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Robe ESPRITES and Sunbeams for Arlo Parks Tour

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“Absolutely amazing” is how lighting designer Tom Campbell from creative collective MIRRAD describes working with the hugely talented and highly acclaimed British singer-songwriter and poet Arlo Parks (Anaïs Oluwatoyin Estelle Marinho). Her 2021 debut album Collapsed in Sunbeams, produced during the pandemic lockdowns, won last year’s coveted Hyundai Mercury Music Prize for Best Album and she also collected a Brit Award for Breakthrough Artist.

Tom started working with the artist mid-2021. The first gig was at Manchester Central for two sold out – socially distanced and masked – nights during Manchester International Festival, for which Tom created an adaptable design that could then be re-scaled in either direction for a string of shows that followed as Parks’ dreamy, relatable, and inspirational lyrics and soulful music and style shot to prominence.

At the heart of creating elegant, structured lighting to accentuate the power and intricacy of her art ... were Robe ESPRITE moving lights.

A showcase gig at London’s Shepherd’s Bush Empire completed a phenomenal year for which Tom utilised 22 x Robe ESPRITES at the core of the lighting rig.

Eighteen of these were rigged off to the sides – in the boom positions – on four-metre-high modular H-frames deployed as far offstage and out of sight as possible given the limited wing space. The aim was to conceal all the light sources, which were used for beam effects and for washing the 6-piece band among other tasks.

The other four ESPRITES were on the rear truss for back lighting onto the band and artist.

ESPRITE is one of Tom’s current ‘go-to’ luminaires.

He loved Robe's previous gen. MMX Spot, but now "ESPRITES are my workhorse," he declared. "They are small, light, unobtrusive, bright, flexible and combining the primary red with a gobo produces insane results!"

The tour design – which included A, B and C rig versions to deal with the variety of venues – took him back to his creative roots in musical theatre, right at the start of his professional lighting career.

"The idea was to keep focus on the artist and her music, so it needed to be beautiful yet sparse, minimal in some ways, but to say so much in others by enhancing the relevance and honesty of each song narrative."

The lo-fi, straightforward approach added a texture to the jazzy multi-layered humanity of Arlo Parks' almost 'conversational' music and lyrics.

Up to three ESPRITES were run on a Robe RoboSpot remote follow spotting system for the tour. One at the rear for the smaller shows was boosted to three for the A rig version, with the addition of two more on drop-down bars either side of the front truss.

These were often run at between 10 and 25%, and Tom was delighted with the sharp gobo work that could be achieved whilst the lights were following her at these subtle levels.

Even FOH sound engineer Chris Parker commented on how cool these ESPRITE effects looked – and we all know how rare that can be, although it is no great surprise to learn that Tom and Chris worked very collaboratively to present the show on stage.

Tom operated all lighting, including LED bars and pendant lights on mic stands using a brand new Avolites Diamond 9 console, with Jaz Hewitt looking after operating on some shows. A custom cyc was made for the tour complete with an aluminium framed gauze circle in the middle that brought extra depth and dimension to the look.

The lighting vendor was Fareham, Hampshire-based Liteup. Tom comments, "Liteup's project managers Dan Bunn and Marc Callaghan (also the company founder & CEO) did a fantastic job. Having A, B and C rigs required a lot of coordination and diligence, and they delivered every time – with a smile and that characteristic Liteup friendliness."

Several lighting technicians worked with Tom over the course of all the shows, including David Peters, James Gardner, Luke Hornbuckle and Nick Moxley. All of them were "spectacular," he enthused.

Tom has thoroughly enjoyed the journey so far, describing the artist as an “exceptionally grounded” individual as well as a great music maker and a pleasure to work with, and all the signs are that we will be hearing and seeing A LOT more of Arlo Parks in 2022.

Photo Credit: Luke Dyson





