

digital edition

# Lighting & Sound international

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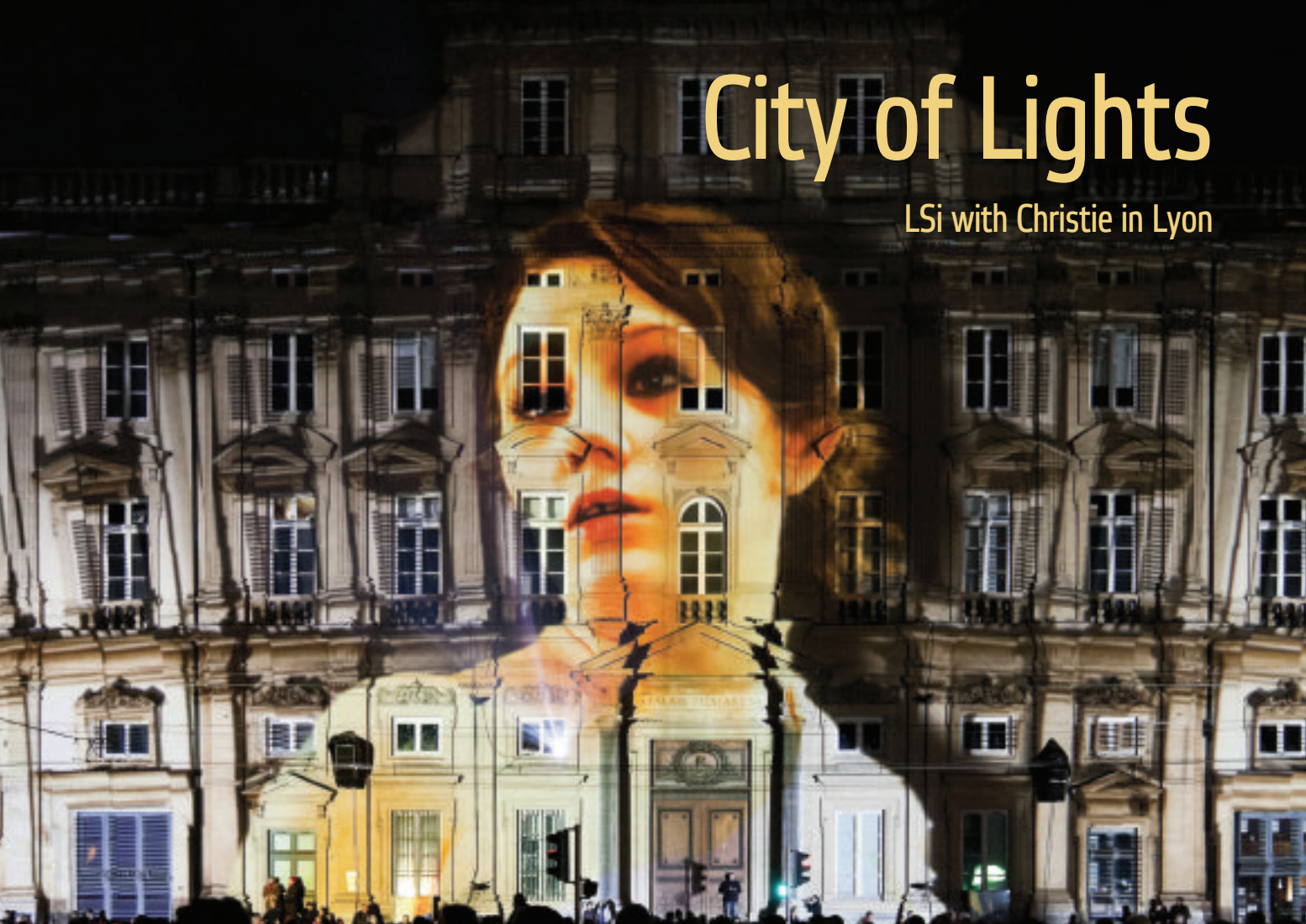
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## City of Lights

LSi with Christie in Lyon



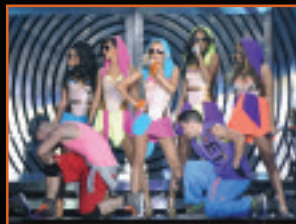
### Also Inside:



**Technical Focus**  
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**Respect La Diva**  
A new, high-energy musical



**The Saturdays**  
LSi profiles the touring show

### PLUS!

Sister Act's Double Act  
Stadshof, Utrecht  
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Photo: Tristram Kenton

# Sister Act's Double Act

LSi follows the production's 2011 UK tour and simultaneous Milan opening . . .

UK / Italy - The hugely popular comedy musical *Sister Act* clocked up two major openings across a two-month period this autumn, kicking off the UK tour in Manchester, followed by an Italian-language version opening in the shadow of Milan's La Scala. Involving the same creative team, the two productions were fitted up simultaneously to keep the logistics as workable as possible, and retained very similar sound system characteristics - with the interesting exception of a brand new virtual orchestra system for Milan.

Sound designer Gareth Owen has used an almost exclusively d&b audiotechnik system for both the UK tour and Milan version of *Sister Act*, deploying the versatile and highly compact T-Series line array. Owen was impressed with the T-Series' sound quality and performance after a successful try-out on two UK tours - *Strictly Come Dancing*, and *Midnight Tango* - as he explains: "I tend to use the Mayflower Theatre in Southampton as a benchmark - in the past, I've had to rely heavily on using delays to get the right balance there, but with these two tours, I didn't have to use any at all. Standing at the back of the stalls and the circle, the overall sound achieved with the d&b T-Series was the best I'd ever achieved at this venue."

The system is typically configured as two hangs of T-Series per side, complemented by Q-Subs, B2 Subs, E8 front-fills, and a mixture of E6 and E0 delays. The T-Series' compact, very narrow profile also proved a hit with the management and set department. It has also improved the stage sightlines significantly, opening up a number of seats that would normally have been blocked.

At front-of-house, Owen is using an Avid Venue console, which he reckons is being "pushed to the limit" as he

explains: "The show has a huge dynamic, with loud rock'n'roll sections interspersed with soft ballads. We have a huge number of different sources to deal with, including a computer-controlled keyboard system - and the challenge is to make the whole thing sound fully integrated and like a single orchestra, along with the live 15-piece band. Every input and output on the Venue is fully loaded, and we also have a second Venue console located in the pit."

Radio mics are the Shure UHR system: *Sister Act* is the third consecutive show that Owen has used them on. For the current UK tour of *Top Hat* (mixed by Mike Thacker), Owen spec'd the largest ever UHR theatrical touring system. For *Sister Act*, he is using DPA 4061 mic heads with the system, worn by all the 36-strong cast. The full sound system line up includes a CSC3 Show Control system, in dual-redundant configuration, used to control all the multitrack click-tracks, sound effects, and around 400 desk cues. The control rests with the musical director, with the click-tracks vamping until he is ready to move on to the next section of music.

Two TC Electronic Reverb 6000s, as well as two XTA SiDDs, are located FOH, along with the complete Waves Live package running on the console. The second Venue console is positioned in the orchestra pit, driving a set of Aviom personal-monitoring mixers. Band microphones are a combination of DPA 4022s, DPA 4007s, DPA4061s, Neumann KM140s, AKG 414s and Shure Beta98s, along with Gareth's favourite - Audix D6 and D4 drum kit mics.

The Milan show features a virtual orchestra - turning the physical 10-piece band into a fully-fledged 34-piece orchestra, courtesy of an innovative new German system, the KeyComp sampling/playback Virtual Orchestra. Developed by Christoph Buskies and programmed by Rene Turschmann, the system is essentially a very clever keyboard playback system - the entire score is recorded

with real musicians and then broken down into the essential note-by-note, beat-by-beat components. Owen was somewhat dubious when the concept was outlined, but considers the result to be stunning: "It's an incredible tool when used to enhance the sound of an existing orchestra," he says.

Behind the scenes, the show features the Clear-Com Tempest radio communications system, which Owen rates as representing "a big step forward in stage management comms. Its clarity is remarkable - whereas previously the stage crew struggled to whisper, now everything is crystal clear, even at very low volumes."

Despite the demands of staging the two shows back-to-back, the results came together remarkably smoothly. London-based Orbital Sound provided the sound equipment supply and support for both shows, effectively building the same system twice at its large facility in Brixton, under the supervision of Owen's senior production engineer, Chris Mace. The two systems were separated by a white line drawn down the middle of the build area, enabling Mace to supervise any required changes across both shows straight away. From Owen's point of view, this approach made the sound team's task a lot easier, to the point of it being almost impossible to have achieved the result in the time otherwise.

Alongside Owen as sound designer, the full sound team for the UK tour comprises associate sound designer and No1 Russell Godwin, with Hazel DeAyr as No 2, Will Jonkler as No 3 and Stew Steely as No.4/Tech Swing. In Milan, the team includes Adam McCready as associate, William Geroli and Armando Vertullo sharing the No 1 Role, with Enrico Spadavecchia as No 2 and Vito Di Giovanni as No 3. The production crew is spread across both shows, with Chris Mace heading the team and Olly Steel acting as his second-in-charge. The rest of the production crew includes Dennis Fernandez, Andy Green, Keith Barnes, Earl Barton, Dan Bailey, and Andi Johnson.

Gareth concludes: "*Sister Act* is a great show to work on - a great story and fantastic music. The T-Series' performance, combined with the awesome workflow of the Avid Venue, has allowed us to keep both the client and the audience smiling. Add in a happy band, cast, and crew and, well, you can't ask for much more than that!"

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From top: *Sister Act* sound crews - in the UK - and in Milan . . .

Above: Sound designer Gareth Owen.

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