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Bidvest Back with Impressive ‘Future Now’ Extravaganza

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The first major live post pandemic corporate event staged in South Africa was organized by international services, trading and distribution company Bidvest for key clients, suppliers and staff. Taking the theme “Future Now”, the large and impressive show returned live after a two-year absence, due to Covid restrictions, staged for the first time at the Time Square Arena in Pretoria with newly appointed CEO Nompumelelo Thembekile Madisa.

Nompumelelo Madisa broke the glass ceiling twice in 2019, both as the first black and the first African woman to be appointed CEO of Johannesburg stock exchange top 40 company Bidvest Group. It is an achievement that has inspired women and the business community across the continent and internationally, signaling a new era of gender empowerment and young new leadership qualities.

It was also her foresight and vision that helped drive investment in the event underlining the importance of having a large and spectacular show to celebrate moving forward from the pandemic, and the challenging time that this has been for areas like entertainment, hospitality and travel.

‘Future Now’ was a special commission for Bidvest created and produced by the multi-award winning team of David Bloch of David Bloch International and Choreographer Debbie Rakusin, who commissioned Gearhouse South Africa as technical supplier together with Pieter Joubert as technical director.

Stage, set and lighting design was delivered by Tim Dunn from nVisible agency, who flew in from the UK to programme and run the show lighting, which he did in close collaboration with Robert Grobler from technical contractor, Gearhouse South Africa (GSA).

Tim and Robert created some truly eye-catching lighting that ramped up the drama and the fun factors with the help of over 250 Robe moving lights!

Previously, Tim has lit the show when living in South Africa and working for Gearhouse, and for this occasion the company supplied additional lighting kit that was added to the substantial Times Square house lighting rig.

This very memorable and emotional occasion resonated throughout the industry as live events cautiously re-start in SA following two years of some of the toughest Covid restrictions worldwide.

Gearhouse Group company Sets Drapes Screens built the set. This comprised of a series of interlocking geometric shapes including three hexagonal thrust stages at the front surrounded by a series of triangular shaped facias outlined in LED tubes which filled the entire width of the room. Upstage was a recessed and raised area that showcased concept segments of some of the production dance routines that were performed by a large cast of over 200 which consisted of dancers, singers, a choir, a local celebrity DJ and speciality acts.

The video elements supplied by Led Vision also spanned the whole width, creating an epic wide-stage reminiscent of the African skies and horizons, and were designed in layers with an elegant 8-way center cluster of LED strip suggesting a powerful, positive South African sun image at the core of the space, also following the shape geometry idea. Along each side of the stage were three levels of video panels, with left and right IMAG screens completing the picture.

"The intention was to use the video to add depth and vibrancy as well as subtlety to the stage – I wanted to get a lot of video in there, but not for it to look overpowering," commented Tim, which made a refreshing change from a big slab of LED at the back! Video playback content was supplied and operated by Inka Kendzia.

The gala dinner event was divided into three sections – a rousing set of speeches including by Bidvest CEO Nompumelelo Thembekile Madisa (Mpumi Madisa), followed by The Bidvest Show, a high energy performance with over an hour of action created especially for the event with the show's musical direction by Bryan Schimmel and the show concluded with a concert by international electronic star, Seal.

Throughout the evening, guests were entertained by a fantastic lineup of African singing, musical and dance talent such as Bongi Mthombeni, Corlea Botha and Thembeke Mnguni as well as performing sets from local heroes Encore, a vibrant trio who sing in Setswana and

who were hot from their recent Best Group nomination at the 2022 Metro FM Awards. Award-winning music producer and singer Ihashi Elimhlophe also earned his share of the adulation getting everyone moving and grooving with heart-touching lyrics, crisp beats, and soothing voice.

The Ndlovu Youth Choir raised the roof and helped ramp up an exceptional atmosphere with rhythm and soul. They sing in all 11 South African languages including Zulu, Xhosa and English and are part of the Ndlovu Care Group's globally acclaimed childcare community programme, which aims to ensure that children from disadvantaged communities can enjoy the same level of musical tuition, care and opportunities as others from more affluent places.

With all this diversity and colour onstage, the pressure was on Tim and Robert to pull out all the stops with the lighting. On the second show evening, an Awards section was added to the schedule, recognizing Bidvest staff from Southern Africa, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Spain and their achievements over the last year.

Tim and Robert's biggest challenges were ensuring enough lighting to cover the full dynamic spectrum of the show – from the dining to the singing and dancing to the international star performance, and that's why Tim chose all the Robe moving lights.

"I simply selected the best lights for the design, so there was a lot of Robe on the plot – power, reliability and versatility – everything you need," he stated, having been using Robe on his work for several years.

The 130 x Pointes were the cornerstone of the lighting design. These were positioned in the air all over the stage, set and risers and were used for everything ... from the big bold anthemic rock and R 'n' B numbers to the power ballads and the more delicate balletic pieces where the stage space needed to be closed right down.

Every Pointe in the rig was used as a truly multifunctional unit, and they were worked hard. "I still love the Pointe," commented Tim, 'it gives so many options in a small package and looks great on any stage."

The 45 x Spiiders and 52 x BMFL Blades plus 12 x BMFL Spots were the key lights and the main stage lights. With large ensembles of dancers for most of the numbers, they needed the flexibility of having lights from all angles of the rig contributing to the looks.

Two additional BMFL WashBeams on RoboSpot systems were positioned on two of the short downstage trusses rigged with pin spots for the dining tables – and were used for everything

onstage including the speeches, with the operators and their BaseStations located backstage at dimmer world.

The 16 x MegaPointes were mounted mainly on the set in between the side LED panels, where they were the main side dancer lighting positions as well as producing cool back lighting effects and back-of-shot eye candy for the cameras.

Tim has used them frequently before, but it was Robert's first time with MegaPointes. "They are very impressive, especially for dance," he commented, especially where the lighting had to keep pace with the fluidity and motion of the choreography. He also adds that he looks forward to working with MegaPointes again in the future.

Time was tight for get-in, set up and programming, so Tim and Robert programmed the show simultaneously working on different grandMA consoles in the same session which was extremely efficient and allowed them to establish an excellent creative flow.

Tim looked after all the big looks and key lighting while Robert added detail and "twiddly bits". Tim commented that while they had known each other for over 15 years when Tim was working in South Africa, this was the first show they have programmed together. "It was a fantastic experience ... and I hope we get the chance to do it again!" he concluded, adding that it was also great to be back working in South Africa again and experiencing the special energy, enthusiasm and vibes of the industry here.

The show also reignited the passion and dedication of everyone involved and underlined the amazing skillsets, imagination and teamwork that go into producing truly world-class shows in the region.

It involved the talents and expertise of over 120 technical staff working across all disciplines and "to re-start with something of this scale and profile was a fantastic boost to our SA technical production industry" emphasizes Pieter Joubert who initially started working on the show in September 2021.

Eyal Yehezkely was GSA's project manager for the event. FOH sound was mixed by Johan Griesel for Seal, and Jakob de Wit for the Gala event and other artists, both using the Times Square PA house system.

All other technical aspects were delivered by the Gearhouse Group of companies, except for Pixel Nation who provided the Watchout system and services for the AV playback and MGG

as Inhouse Technical Supplier to Time Square provided rigging and additional lighting support including the 16 x MegaPointes that were so central to Tim's design.

Photo Credit: Louise Stickland







