



Hot Fuzz

For *The Police Reunion Tour*, Patrick Woodroffe Brings On The Lights

By Hannah Kate Kinnerley | Photos by Steve Jennings

The challenge for Patrick Woodroffe in designing *The Police Reunion Tour* this summer was to reference the band's past, without sinking into nostalgia. "The tour was about the reality of them standing on the same stage together after all these years," he says. Woodroffe purposely mimicked the simplicity of the band's early shows, explaining, "We used a lot of white light to suggest those PAR can rigs of the 70s and 80s," but opted for saturated, bold colors to create the simple and energetic esthetic the band asked for. "It used to be that there was just one kind of moving light or fixture, nowadays, designers are spoiled for choice," says Woodroffe, whose equipment list includes

Coemar Infinity Wash, Robe Color Spot 2500s, Martin Mac Wash, Profiles and strobes, and Little-Big 3.5s.

The stage, custom built by Tait Towers, is an oval shape, with Mac 250s around the front to both reflect a VersaTube® mock "proscenium" and provide some audience lighting, with the lighting truss mirroring the oval. "To make the whole thing look bespoke," says Woodroffe.

The lighting vendor is Upstaging, and they also provided technical and logistics support, including trucking, networking and designing the 70'x40' oval truss fabricated by Tomcat. Woodroffe and lighting director Danny Nolan also used

Upstaging's new 140,000-sq-ft facility for preproduction programming.

The stage design incorporates five giant video screens, six Zip lifts from Tait Towers and a "fringe" above the stage of 250 2m Element Labs VersaTubes ringing the front half of the truss and defining the shape of the oval. Dubbed the "Versa truss," at various times paint strokes and digital symbols from Police album artwork, a water ripple effect, and individual bars or groups of bars are illuminated to emphasize drum or bass riffs. Woodroffe says, "That's what made the set modern. It gave it a very contemporary feel, which was important."

For indoor shows the video screens float above



For *The Police Reunion Tour*, the video system is high definition to accommodate the filming of a live DVD of the tour, and give fans a close look at the band after all these years. Though Vello Virkhaus created some custom content for the production, much of the video is a live feed.

the stage, outside two of them drop down to act as a backdrop, showing live video of the band run by Screenworks' video director Kevin Williams, and images created Jim Gable, founder of Graying and Balding, and Vello Virkhaus, CEO of V Squared Labs, Inc. Woodroffe says, "I didn't want a video show—it can be distracting—but people are many yards from the stage and they want to see what the band looks like now. I think we got the balance right." Williams agrees, "We tried to keep a club feel, with not too many visual distractions. It is all about the band." Williams captures live video using seven Sony HDC 1000 high definition

cameras, and three robotic cameras, and depending on the musical cues or band position he can show individual band members on different screens or a "blended" shot of the whole band. Danny O'Bryan, vice president of Screenworks, designed the video system and specified slightly upgraded, high definition, cameras for the show knowing that Jim Gable and Ann Kim of Graying and Balding would be making a DVD of the show later on in the tour.

Gable says this was a much better choice than bringing in new people to shoot live footage who have never seen the show before, or having the existing crew switch to high definition cameras

they were unfamiliar with to shoot the footage. The video element is introduced during the second song of the set, "Synchronicity," when vibrant paint strokes created by Vello Virkhaus and inspired by the album cover play over the VersaTubes and then live images of the band appear. Gable says, "The goal was to just tease the audience with these iconic images from Police history without taking away from the live show."

One of the most striking video images, created by Virkhaus with Josh Reece and Casey McClean, was used during the song "Walking In Your Footsteps." Using Maya 3D animation software they



POLICE CONTROL

Danny Nolan, lighting director for The Police reunion tour, chose the MA Lighting grandMA console for this tour, specifically for its ability to integrate both live and preprogrammed video.

The tour includes five NSPs and five grandMA video media servers, providing effects to fixtures like the low resolution Element Labs VersaTubes over the stage, running over a fiber optic network. Nolan found that it was easy to integrate them into the desk. "It was a very big show with a lot of fixtures and different elements" he says, "and I wanted the security of having a desk that was extremely reliable and had great back up from MA Lighting."

The grandMA also made the transition between venues easier, as the show changed, depending on whether they were inside or outside or even when using someone else's rig. Nolan relies on the clone function to pick new lights or add lights to the system and have them do what other lights used to do without having to reprogram. For the Virgin Festival in Baltimore last month, Nolan says, "I cloned and translated all the fixtures in advance, and when I arrived at the venue, I did virtually my own show but with a different lighting rig altogether."

Matrix mapping also made programming easier for Nolan. "We have these 12-light Maxis [from Mole Richardson] with 12 channels each, and we set up the matrix control to bring up a sequence of effects without having to control them individually. Now you can just tap the fixture with a stylus and bring up the cue without having to go through 96 channels of dimming."

Because the grandMA seamlessly integrates content from the media servers to the video screens and the VersaTube "proscenium" and controls everything from the ribbon lifts to moving light fixtures, Nolan was able to program cues that he can manually trigger to accentuate musical cues. The effect is almost like a MIDI system, with images dancing on the VersaTubes in time with the bass and percussion. The show's designer, Patrick Woodroffe, praises the "perfect and elegant timing from Danny Nolan. He is an artist playing the lighting board."

Nolan says another reason to run the cues manually is that the musicians never play the same show twice, using different tempos and intros/outros. "I realized that there is no way that I would want to do the show running off MIDI triggers, because if they make a mistake, we make a mistake as well," he says. Nolan calls the grandMA "rock solid," enabling him to consistently get the most out of the different elements to the show.

created a dinosaur skeleton based on a brachiosaurus but with a tyrannosaurus skull that walked from one side of the video screens to the other, tail swishing over live images of the band. Gable says, "Sting had an idea for a dinosaur relentlessly searching; originally we were going to have a scrim behind the stage for the image, and it would be transparent to the people behind it. But it didn't look so good, so we modified it to run over the video." Prerecorded video content including the dinosaur and a rapid-fire montage of images of The Police from earlier tours that Gable calls a "graphic assault" runs in loops on a Doremi Labs hard disc that Williams can punch in and out of.

The video runs through MA Lighting grandMA media servers and one of the most challenging details for Upstaging was making sure that all the different components of the video and lighting system could communicate and run on an inde-



I credit my design start as a combination of designing for community theatres and working backstage at the (LORT) Alliance Theatre. Volunteer designs helped build my portfolio. The backstage work built connections to directors and led to my first design jobs with the Alliance Studio Theatre. I see an increase in the use of projection technology for still, video, and animation due the affordability of presentation software, computers, and projectors for small theatre companies.

—John Thigpen, freelance scenic and film designer

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Patrick Woodroffe wanted to reference the simplicity of the early 80s without being nostalgic on the tour, so he employed a lot of white light but also included bold saturated colors.

structible network. Upstaging's John Huddleston says, "You have to keep those computers all talking the same language and keep the power evenly distributed." Upstaging and MA Lighting created a network of tactical, military-grade fiber optic cable. "You've got to make sure people can walk on it, or bend it, and the military uses it in the field and drives over it so we knew it would be the right thing," says Huddleston. Procuring the cable was part of the challenge says Huddleston, "These companies are not used to having rock and roll outfits calling them up, and they are not used to rush orders."



The Reunion tour is personal for Upstaging, as they worked with The Police when they first toured the US and three current company executives, Don Carone, Georg Slejko, and Huddleston were part of the road crew between 1979 and 1983. "We have a lot of history with The Police," says Huddleston, the former road crew chief and now director of lighting for Upstaging.

The six Tait Zip lifts at the back of the stage were designed to give additional lighting angles and fill the space where, in different venues, there might have been a backdrop of additional truss. Each tower holds three Martin Mac 700 Profiles and when they are in slow, searchlight mode, they bear an oddly similar appearance to the tripod invaders from *War of the Worlds*, contributing

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—Patrick Woodroffe



Woodroffe's oval-shaped set, custom built by Tait Towers, incorporates five giant video screens, six Zip lifts, and a fring above the stage made up of Element Labs VersaTubes.

a flexible backdrop of saturated light to the design. Woodroffe says, "Because there are people watching from behind, the towers are never in the same position blocking the same view for consecutive songs."

Also onstage are five Lowell-Light Omni-light 500W floods for uplight—two on the drums, one for Sting's mic position, and two for Andy Summers.

Woodroffe uses Coemar and Martin wash lights in saturated, single colors like shocking pink and Yves Klein blue to create bold but uncluttered looks. This keeps the focus on the band, while making the stage environment emanate energy. The bright colors also contrast with the black-and-white video footage of the band from the early days, and provides the perfect party atmosphere for the audience to sing along with the greatest hits they have waited so long to hear. **LD**