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Robe Gets Magical for Mat Franco Las Vegas Residency

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Amazing, popular, charismatic, and award-winning American magician Mat Franco's current Las Vegas residency – "MAGIC REINVENTED NIGHTLY" – is staged at the Mat Franco Arena at the LINQ Hotel+Experience, and is every bit THE hot-ticket in town – a fast-and-furious, thrilling show-stopper full of cool tricks and humor ... immersing and delighting fans!

Production lighting designer Scott Chmielewski from design studio DMDS7UDIOS was first asked to create a lighting environment for this show in 2020 when it launched. Scott has worked with creative director / producer Brian Burke on top TV shows like American Idol and America's Got Talent and has crafted his own multidisciplinary lighting aesthetic blending the theatrical with the televisual.

The Mat Franco show – under the artistic direction of scenic designer Joe O'Neill was initially planned to run for 5 years – and received a quick refresh during the Covid period, followed by a full production and room re-design in February 2023. This last update brought large quantities of Robe moving lights into play, including 17 x FORTES, 16 x Spikies, 8 x Tetra1s and 7 x Tetra2s, plus two FORTE FollowSpots running on two RoboSpot systems, all of which are central to the lighting plot.

Scott presented three initial design ideas for the revamped show, from which a 'forced perspective' look was selected and developed for the intimate 575-seat theatre space.

All the overhead / flown structures are unique, juxtaposed and related to one another in keeping with the ultimate goal of expanding the space and making it look seriously larger, a concept that dovetails neatly with the optical trickery of the show!

Mat Franco's individual style and delivery is more that of a close-up magician as opposed to a grand illusionist, so that MO opened many possibilities for lighting. Scott also wanted to

make the lighting spectacular and energetic, capturing the pace and energy of the show, creating a distinctive sense of the dramatic ... rather than simply lighting a stage.

“We needed good qualities of small, bright, powerful and unique fixtures for this to work as we envisioned ... which led us to Robe,” explained Scott, who extensively researched available fixtures and looked at their specs, characteristics, and how they might behave before making the final choices.

He liked the fact that you can run unified effects simultaneously through both Tetras and Spikies and that it is possible to run these on the fixtures without physically revealing the source.

The FORTES are spread out across the overhead rig, with five on the downstage truss for critical key lighting, and a couple more on the balcony rail positions. All 17 of them are also capable of being used with either of the two RoboSpot BaseStations, although mostly it is two dedicated FORTE FollowSpots that are used for this task.

This setup enables the lighting team to bounce between follow spots if needed while keeping up with Mat’s highly proactive show. He utilizes the full stage space as he presents the show in more of a contemporary broadcast style, an environment in which he is very comfortable.

The dramatic and striking forced perspective elements derive from 12 ceiling pods outlined in LED tubes with the FORTES concealed in the roof above.

Some of the Spikies are deployed on the deck. For these positions, Scott wanted small, bright units with good effects, with more positioned along the back, together with Tetra1s along the sides.

Scott again spent time looking for the right moving LED battens and concluded that the Tetra’s potential far exceeded any other potential alternative options. That they have the same effects and mimic the Spikies so closely was a welcome bonus, “These luminaires integrate together very nicely” he noted.

One of the fun challenges of lighting the Mat Franco show has been to ensure it is epic and memorable for all guests, a talking point as well as a great evening’s entertainment, and that part of the remit has included creative enlargement of the space.

On the flip side, it is simultaneously a very intimate show, so with that in mind, it was critical that Mat was not overwhelmed by tech!

Scott also designed the show's production video which impacted how it was lit.

IMAG feeds are combined with playback video on the main upstage screen, plus assorted video tricks and audio interactions are integrated into the show, so all production entities must be balanced and harmonious which was a galvanizing task from the overall show design.

Two primary LED walls each 40'x12' upstage and downstage are the primary video surfaces as well as two 10'x10' mid-stage LED walls. All the video is automated and creates countless variations and looks for the show.

Scott enjoys working with Mat who is constantly adding new sequences and ideas to the show, which is updated accordingly, keeping everyone on their toes.

Lighting and video were programmed by Scott and are running via a grandMA3 console, with all the videos and pixel effects also triggered through the desk.

Scott has used Robe products in his work for around 15 years, with the BMFL being a preferred go-to since being launched in 2014, and now the FORTE has become another favorite.

"Robe's quality has always been excellent, and I like the continuity with the colors and color mixing, the refined dimmer curves, and the outstanding optics. It has always been possible to identify Robe luminaires with their distinctive looks and the bespoke nature of some of the products."

Photo Credit: B-Freed Photography





