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Robe Lights the Way for MacBeth at New Zealand Opera

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The New Zealand Opera's recent acclaimed production of Giuseppe Verdi's MacBeth unleashed a classic and grisly narrative of power, politics, corruption, murder and authoritarianism ... that is every bit as pertinent today as when William Shakespeare penned the original play, circa 1606!

Lighting designer Matt Marshall was delighted to be part of a talented cast and creative team delivering this outstanding production for which he specified and used Robe T1 PC moving lights to provide special soft back lighting to delineate the cast and evoke a sense of separation between them and the large scape video projections across the set.

The performance opened at the Aotea Centre in Auckland, then travelled to the St James Theatre in Wellington and the Isaac Royal Theatre in Christchurch impressing critics and theatre buffs and thrilling audiences.

It was the first opera that Matt has lit using T1 PC fixtures and his first creative collaboration with British director / designer and video artist Netia Jones who designed set, costumes and video as well as directing the work. Projected images played a prominent role in the dramaturgy, beamed onto three imposing scenic walls making up the set.

As the only other technical creative in this structure, plenty of expectation was on Matt to deliver a smart and dramatic lighting design to suit the viscosity of the piece.

With video projections so fundamental to the action and aesthetics, this also informed the way he lit the stage and cast. It was needing a specific and refined back light to give depth and three-dimensionality which led him to T1 PC to make the characters pop out but not affect the impact of the images.

Matt - who works internationally and prolifically on cutting edge opera and contemporary dance productions - first saw the Robe T1 fixtures at a demo by Australian distributor Jands and was struck

by their silence in addition to the quality of light.

The production's visual style was very Noir with multiple greyscales, monochromacy and sharp contrasts, so he needed a crisp, cold white to complement and contrast with this ... for which the seven T1 PCs were a perfect solution.

Having previously used T1 and T2 Profiles on shows for the Western Australian Ballet in 2021, he knew that light output was excellent and that the products were ideal for this environment, but it was the quietness that really blew him away! It's also something that is essential for opera, as everyone involved in this genre of performance – from the orchestra and conductor to all the artists – is acutely conscious of ambient noise levels.

"There's absolutely no sound coming out of them at all," Matt repeated with raised eyebrows!
"Amazing!"

Other features like the accurate shuttering system and super-smooth dimming were also useful, especially when confining light to specific areas and preventing spill onto the set.

The general challenge in lighting this production was accentuating all the nuance and intrigue involved as Francesco Maria Piave's libretto was unfolded, capturing the intricacy and narcissism of the characters and the cynicism of their actions.

There had to be a constant and complete balance between the two visual media – light and moving image – to enhance the compelling storytelling, and Matt enjoyed working with Netia enormously to create this fluidity and sense of visual spectacle.

The set was essentially a giant angled box wrapping an almost bare stage, so the trick was penetrating this space and using it properly and intelligently to relate the story.

Fixture placement was absolutely critical in each venue and lights had to be rigged on drop bars and other rigging infrastructure to get them spot-on, as no luminaire could be below the 10-metre projector pathway.

Matt loved thinking out of the box and taking a different approach to lighting such a classic opera as much as he enjoyed utilising the T1 PCs which he reckons added a sense of clean white slickness to the grungy downbeat atmos of the proverbial 'Scottish play'.

The moving lights were supplied to the production by Wellington-based Grouse Lighting.

Photo Credit: Grant Triplow





