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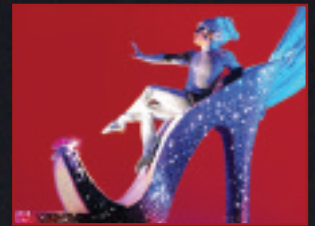
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# PINK'S FUNHOUSE

A remarkably energetic performer, backed by an experienced crew: Pink's Funhouse tour is a tight, theatrical show, programmed down to the millisecond.

Words & pictures by Steve Moles . . .

<b>LD &amp; Show Director:</b> Baz Halpin	<b>Lighting operator:</b> Trent O'Connor	<b>Video supplier:</b> XL Video
<b>Production manager:</b> Richard Young	<b>Lighting supplier:</b> PRG Europe	<b>Set Design:</b> Mark Fisher
<b>FOH sound engineer:</b> Chris Madden	<b>Audio supplier:</b> Clair Brothers Audio	<b>Set Construction:</b> Brilliant Stages
<b>Monitor engineer:</b> Horst Hartmann	<b>Audio crew:</b> Concert Sound	<b>Custom set elements:</b> Specialz

70 minutes into the show and I was just about to wend my way back home when two things abruptly stopped me. I'd already seen enough of the show to count it the best of the year: Pink is a changed woman from three years ago when I last reviewed her for L&SI. She's lost none of that frightening energy, but she's an altogether more controlled presence on stage, easily harnessing her own excess of exuberance.

What stopped me was a measure of that energy. She performed the song *Sober* 40 feet above stage on a trapeze. As she is an acknowledged aerial gymnast, we shouldn't be too overawed by this, although the fact that she was clearly singing live as she performed 180° flips beneath the arms of her male companion did impress; the wind noise from her mic as she swooshed through the air said 'authenticity' in big letters. The dismount was fast and elegant, yet no sooner had she disappeared through a portal in the set for a costume change than the unmistakable opening notes of *Bohemian Rhapsody* rang out. Before we could catch breath, she reappeared and belted straight into the opening lines resplendent in bright yellow Freddie Mercury military tunic. After two lines I switched my attention to the IMAG screen high on stage left where to my amazement I saw her tiny body barely show a flicker of fatigue. Not a pant, not a heaving plexus, just easy, measured breathing.

Astonished, I stood mesmerised for most of the song. As it rose to the third crescendo with 19,000 people singing along, a man in black shirt and trousers ran in front of me. It was promoter Barry Marshall. Yes I know I've mentioned him a great deal of late, but this cannot be overlooked. On the floor in front of the mix enclosure a young girl had collapsed, overwhelmed by the emotion and the heat. Marshall had seen her fall and ran to her aid, with a security man dispatched by show director Baz Halpin close behind.

Yeah, yeah; the cynical among you might say, but to his credit Marshall didn't just hand this girl on to Security, he slowly brought her to her feet, then with her arm over his shoulder and quite obviously bearing most of her weight, supported her across the arena floor and out to the First Aid point. Pink's manager Roger Davis wasn't there to witness this act, but I was and I commend this Promoter to any artist that understands: this is a people business, and they all count.

## Lights, stage, show

"This is a very tight, theatrical show," said lighting operator Trent O'Connor when I arrived at front-of-house that afternoon.

"Lights, choreography, set moves; it's all down to the millisecond," O'Connor runs lights and a Catalyst system, calls followspots and some of the set cues - "traps and confetti", he said nonchalantly. "Automation is its own department, and the set guys know all the Prop cues really."

It all sounds a bit busy. "There's some strong theatre in there, but it has a big rock and roll element." Before I could quiz O'Connor on the Martin Maxxyz desk - the first I've seen on tour in an age - he whisks me away to meet with show director Barry 'Baz' Halpin.

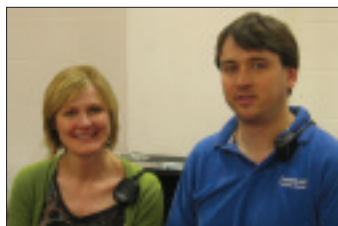
Before we start, let me say this; it's barely seven years since I saw this young son of Ireland take over the reins as lighting design for Westlife. Now here he is, not just LD but Show Director for Pink, Tina Turner, Cher and Joe Cocker. There's something of the sorcerer's apprentice here, these are all acts managed by Roger Davis and by his own admission Halpin has learned much from this man; but he's no cipher. Halpin has talent, ideas and confidence. Not arrogance, just quiet, measured confidence.

"Funhouse actually came from her," began Halpin. The Pink stage set presents as an ever-so-slightly insane hall of mirrors somewhere between the ghost train and a funfair ride. Like a ventriloquist's dummy sat staring blankly in the corner of the room, it conceals a certain creepiness; you expect at any moment for it to jump into life. "There are too many Circuses around at the moment," (Madonna & Britney?) "so this is more carnival-style. But it has an edgy, dark twist," Halpin confirms the feeling.

Did she contribute beyond that preliminary concept? "She reminds me of Tina, she's involved in every aspect and included in every decision. Mark Fisher made the initial drawings and she's been there ever since." Halpin revealed this is a 10-truck tour: "Roger aimed for nine, but 10's OK, it's like an 18-truck show crammed in." I wouldn't dispute that, it's more than big enough to satisfy the gaping maw of Manchester. "Roger likes to maximise his dollar," says Halpin.

There are screens, inevitably - six of them; all are picture frames, all irregular rectangles, they use physical and software framing to present the phantasmagoria: "We started with the





From top:

Show director Baz Halpin.

Horst Hartmann, monitors.

Production assistant Jill Aram Orid and production manager Richard Young.

Lighting operator Trent O'Connor and Dennis Brown (PRG).

set - no gags, no props; looked at the sightlines, then considered video elements. Once that was defined we thought about the gags and props. They all came about through meetings with Alicia [Pink's real name] as we developed the set list."

It's here Halpin revealed Roger Davis's masterful touch. "We started with the opening and ending of the show, then the big production songs. She has too many potent songs so we had to choose carefully; that's Roger's genius. He sees the pacing of the show and feels the ebb and flow acutely. I've seen him watch rehearsal for the umpteenth time and then suggest, let's just move this one from here to here, and suddenly the whole thing comes alive. That's a great skill."

For my own personal gratification I went to see Tina Turner's final show of her comeback tour a week after this one and that skill was revealed. With the exception of the opener and closer of the first half and the interjection of *Mountain High*, the first hour followed exactly the song pattern from the tour I did in '87. 'The next song will be *Better Be Good to Me*' I turned and said to my wife. 'How do you know that?' she replied. It was that big wide river of familiarity and I was happily floating down on a big rubber tyre of nostalgia. Davis did not need to reinvent the wheel.

Halpin explained: "It's a two-hour show so pacing is critical, between those big songs and costume changes there has to be time for the audience to digest and relax," I'd never heard it put so eloquently.

"She has very little off-stage time, but that still has to be managed. Quick-change interludes have to be high-brow. There's a piano solo, for example; if it's virtuoso the audience appreciate it, even if it's not their thing. It's the same when you consider the choreography,

you can have great dancers, but it has to work together as part of whole. That's my approach to lighting. There are some big songs in here, but that doesn't mean the lighting is all in your face; if the action is on stage, put it there."

And how does Pink input to that evolution? "She's secure in her own ability but wants to have fun on stage; she's not afraid to be self-deprecating; she has that 'so what?' attitude. She's also into new technology. For *U + Ur Hand* - an S&M song - she wears LED gloves and we emphasise that by putting part of the glove routine in blackout. She wanted to do the whole song like that - that's what I mean by unafraid."

In reality, Halpin caught the measure nicely, perhaps 45 seconds of total darkness in which to identify the glove gag, congratulate yourselves as an audience for appreciating it, then move on. There were other adventurous things Pink did, including the most beautiful rendering of Led Zeppelin's *Babe I'm Gonna Leave You* which had all the raw, burnt emotion I saw in Robert Plant 35 years ago at Alexandra Palace.

But we should move to the technology. "The show is 70% straightforward, 30% big production numbers," says Halpin. "To create lighting for rock and theatrical is a very tricky thing. The fact we play to 270° audience way up the sides of stage didn't detract from the need for side lighting, but sightlines are paramount." Halpin has dangling pencils of eight foot PRG mini-beam, rigged high with four Martin MAC 2000 Washes on each. Staggered up/down stage, they give him enough lighting leverage from the sides with minimal compromise to audience viewpoint.

"The rig is a mix of MAC Wash and Coemar Infinity. That's a budgetary consideration; the Coemars are for the back truss, a much higher,

more distant vantage point, but they have the punch to handle the distance, and they're good for key lighting from the front truss as well." He also has Vari\*Lite 3000 Spots in the rig, the three different instruments giving him the essential toolkit. All other lights serve a decorative or environmental purpose.

"The set doesn't morph, it's constant, so that visual dynamic between instrument types matters. Specialz built some custom festoons for us that drape the vertical mini-beam. They're faux fairground, slightly tacky, some odd bulb sizes, one or two blown lamps, they look the part. A little thing like that can help create a really claustrophobic atmosphere on stage."

Halpin enhances this slightly shambolic feel by deliberately mis-programming some elements; colours and focuses aren't always correct, "that gives us all the more impact when we switch to the big, wide rock look," he says.

Other details include Color Kinetics iColor Flex strings surrounding the video screens, and again used by Brilliant Stages who built the set, for the large illuminated Fun House marquee above centre stage. "The set is all printed, including the Marley, rather than painted, which is more durable. There is not a lift in the stage, that's a first for me in a while and I like it; but Prop traffic is pretty high - an eight foot bed for *Please Don't Leave Me*, Grand Piano, Chaise Longue, Trapeze, things come and go."

Halpin had input to the video content: "The screens are two formats, centre stage are XL Video's Hi-Def 7mm F/LED, the outer ones are Stealth. I worked with Olivier Goulet from Geodizik (based in Montreal) on the content." (Goulet provided the content for Tina Turner and Cher as well.) "We wanted original content: Olivier's style is very versatile and draws upon many artists. We worked out the basic treatment for the entire show in two meetings, building a collection of ideas. From that he'd create still images, put them on a website for Alicia to view and give the yea or nay. It's all original bar one montage of pop videos that showcases the excellent work done for her by director Dave Meyers."

Well worth a look-see on music TV if you never have; there's something of the Jean Harlow about this girl, and the camera loves her. "Yes there is some IMAG, but it's limited. Directed by Larn Poland, who again worked with Olivier on Tina, the shot set-ups are mixed and unexpected."

It was nice to watch a show where for once I felt that lighting was secondary; not once was I distracted from Pink's performance. Yes, Halpin hit the spots and certainly

caught the mood throughout, yet all application was subtle, even the big numbers showed restraint, making even the rock and roll a touch theatrical. When she played the *Touch Me* song on the chaise longue, and hands reached up through the upholstery to stroke her erogenous zones, there might have been a temptation to reveal the act more overtly, especially to a room of 20,000 where you might imagine big gestures are needed. But no, he held the girl alone in her private boudoir atmosphere with a dappled pink smoke diffuse piquancy that transmitted more about sexual intimacy than any porn video.

As I said at the beginning, this was my first sight of a Martin Maxxyz on a tour. Halpin comments: "They're popular in the USA these days. I've used them a lot over the last three years - Christine Aguilera, Cher, Queen; I've taken them around the world and they're reliable. It has the best lamp



cloning I've ever come across. I programmed this show, I always try to, it avoids the frustration of trying to explain to an operator while your mind is alive with thoughts."

### Sound

Three months ago I was taken by Trip Khalaf on a tour of Clair Brothers in Pennsylvania. Clairs have manufactured their own cabinets for decades so the in-house factory was expected, but the scale of production was intimidating. What the hell are they making? I asked Khalaf. "The new I5 - can't build them fast enough," he said.

The old S4 lasted decades; the I4 has been superseded in less than 10 years. That's a blank admission that their first foray into line arrays has been a steep learning curve. I was reminded of the I4's shortcomings at the Tina Turner show a week after Pink. No legs over distance, particularly in the high-mids - a fact that saw me visit FOH engineer Dave Natale during the intermission and crave a seat in the enclosure (thanks Dave, and in fairness to Clair's, Dave Natale can get something approaching Low End nirvana from just a few flown I4 Subs - something so potent it would shame many a much beefier system of subs).

So it was with some expectation I viewed the I5s when I first entered the Manchester Arena. I can tell you now, I haven't walked around this arena so much since its Press launch last century. Listening at every point, right to the top of the upper tier and all around, I can tell you Clair Brothers have done their sums and balanced the equation. Full-bandwidth total coverage, no nasty peaks or gaping holes. Not the most musical sound, granted, but this is rock and roll, not Sibelius.

Front-of-house engineer Chris Madden (no relation to Rory) comes from a recording studio background. "I've been working for Pink since last October, before that I did Joe Cocker, his last world tour." So the Roger Davis thread continues. "The I5 is new to me, but then I've never toured with the I4 before either, though I have used it for one-offs. This is a marked improvement, in the high end especially. For subs I have just four BT218s a side; it's a twin 18" as the name suggests, but I can get so much low end out of the main system."

Madden wasn't sure how low the BT218s reached, "but they go up to 80Hz. But I don't need much energy from them, in essence this is still a pop act, though personally I've never been a trouser flapper." That doesn't prevent the Concert Sound crew from rigging a line of I5Bs, the I5 sub, of equal length to the main hang, "so there's plenty there around 100-120Hz. Howard Page from Clairs did come out with me for the first few weeks, which was very helpful. Now the crew is all Concert Sound, and they've all toured this system before with the Sugababes."

So what of the music and Pink's band? "Simple enough - drums, bass, guitars, two keys, two BVs and a fiddle player." And her voice? "She wears a headset mic a lot of the time, I've not had a lot of experience with them, but you can hear her, and not tons of wind when she's singing and flying through the air."

Madden deferred to monitor man Horst Hartmann about mics: "He basically built the headset one for her with Sennheiser's help - he's the man. Stage levels generally are not an issue, the band all use in-ears, she wears a set, but uses generally one ear piece, and she has a bunch of wedges. The guitar is loud but the main problem, as ever, is drums. She does like to go onto the riser and she will point the mic at the cymbals; and she expects to hear that little boost."

Madden, in fairness, said this without the slightest hint of frustration on his face, in fact he smiled. "There are harder things - the BVs are all over the place, and there are times when Alicia is in front of the PA with her headset mic, so it's a show to be watchful. I'm using a Digidesign Venue with





two sidecars; I've got 80 inputs, but just three hot channels really. I use just one tool outboard, a Mindprint DTC - a two-channel mic pre-amp with four-band parametric; it also has a valve stage compressor. I use it specifically for added warmth on the fiddle, cello and double bass. In fact I use it all over the place. It's one of those things I've had for years, I can't even remember where I first found out about it, but I wouldn't be without it. It's simple, versatile and very quick."

"So with the board set-up I have a potential 96 input system, two HD cards and HD3 Pro Tools so I can record every night. Alicia wants to sound-check, so I don't use it for that; that may change as the tour progresses." (When the tour leaves Europe, Pink moves to Australia where she plays almost 60 arena dates in two months.)

"On board I'm using Fairchild Comps quite a bit; a TL something-or-other for reverb - it runs old school plate reverbs; I like that - I used to tour with an old AMS. I've started using the Cranesong Phoenix tape emulation, that's quite nice, makes it pop out, very simple, one knob." A more is less man.

"Day-to-day my focus is mainly on the drum group and vocals. I get on really well with the desk EQ; I've been using it for four years now, so I should. There's no point in comparing it to analogue, but the bonus is versatility and I continue to get results I like."

#### Monitors

Down at the stage end of the snake, Horst Hartmann is just tidying up as I arrive; monitor men these days have an endless amount of house-keeping to maintain the radio ear and mic systems. Hartmann appears very happy in his work, a characteristic that carries over into his conversation with me. He is without doubt the most engaging and pleasant monitor man I've interviewed in some time. "I started with her in 2006, just filling in gaps for her

previous guy who couldn't make some shows. That carried on through 2007, then they called and asked, did I want to tour Europe and Australia? It was a big question; I have three other German bands I work

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it's live, not lip sync'."**

regularly. Production was good, money good, so why not? I cancelled all my 09/10 engagements; I do lots of TV shows on a regular basis, so I was booked, but could find them a good replacement."

Hartmann uses a Yamaha PM1D: "I like it for two reasons - I think it's the most reliable for

touring; and second it has 48 faders. Inputs are full, 190 in; some are double - vocals, for example, for wedge and in-ear. Kick drum I have one channel for him, one for everyone else. 48 mixes, 12 stereo, matrix output for days," This man is smiling broadly as he tours me through his empire. "I have two [PM1D] brains, in mirror mode, 32 line amps, 80 mic pre-amps, world clock, 20 minutes of UPS back-up power." He has reason to smile.

"There are nine people on in-ears, nine on stage, plus three or four backline guys. There are wedges and side-fills - Clair 12AMs."

She wears just the one ear? "Yeah, I have lots of clients like that," he smiles again. "I like wedges, front and rear, gives her a place outside if she wants to step into it, and a bigger field of walk room. We use the Sennheiser G2 system, 14 channels, two eight-ways, combiner, and an AP5000 aerial. Radio mic is SKM2000 - that's the Pro version of Evolution G3 which they'll launch at PLASA09.

"The new 2000 series have bolt-on capsules; we have a special cap', like the 5000 series. Not a pure copper coil, it's smaller, lighter and gives a little bit more high-end. For a female voice, it sounds good. This is a prototype capsule but I think they should launch it."

Well that's a revelation on the hand-held. What about this head-worn mic Madden says you've developed? "Something so she can go on the trapeze . . . Well, a DPA made no sense; we needed something that would reach her mouth, not her cheek. For me, the only choice was the 104 capsule from Sennheiser, we made a single ear wire wrap, long boom, and used skin-tone tape to secure it to the mouth position. It sounds almost like a normal mic. We actually allow the audience to hear a little wind noise so they know it's live, not lip sync'."



You sound very happy and on top of your game? "Yes, we are happy, but feedback is still to be refined. For us these are all practical solutions. Sennheiser have worked very hard for us, they liked the idea of what we wanted to do, put the mic in the corner of the lips, a small windshield, all these things can be done, you just have to find the right person."

Radio mics run on the Sennheiser G3 system: the receiver is the new EM2050. "It's well made with a nice in-built PSU and aerial splitter - all good." A man who loves his job - he'll never be short of work.

### Production

I couldn't let this pass without a quick chat to production manager Richard Young, the man who stitched together the ecological aspirations of Radiohead last year, and produced a coherent production plan that fulfilled them. "I was looking for a gig, then in the space of one week I had calls from three independent production managers - they'd all put me forward for this gig."

Flattering, but did that mean all three were called ahead of him and for whatever reason couldn't take the gig? "Yes. But we all go through that at some point. I spoke to Marshall Arts, and then got a call from Roger Davis. We had lunch the next day and I was hired 45 minutes later."

I suspect he will be hired by this man again. "I really like his work ethic. He's interested. If I go with a genuine request he will listen, even if he doesn't always agree. He has good, clear vision of what he expects; he's not wishy-washy, he's always thought it through."

It's a big departure from what you had on Radiohead. "Yes, I've never done a show with a Mark Fisher set before. But I applied my usual process - I stuck my nose in everywhere. This set was designed direct by Mark; between him and Tony [Bowern] at Brilliant (another new relationship for me), I found everything I needed to know. Brilliant are not cheap, but make good product."

Halpin mentioned the initial desire to restrict trucking costs? "We did try without a rolling stage. When we set up rehearsal in Nice it quickly became apparent it wasn't practical to use venue stages. Alicia singled out the problem when one of her stilettos slipped down in the gap between the boards. Now we have an extra truck and a rolling stage rented from Litestructures. Load-in starts at 6.00 and the stage rolls into position around 1.30; it takes between 1.5. and 2 hours to build the set.

Young continues: "Trim height is my biggest issue. The static trapeze hangs from a box truss; it needs to be 36ft from the stage

deck, 8ft for the cradle, 10ft for swing, and another 5ft of clearance from stage. Plus is has to be rock-solid, so it's on four points of rigging and is guyed to the roof structure. Dave Rowe from Artform Ents is the rigger.

There's also the water gag at the end, a tank of water 6ft wide, 3ft front to back, and 2ft deep, and the water needs to be warm. We started with a circulating swimming pool-type heater system. It failed two hours before the first show. Yes, she did have a few choice words that first night. Now we have a three-phase 63A heater. It's a feat of science, especially if we're playing on top of an ice rink. Why? Because we heat it to 50° four hours before the show and then allow the water to cool. If it's still too hot as the finale approaches we have a big bag of ice on standby."

I think he meant a big feat of art, not science. Which is where we came in; this show is a composite whole, none of the elements within the presentation live within their own skin, all contribute to a greater whole: Art.



#### ADDITIONAL ONLINE CONTENT

View Baz Halpin's lighting schematic online at:  
[www.lsionline.co.uk/Jun09](http://www.lsionline.co.uk/Jun09)

