

# Lighting & Sound international

March 2010

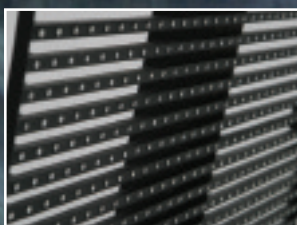
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**Christian Engsted**

Martin Professional in 2010



**ProLight&Sound**

A look forward to Frankfurt



**Lostprophets**

Live at Leeds O2 Academy



**Technical Focus**

The Vari\*Lite VLX Wash

## Eros Ramazzotti

The Italian superstar's  
latest European tour

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# LOST PR

Steve Moles talks to the crew at the Leeds O2 Academy . . .

pictures by Steve Moles

Three short years and how things have changed: back then, Lostprophets were packing arenas, largely with a younger female audience - today they're on the O2 Academy circuit (with a few notable larger venues sprinkled about, Manchester Apollo and Brixton Academy to name two). But having seen the show it's my perception that perhaps this is their natural habitat.

I've said it many times before: venues like the Leeds O2 Academy are my personal favourites, large enough to warrant a production, small enough to maintain a sense of personal contact between artist and audience. To feel the real elation that infused the crowd in the final half dozen songs was overwhelming, though sadly much of the preceding hour was largely forgettable. That twin phase element to their show probably explains the venue step-down: for those last few songs, notably *A Town Called Hypocrisy* and *Rooftops* (both from their biggest selling third album), are the band's gesture pop tunes. They did for the Prophets what 'Design for Life' did for the Manics - brought then to a wider audience. Three years later the fuss has died down and it's largely the true fans that inhabited the Leeds Academy; the proportion of girls was much smaller, maybe 50% compared to 80% at the MEN in '07, and a surprising smattering of oldies like me, but that's the intimacy of the gig, they were probably at the MEN too, just lost in the masses.

The first half was punky and much darker than their more poppy output, much of the audience were quiescent, patiently waiting, while down below in the mosh pit a group of maybe 20-30 young lads aimlessly pogo'ed and bashed about. The funny thing is, the band are actually a bit camp on stage: whether that's Ian Watkins' eyeliner, or their slightly infantile urgings to the crowd ("my side are better than yours, 50 of mine could have all of yours"), it all made for a pantomime atmosphere. Punk, Panto, Prophets - it's a lot to take in.

## Crew Credits:

**Tour Manager:** Keith O'Neill

**Production Manager/Lighting:** Rob Lister

**Lighting Designer:** Ian Tomlinson

**Stage Manager/Guitars:** Sean Harrison

**FOH Engineer:** Alan 'Doof' McCann

**Monitors:** Dave Belis

**Drums:** Booma Combés

**Guitars:** Richard Henry

**Lighting Systems Tech:**  
Tim Spillman, Neil Holloway

**PA Systems Tech:** Hassane Es Siah

**Monitors Systems Tech:**  
Paul Roberts, Richie Nicholson

**Chef:** Ritchie Duncan

**Caterer:** Matt Hyams



# OPHETS







### Lighting

After a change in the lighting department, Rob Lister now carries the title of LD, although he is the first to say that this show is primarily the design of Ian Tomlinson. "Ian was the designer for Mika on his first tour. Working out of Adlib, he does all sorts these days. It's his design - we programmed it together in rehearsals at Leicester and he has taken on board many of the ideas I've come up with, so it's been a collaboration in that way."

Lister has the dual role of production manager on this tour, certainly in the day-to-day sense, with Keith O'Neill taking on most of the wider duties as tour manager. It all looked pretty steady to me when I arrived at 5:00pm: Lister and his only lighting crew Tim Spilman said they can get the rig up in three and a half hours, "less at a venue like Brixton where there's plenty of space and an easy in."

The lighting rig from Adlib is, on first examination, quite unique - just 24 Martin MAC 301s, 10 4-lamp P36 (linear) Moles, and six Atomic strobes. "We could almost run the light show off the bus generator, certainly a 63A three-phase if we were careful," said Spilman, "but full-on, we need 90 Amps a phase."

Even so, the power saving is pretty damn good, "the 301s each draw just 1.6Amps peak," said Spilman, but what's more remarkable is their output. I've seen these lights before a couple of times now, but just as shoe-ins on larger system; in such environments they didn't really have chance to show their chops. Lister harboured no reservations when Tomlinson specified them. "I'd already done a lot of work with them, Adlib brought a large stock last year and I'd been using them on various shows and corporate events. The band had asked for a 'Blade Runner' feel to the rig; that influenced Ian's choice, principally for their colour temperature and intensity."

(NB. The MAC 301, for those who don't know, is the same LED luminaire as the JBLED A7 moving head washlight from JB-lighting, which picked up a PLASA Award for Innovation in 2008: early in 2009, Martin Professional agreed the deal with the German manufacturer that would see the product marketed as the MAC 301).

What I saw from them was very powerful beams, especially when narrowed down, but not at all bad when wide open; fast, powerful strobing, which Lister often reinforced with synchronised output from the Atomics, and rich saturated colours. "The colours are good," said Lister, "even white. The CTO isn't quite there, but then this is LED; it's not bad." Visually they appeared as powerful as a P64 ACL at this range, and while the show wasn't a great exposition of colour mixing, so I can't vouch for their abilities on that score, they certainly look to give the Vari\*Lite VLX a run for its money. "They're also very fast, very smooth motion, and very light," said Lister and Spilman together. "Our back truss has 10 MAC 301s, three Moles, and four back-cloths. It weighs just 250kg a point, and that includes truss, rigging and two half-ton hoists."

There are in fact other lights in the rig, just not many. The back-drops, painted by Hangman, are lit with UV cannons, and in the absence of any significant front or followspot light (because "the band don't really like it,") there are single P36s about two feet above stage level on mic' stands across the front of stage. "Ian put them in just to give the band a little lift from the front," said Lister, "but I don't ever really get them up above 30% fade."

I must say they make a change from the usual Omni floods tucked in around the wedges, and the slightly elevated position does avoid the facial shading of a lower rigged lamp. "The back-drops are nice," added Lister. "You can't see it here, but we have matched painted legs as well, so in Brixton for example, there is real depth to the stage."

Lister also persuaded Tomlinson to specify grille fronted risers (from LiteStructures) to get a pair of Moles low and nasty for some strong silhouettes; but that's as much of a nod to stage set as this band offers. "The back-drops are largely Ian Watkins' idea," added Lister, "he is very creative and his input was valuable for Tomlinson and me. The great thing about the design over all is that it will fit anywhere. I did think about getting a few extra 301s for Brixton, but actually they weren't needed."

That issue of fitting everywhere is significant; Tomlinson's design fits easily into this venue and at a squeeze he could probably have left his back truss in the truck as well and rigged off the house. While he didn't use any of the Academy house system, the point is the band gets their show out of a rig that, without trussing, could fit in a bay of the bus. Is this a trend and should rental companies be bothered by this?

A fan of the Avolites Pearl, Lister was encountering his first Hog III on this tour. "Ian spec'd it, obviously, but I did get to do





some work with it in the Wysiwyg suite at Adlib before we went into rehearsal. The logic is different so I did have to adjust, but I'm happy with it now." Lister was in fact programming away when I arrived, as the band had added three new songs to the set. "I've been a fan of the band since the first album so I know all their material; Tim is also an expert Hog programmer, so I'm well supported by Adlib in that sense," he said.

While the 301s are undoubtedly a powerful performer, they did have to carry pretty much the whole show which made for a one-trick pony; that and the fact that the band insist on being predominantly back-lit. Tomlinson had added strips of Light Tape (made in Runcorn by - wait for it - Light Tape) to the stage and trussing - bands of hosphorescent red, blue and green. While this did lend a futuristic edging to the stage it hardly relieved the monotony of the single light source rig. Work with the contrasting Tungsten light of the Moles and the P36 on the floor helped, but given a bit more budget in this area I felt Tomlinson and Lister would have been able to exploit that facet more, to their and the audience's advantage.

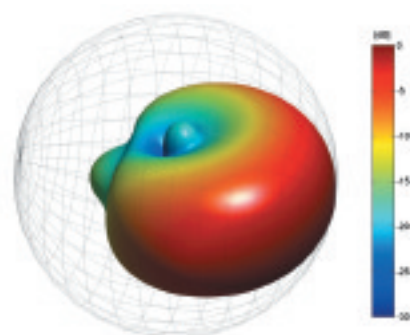
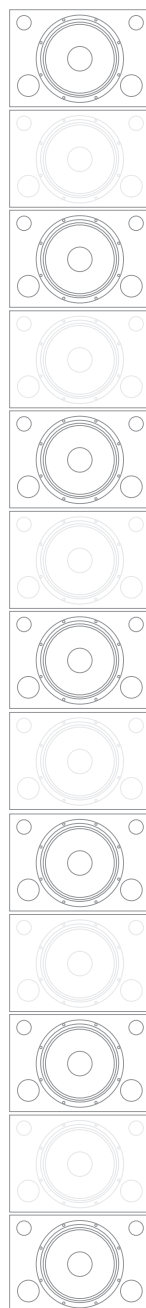
#### Sound

Unlike lighting world, here in the calm waters of audio there are no changes, Alan 'Doof' McCann still raises the roof out front (discretion prevents me from revealing the dBA peaks I saw on my meter) while Dave Belis is keeping the band happy and in touch on what is a loud stage, with lots of roaring Orange backline cabinets. Neither man has an easy job and while I might have mentioned the levels, not a squeek or pop was heard during the show.

'Doof' as he is consistently called, and Belis, have both now been with the band for more than six years and it hasn't worn their passion for the job in hand. With a tour based largely on the Academy circuit, which implies installed PA systems, I began by asking Doof for his thoughts on carrying a PA that spends more than 50% of the time in the truck?

"Adlib has supplied me with the Nexo Alpha system; I really like the Alpha for theatres, I like that old school, 'bite you in the ass' sound. For this band I find line arrays too smooth and refined, there's just not the

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## EXTRA PROPHETS

• "The Light Tape is quick and easy," said Spilman. "It is maybe an inch wide flexible tape, just attach it with Velcro. It fluoresces with the attachment of a small transformer, 250-600V, I'm not sure how it works but it's single wire, no neutral, and there is a degree of fade possible. The glowing part is maybe 2cm wide and each tape length can be up to 300metres. They're pretty robust, I've seen big booted stage-hands step on it and make no damage. Just cut to length and fit; it's almost a neon effect from out in the audience."

• Rob Lister has been working as LD for a couple of years now, Lostprophets apart, his most notable act is Richard Hawley, "He also uses Keith O'Neill for Tour Manager which how I got slotted for this job. I've really enjoyed working with Ian on this; as an LD he doesn't do what everybody else does, like the Par 36s on mic stands for upright. He also got me thinking about asymmetry; we do have similar ideas."

• There was a lively crowd at this show and I feel obliged to comment on how Showsec handled the crowd. A group of maybe 20-30 young (15-17 year olds?) boys insisted on hurling themselves around in the centre of the stalls standing audience. It looked harmless enough, but quite brutally physical at times, and although it was obvious there was no intention to start something it was inevitable that audience members close by would get accidentally bashed into. If you'd just spent 10 mins negotiating through the crowd with six pints in your hand only to have them knocked flying, there would be ample cause for a punch-up. The Showsec lady responsible for the balcony area explained, "you can't just throw them out. We have a duty of care, you can't throw a young lad out on the street maybe an hour before his parents come to pick him up. If it becomes very problematic we are lucky enough to have the old club room downstairs and we can take them down there to cool off."

• She also mentioned Dutch security, with who Showsec work from time to time and provide mutual support at the big summer festivals. The Dutch eject crowd surfers as the activity has been outlawed in that country; the security people find it difficult to adjust to the English way.



Left: Alan 'Doof' McCann (left) and Dave Belis.



Right: Rob Lister (left) with his only crew member Tim Spilman.

same dynamics, no rock show feel." But you do use line systems for the bigger venues? "I toured with Geo T last time and I do like it, it fits in between a good point source and what I said about line systems. It does present that typical V-Dosc definition, but more in your face. Line arrays are just so controlled, they're very safe."

You're obliged to use the house d&b J system line array here; how do you compensate to achieve the sound you desire? "I'm driving my desk way harder." But you're using a Soundcraft Vi6: over-driving desks is more an analogue approach to achieving a distinctive sound? "You're right, I normally use a Midas H3000, but Pete Russell at SSE, who provided the Geo T on the last arena tour, got me into the Soundcraft. Of all the digital desks, it is the closest to an analogue board, and it does sound like a Soundcraft. I like it for its simplicity; it's a good desk for people to get used to."

Dave Belis interrupted: "It does sound like a Soundcraft, I agree, but it's not my first choice - I prefer DiGiCo. But it does look cool." Both men commented on how much they liked the look of the desk, and more importantly, the way it presents information to the operator: "There isn't too much trickery in there," said Doof.

"For this house system I EQ at the desk, I take out 3 and 4kHz, 630 and 800, and bucket-loads of 250. A bit off 80, then right off between 40 and 20Hz. That's pretty typical for me with any system, I don't like too much fizz, that's why I hit on 3 and 4k; with rock music I'm just not a fan of those frequencies, pulling them lets the drums and vocals fly through, and you can still get a good guitar sound." Not that he really needs to with this backline blasting the venue. "80Hz I find just doesn't work with this drum kit, and the hit on 250Hz is because of the room, there's something going crazy there."

Doof did admit he's had lengthy discussions with the band's backline crew about getting the cabinets off stage. "No way," yelled Belis, indicating that after six years he's found even the idea of maybe

turning the cabinets to face away from the FOH mix position carries little weight.

There's a fair amount of screamed vocals in the Prophets' earlier material: I posed the question, doesn't rendering that sound live damage the voice? "Ian is very good, he's learned to do it and not shred his voice; I run a chorus at 35Hz and a basic reverb - that and a bit of delay. Effects-wise, generally I do very little other than that. I use no reverb on the kit except for one or two very specific things, same with vocals, some want delay, but not all the time. I used to listen to albums and make lots of notes on what's been done at the recording level. But these days I'm more into light and shade in my mix; I'd rather respond to how the band is playing."

Any special mics up there? "We have always had a relationship with Sennheiser and I use an e840 for vocals, but there are other makes, the dual element [Audio-Technica] AT 2500 for the kick I like, and on the guitars I use a combination of Shure 57 and an AT3000. I get more weight out of the AT and a bit of bite from the Shure, but I must admit I do EQ them to sound pretty much the same - it's a blend and safety thing. The 840 for the voice is just easy; good rejection, it just sits where I want."

### Monitors

Belis is equally forthright. "We're using the Sennheiser G2 system as well as a row of d&b M2 wedges across the front. Sennheiser have been very supportive, the IEs take a beating." You mentioned your preference for the Digico earlier? "On a digital platform I listen and try not to look at the curve; cut it, beat it, drive it to where it breaks down, then back down and trim. It makes a nonsense of the sharing head amps between desks idea. Just 'cos you can, doesn't mean you should." Good man, I can hear the murmurs of agreement from here.

"Thing is, the guy on stage doesn't care if you've balanced till it's band coherent. A lot of guys trip up on that, by looking at the visual representation on the desk display and forgetting what their ears are telling them. That's what I don't like about digital



desks. I don't need a cool toy, if I have to I can narrow it down to the bare minimum."

Belis then made a short but impassioned plea to students at the university of audio to stop focussing on the display info: "You can become brilliant at Pro Tools, know all that stuff, but get lost in the images." He then recounted a hair-curling story of when the Prophets played a mis-booked gig in El Paso, Texas.

"It was like a derelict motel and there was just a 6-channel Behringer out front with two cables running to some dodgy amps on stage and speakers on beer kegs. I used two Aux for the IEs - Doof had the rest." Doof confirmed the story, and both men agreed it had been fun, as only battles won in the heat of adversity can be, but as Belis said: "See where Pro Tools gets you in that situation."

Why the heavy wedge and IE combination? "I did get rid of them [the wedges] for a while; then we played some festival where there were some onstage and the band enjoyed the vibe, so they crept back in. They do want the shake, it's that punk rock ethic, but I try not to put any bottom onto the deck, unless it's a cardioid sub system, in which case I time-align to Doof."

And the variety of mixes you're providing? "Not so much, they listen as a band, they all have pretty much every input into every mix, and there's not too much cueing. The big mixes do make me pretty busy, plus

I don't have much automated in there. Sure, the Scenes seem to be bullet-proof and consistent, but I find it's not easy on this board for the subtle changes, it's all huge blocks with all the parameters in there. It's just a feeling, there's something I don't trust." That's more a subjective reluctance than objective? "I will say this, after six years with a DiGiCo I've only been on this Vi6 for eight shows and it does sound great, and it does sound just like a Soundcraft."

I mentioned earlier that the Academy model of house systems could possibly impinge on lighting rental companies. For the sound - the invisible, less tangible element of a show - the implications are even more profound. You can reasonably argue lighting design is unique to artist, even at this level; so even if you use house trussing the amount of hardware travelled is reduced but not eliminated. But it's far harder to argue with a manager that the brand of PA is critical to the band's live show. Any engineer worth their salt should be able to get good sound from a house system (providing it's been properly specified and installed, as indeed this one had by Adlib Audio). Will that take part of the traditional revenue stream off the audio service providers? I imagine some are already concerned and welcome any reader to input to the debate now.

As for the Prophets, see them at an Academy near you and feel the visceral, elemental truth from a bunch of Welsh lads.

## EQUIPMENT LIST:

### SOUND

20 x Nexo Alpha M3 Hi Pack  
16 x Nexo Alpha B1 Bass  
12 x Nexo Alpha S2 Sub  
2 x Soundcraft Vi6 Digital Console  
1 x EMO RK1 Raklite  
1 x ASL BS216 Comms Master System  
1 x Tascam CD-RW 901  
1 x Furman SB-1000E UPS 240V  
2 x L-Acoustics Arcs (side-fills)  
2 x L-Acoustics SB28 (side-fills)  
14 x D&B M2 Monitor Wedge  
2 x L-Acoustics dV-Sub  
2 x L-Acoustics ARCS  
2 x Monitor amp rack 4 send bi-amp (d&b d12)  
1 x L-Acoustics LA8 Amp rack  
1 x Adlib multicore 120m 2 x fibre + returns  
1 x Adlib 63A single phase stage distro

### LIGHTING & CONTROL

1 x High End Systems Wholehog 3 + DP2000  
24 x Martin MAC 301 Wash  
4 x 4-Lite Molephay (Linear)  
4 x 2-Lite Molephay  
6 x Martin Atomic 3000 DMX Strobe  
1 x Light Tape 120m  
1 x Unique 2.1 Hazer  
1 x Avolites ART2000 T4 (48)  
1 x Avolites ART2000 dimmer module  
3 x Avolites ART2000 distro module  
96 x Avolites ART2000 patch leads

### RIGGING

6 x Tomcat One 390mm Stacking Truss 2m  
1 x Truss Bolt Set (Stacking Truss)  
2 x Lodestar 1/2T Motor Model F



### MORE ONLINE . . .

View Ian Tomlinson's lighting design plots online at . . .  
[www.lsonline.co.uk/Mar10](http://www.lsonline.co.uk/Mar10)

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