



STING Symphonycity Tour 2010

It might be argued that Sting's latest tour, Symphonycity, is a case of 'art imitating life', yet the addition of 48 members of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra to his stage has enabled Sting to approach his work afresh – this is not imitation, rather it is reappraisal. That, of course, is exactly what Aristotle meant when he first uttered those immortal words. In the wider context of show design, Danny Nolan has rightly interpreted this shift of focus as an opportunity to reappraise his own methods and, like Sting, Nolan looked to other art forms for inspiration.

“When I first took my ideas about staging to Tait Towers for construction, the main focus was what we now refer to as the light boxes,” says Nolan. “These are flown LED video panels made up from Nocturne’s hires V9 modules. Because the original concept from Sting’s stylist was predominantly orchestral with operatic overtones, the panels were perceived as something solidly three dimensional; structures that would evoke images of the large sound baffles you see flown above stage in orchestral concert halls. As such they are shallow rectangular boxes, rather than slim flat surfaces.” This was a difficulty for Nolan, “You can’t get light around a solid baffle; the stage would be covered in shadow. But then I had the

idea ‘why not have something that looks like a sound baffle, but functions as a light source’.”

It was a short step from there to V9 LED video, but Nolan looked to Tait to realize a more esoteric application of the medium. “I needed the panels to be visually functional, but also to be able to be broken into segments, something that took the viewer away from the conformity of their normal expectation of video, whether that be projected or LED.”

The fascias of the boxes are, by Nolan’s own description, “derivative of Mondrian” (Pieter Mondrian the Dutch artist 1872-

1944). In constructing the framework to support the LED modules (each of the three panels is 16’w x by 13’h and 1.75’ deep) Tait have mapped the panel fascias, front and sides, with the familiar irregular black vertical and horizontal lines that characterize so much of Mondrian’s work. “To me it was also important to disguise the LED element and to soften the image,” continued Nolan. “Diffusion was the answer and it was Tait that researched and presented a variety of potential materials to Production Manager Charlie Hernandez and myself. We chose a particular acrylic treatment they produced which has proved perfect.”

Tait developed stand-off frames that hold the diffusion approximately three inches away from the LED modules. “The effect is visually amazing,” said Nolan, “and with typical Tait engineering flair the frames are fast, easy to fit, light-weight and strong; Matt Hales and Adam Davis at Tait did a really good job. From the audience perspective - well even from the orchestra’s close point of view - the individual LED pixels are completely subsumed; the image is pure, totally coherent. What’s even more startling is there’s no loss of resolution.”

Nolan uses the light boxes to color the stage, and he plays video content through them. "They're not a static visual entity, they also gimbal in space. Each is flown from three points so they can be oriented in any direction. That gives me the latitude to re-contextualize the stage; from open operatic with the panels flown high, to lowering and enclosing them shell-like above the central area to create an intimate contemplative mood as becomes a string quartet. Using Catalyst and mapping software, I track images around the surfaces of the box, sometimes split, so I-MAG dominates the main screen area, while the side panels take created content."

For lighting, supplied by Upstaging, Nolan has plundered the art world further, referencing the contemporary work of US kinetic sculptor Arthur Ganson. "I wanted something that allowed me to move lighting physically through space to complement the panel positions. Pantographs are a familiar solution but would have diminished the impact of the panels. Ganson's work features movement as a key element realized in unexpected ways. His piece, The Chair, which utilizes an arm like structure pivoted in two places, provided the model for what Upstaging has provided for me here." Redolent of Victorian engineering, Nolan's 'Drop Arms' as he calls them, move with humanistic grace.

Tait Towers also provides the main stage for the forty-eight piece orchestra. "Charlie Hernandez planned the layout," said Nolan. "The orchestra are arrayed traditionally, strings stage right, woods left, but with Sting's more traditional ensemble of percussion, guitars, bass and backing vocals nestled within. At 60' by 44' it's large and multi-tiered, but even here Tait has applied a level of finish to the stage that wouldn't shame the Carnegie Hall or the Avery Fisher hall."

This current Symphonicity tour might be visually and musically unfamiliar to Sting fans, but they have become accustomed to him challenging preconceived notions, whether through his music or his presentation. We're sure Aristotle would have approved, as he said, "The beautiful is that which is desirous in itself."

Nolan video recorded footage of lighting effects instruments on the Police tour last year, notably of Maxi 12 and Kino Flo fixtures, and plays these images across the Mondrian panels of his light boxes, "The Tait diffusion material is so effective that the images are rendered life like, in effect what the audience sees is Kino Flos and Maxi 12s," he said. ☺

Tait Towers also provides:

- All video control & power Cable Management systems for the panels
- Handrails, stairs & conductor podium for the main stage
- All soft goods to dress the stage including double wipe 48" 100% fullness Tabs

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