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Robe Fixtures Plays Key Roles in James the Musical

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James the Musical is a new Belgian live broadcast concept – and runaway success – staged at the beautiful NT Theatre in Ghent and produced by Dedsit.

The show was originated by James Cooke – also the host – and each episode pays tribute to a Flemish celebrity via the construction of five elaborate ‘musical scenes’ depicting key moments in their lives, uniting all the drama and emotion of live television with the spectacle of musical performance. To quote James himself, “Everybody deserves a musical” and with this format he wants to promote the drama and enjoyment of musicals generally to a wider audience.

Luc Peumans of Genk, Belgium-based creative studio Painting with Light was asked to design lighting and video, and he chose 42 x Robe T2 Profiles to provide the essential key lighting and specials for the shows.

Also on the rig were 38 x Robe MegaPointes, 20 x Spiiders and 62 x LEDBeam 150, all supplied by Phlippo Productions who provided the show’s technical production and crew utilising equipment from Rent-All.

For key lighting, Luc needed a powerful, consistent, and reliable luminaire, so a shootout was organised ahead of the first series, and the T2 chosen as a result.

The main challenge of lighting this project was ensuring the rig was adaptable enough to deliver the breadth and diversity of lighting needed.

For each episode, Dedsit chose the five landmark events from the featured celebrity’s life and together with TV director Kevin Houben and James Cooke a story was devised around these. The music would be chosen from the year the event happened, with lyrics adapted to suit the character’s specific story.

As James and the featured guest sat in the middle of the auditorium and chatted, the various 'micro musicals' played out onstage.

All 40 scenes across the first and second series had to be reproduced in the same space which also had some impressive digital scenery presented via a 12-meter-wide by 7-metre-high upstage LED 3.9mm screen and two sets of LED legs 1.5m wide, and 4 and 5 meters high respectively. This was augmented with numerous and often substantial scenic pieces and props.

Creating and lighting all these scenes was an intense process needing superlative teamwork by Luc and his FOH crew, who paid much attention to detail during some long days over the month for which each series ran.

The T2s were rigged on the FOH bridge and advance truss. "The quality of light is excellent and there is lots of functionality on top of that. It was exactly the fixture we were looking for," noted Luc. A manual Follow-Me system was used to control some of the T2s as followspots.

Each scene used the same overhead lighting rig, a variety of floor specials packages available for creating bespoke lighting looks, plus a wireless LED kit on-hand to deal with last-minute deployment if necessary.

Twenty-four out of a total of 36 x Robe MegaPointes plus 20 x Spiiders were rigged above the stage area on the theatre's fly bars, functioning as backlight spot and wash beams. The MegaPointes were installed on 6 metre hangers to create more dynamic positions and effects, an exercise made possible utilizing the automated elements of the fly bar system.

The other 12 MegaPointes were deployed on the floor primarily in a default setting, but with custom positions for each of the different scenes.

Eight ladders – four per side – each rigged with three Robe LEDBeam 150s were used for neat side lighting. A further 14 of these tiny but powerful little luminaires were rigged on the top balcony rail and the advance truss, perfect positions as key and backlight for the audience sections at the back.

Two vertical lines each comprising four Tetra2 strips and two vertical lines of 5 x Tetra2 strips were clamped along the vertical LED screen legs, with another 8 x strips of Tetra2 on the downstage edge of the stage for eye candy and funky effects.

64 zoomable RGBW LED PARs were used to highlight the beautiful original features of the historic Royal Dutch Theatre building (the NT Theatre since 1965) that dates from the late

19th century, complementing the very special atmosphere of this location to match each scene.

All the advanced planning for each show was kept secret from the featured celebrity. They were invited to the show ... and then experienced a series of totally live surprises presented with the best styles, colours, and atmospheres of the musical genre, resulting in some truly magical moments that made great TV!

Luc was joined on the creative team by Painting with Lights' Katleen Selleslagh, who co-ordinated all the video programming on a disguise GX2C media server using content created by Bart Tauwenberg & Aitor Biedma. Tibo Spiessens was the series lighting operator using a grandMA3 light with an expansion wing.

The musical scene sets were designed and manufactured by Maxim van Orlé from Concept Factory and the 'talk set' was designed and built by Deusjevoo.

This James the Musical format has been a massive hit that has also gone international as The Musical of Your Life and has also won multiple awards including the C21 Award in Cannes for Best Factual Entertainment Format and the 2022 Rose d'Or Award 2022 in the Studio Entertainment category.

Luc concluded, "It was simply an amazing project! The workload was huge and the pressure intense for all departments, but everybody believed in this very strong concept and 'Teamwork makes the dream work!' as they say. When we all saw the quality of the final result and the very positive reactions of both live and TV audiences, all our efforts were validated!

"That's the beauty of our work in the theatre and broadcast industry. We love to create emotions and that's what this show is ALL about. As James Cooke always says in the show, 'Everybody deserves a musical'".

Photo Credit: Thomas Geuens



