, but it was in the process of arriving and was still in its cardboard boxes, so we started with V-DOSC." Frustrated? "Not at all, I think Bryan [Grant, MD at Brit Row] had decided to learn as much as possible about how the system worked by putting it on events like Hyde Park Calling first. That way, crews and engineers get to sample a range of performers through the system. I'd do the same. So we toured V-DOSC that first leg, and used V-DOSC from PRG in the US . . . Then, when we came back to do the indoor European leg, I got the K1. My first impression is the power of the system, more than V-DOSC and with a good sense of proximity; in contrast to the way some systems sound loud but you still hear it from 'over there'. This is louder and closer."

Making my usual parade around the vertiginous stands of the MEN, I can, somewhat short of breath, confirm the enveloping nature of the audio.

And is it an easy system to drive? "It's not forgiving, you do have to be careful." How so? "I'd advise anyone approaching it for the first time to be open to it as a new system. Don't try and make it sound like V-DOSC, or whatever your favourite system is - let it be itself. I already had the mix set for V-DOSC and I found I had a lot more around 2kHz and 3kHz, and a huge improvement in the low end." King felt a little awkward about that statement, but then V-DOSC is how old? and you still find it in use . . . well, everywhere.

Beam



Modus Operandi

- FOH engineer Anthony King mentioned the SB28 L-Acoustics Sub in his discourse on the K1. Just nine boxes a side for the MEN? "In cardioid array, bottom cabinet stage facing, they're rolled off at 100Hz. I find that's the tightest way to operate them, gets them up another level; nine a side is more than enough." And how easy is it to set the sub array to avoid the power alley up the hall? "We put them two of my feet apart, that seems to be perfect." (King has size 9 feet that's a size 10 in the USA, and a size 43 in Europe, if you're wondering). "Brit Row's Ben Philips is my system tech' like all the guys from Brit Row he does a brilliant job. It's a very comfortable tour and I get well looked after"
- The movement cues for the Wave trusses are triggered from stage. Paul Eastman also developed the Fluqe 'On Stage' software (see www.fluqe.com for more on this), so the Kinesys takes its cue from there.
- Lighting operator Graham Feast: "What Paul [Normandale, LD] does is a bit left-field. I've lit enough of my own shows to know that variety is the spice of life, and he finds it again and again. He does have a method: when we got to rehearsals we didn't reposition a single light, he'd already thought it through and knew what he wanted to create from where. I must say I'm not bored of the show after nine months on the road."
- Stage Set: The stage risers, what little there are, sport special fascias built by Total Fabrications, who also made the Wave trusses. The fascias have RGB LED clusters spec'd by Normandale and installed by Total Fabs.
- Live video director Jon Shrimpton: "I've been a fan of Anton's since I was 14. I'm very happy about the creative interface; imagine me, a Yorkshire idiot, working with him. It's like talking to teacher kind of scary, but I point out the looks for the camera part, and it's ended up 50/50 my stuff on camera with his. As far as the cut goes, he's pretty happy with what I do."
- The eagle-eyed among you will have noticed Shrimpton also carries a Magic DaVE: "It's fairly old now but it's good a for a few colourising effects, something that looks a bit nicer than what you can get with the Catalysts. Actually, the main reason it's there is I paid £715 in 2001 to do the training and I'm going to get my money's worth."
- Mojo: PM Tony Gittins carries his own Mojo Barrier system to properly secure the stage left thrust, in plan view a block'ish comma shape: only such a versatile barrier set would do.



King has K1 as stereo main system with V-DOSC at the off angle sides, and finally Kudo for rear side. "The Kudo is way better than when it first appeared and it integrates with the K1 well, in that the transition between systems is very smooth. We did set up with V-DOSC as a main hang, K1 for sides and Kudo rears to test that. And then at the SECC in Glasgow recently, because of the low trim there, we got to hang K1 for front and sides, with Kudo at the rear, no V-DOSC, and I was really able to test that there. Overall, the system has great clarity: with V-DOSC you always need to notch up the top end, and with K1 the richness is there in the low mids - you don't have to work for it "

On stage is the typical Depeche lineup, three core band members and two other musicians (Peter Gordino on keys, Christian Egner on drums). King has 72 inputs at the desk. "There's a fair few on the kit, two kick drums, two snares, three high-hats - they're all very different sounding, one of the 'hats is huge. Then there's two piccolo Toms, three rack toms and two floor toms. It's not a hard kit to mic - all Shure, the usual stuff, 81 for hats, a 52/91 combination for the kicks, 57 top and bottom on the snares. Stereo 2 x 12" cabinets for guitars, I use a KSM32 and KSM57 on both, I mainly take from the 32 and bring in the 57 for a bit of edge. Dave's voice is still strong and he got back on track pretty quickly after his illness. He's on a standard SM58; all backing vocals come from 58s as well." It could have been a tour from 25 years ago? "They still do exactly what's required - it is the authentic sound of the band," says King.

The Midas XL8 is, like the K1, a new tool for King, though he's had it from the tour start. "I did the training at

Kidderminster back in January of this year, then didn't get to touch one again till April. I did have a 'now, how does this work?' moment, but it lasted seconds. Lots of people have experience on this model now. In action I found it simple to use. It has a very easy layout and of course I love the EQ. It's what we all wanted and waited for an XL4 pre with a digital front end. EQ aside, my favourite feature is the Pop Groups; it's just a great way of moving around a digital desk. I have it assigned by musician - hit it and everything they play is right there in front of you."

What about the effects and dynamics: I see you have a couple of Manley Vox Boxes off to the side? "I never really liked on-board gates and compressors but I do use them here. But the Manleys are for Dave and Martin's vocals - the EQ and de-esser is just so smooth. I use an M6000 for a bit of reverb on the toms and vocals. It's an old reverb; I put it back into the desk and gate it for the old snare sound. I also use a TC Helicon on the backing vocals, just to fill them out. But the desk is the big picture; it's like mixing in Hi-Def."

King is in the luxurious position of having a Klark Technik DN9696 out front. "Bryan [Grant] bought it for the tour; if he sees the investment is sound he'll do it." Still, a lot of money for virtual sound-checks? "Yes but we're using it every day, and as is the Brit Row way, as a new piece of equipment it gets a good shake-down on a long tour like this. And it's brilliant - just eight Cat 5 cables to hook up and I get the whole show each night at 96kHz. That said, it is a lot of data - maybe 230GB a night, so we soon fill the drive. But it has a very simple front end and I can watch and operate from a screen on the desk when I want to "

You can almost touch the contentment emanating from this man.

Monitors

Sarne Thorogood on monitors has, like his leading man, experienced a nasty incident. "I fell off stage a few weeks ago and landed across a wedge. It could have been a lot worse, but I tore my kidney so I was off for three weeks." He was still nursing the haematoma when we met backstage on the bus. So who took over? "Chopper [Chris Morrison]; he's the guy who pushed me off." Hasn't lost his sense of humour then?

Thorogood is now safely back in harness, and having operated for the band since 1998 that's probably just as well. He too has an XL8 and again, it's his first tour with the esteemed Midas flagship console. "The advantage for me is navigational control, and especially for monitors the Helix graphic EQ control; you don't have to go to the screen, it's like the old TC EQs." (The Klark Teknik DN9331 Helix Rapide remote motorised fader control for the XL8 onboard graphic). "Whatever send I'm cuing will automatically be on the Helix, third octave, large and easy. I find I don't have to do too much EQ before I send it out."

What does he think of the desk now he's had it out for nine months? "Well you're not going to A/B desks to the band, so my reference is exactly as I just said; finding that I don't need too much EQ. I'm doing 20 mixes, five are stereo in-ears for the band (Sennheiser EW300 G2 system); the drummer has a sub as well. The only unusual thing is Martin uses one earpiece, just for click and vocal; he stands stage right about three metres from the side-fills [flown L-Acoustics ARCS] and gets most of what he needs outside his voice from there."

I notice there are wedges all across stage? "Yes, 24 Turbo' TFM450s to be exact, mainly for Dave - usual thing, centre stage inner pair for his vocal, outer a bit of programme. They allow him to go anywhere. The sidefills are interesting, besides the six ARCS a side I also have two Outline Subs, the twin 18"s. I asked for them so they don't get confused with the main PA boxes when

we're loading in. I've been really impressed with them - light, fast and tight. I cut the ARCS at 80Hz to give more vocal power, the subs are just there for weight, they roll out at 50Hz. The fills and wedges are not too loud, and Dave's vocal takes precedence."

Does stage sound benefit from the cardioid sub array? "That's hard to define. For me, the V-DOSC has been the best system to be behind; there does need to be some bass coming back on stage for an act like this. I didn't realise how used to that I was."

Familiarity is arguably what makes Depeche concerts so agreeable; certainly for the crew, where Tony Gittins has guided a well-matched assemblage of personalities. For the audience it's much the same, we are all part of the same club. That's true for all musical artists really, even the powdered wig brigade: we are of their tribe. Maybe musicians should take over politics and save the planet?



MORE ONLINE . . .

View Paul Normandale and Anton Corbijn's design concepts for Depeche Mode's Tour of the Universe online at . . . www.lsionline.co.uk/Jan10

