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311 Day celebrates 34 Years of Underground Cool

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In 2024, rockers 311 from Omaha, Nebraska, celebrate 34 years at the cutting edge of underground cool as one of America's most acclaimed and popular indie bands with a massive 'cult following', a phenom celebrated biennially with a '311 Day' concert event ... 2 nights of unapologetic 311-core music! Since 2018, this has been staged at The Park Theater at Park MGM, Las Vegas.

Lighting designer Bobby Grey of Notan Creative has been working as their production designer since 2018. But before then, he had completed his first ever 311 tour as a fresh-faced fresh out of school lighting tech, back in the day when the legendary Joe Paradise was pushing the buttons! So, he has a great history and rapport with the band, who are a fantastic client in terms of visual possibilities.

The 2024 311 Day event featured a completely new production design - which will be followed up by a heavy touring schedule - and Bobby seized the opportunity to spec nearly 200 Robe moving lights - a mix of FORTES, ESPRITES, Tetra2s and MegaPointes - for his rig.

With lighting, video and a substantial automation system under his visual discretion, Bobby built a multi-layered design that could be textured, built up and stripped back as appropriate to the different dynamics and sections of the show.

The band is keen on being close to their audience - literally and metaphorically - and maintaining and reinforcing these strong bonds is a requirement of any production design.

Bobby loves Robe fixtures which is why he chose to work with the brand so prominently on this design, also for the flexibility the luminaires offered for delivering a diversity of moments, from big rock-outs to more intimate, downbeat jazzy tones not to mention some jamming and freestyling. "The music is extremely nuanced," described Bobby, and with 90 different songs performed over the 2 nights, adaptability was key to delivering the show everyone wanted.

The design featured a large upstage video screen, and structure and form were also integral to the stage look.

A hexagonal shape – made up of six trussing sections split in two automated sections of three truss pieces – was flown above center stage and surrounded by 8 x 20ft long trussing ‘pods’ with two more pods in the center making 10 in total. Each pod was automated and populated with 4 ESPRITES, with the other 8 x ESPRITES divided between the two sides of the hexagon.

A 30ft diameter circular truss – also kinetic – surrounded the hexagonal truss pieces and the two central 20ft pods, and this sphere was rigged with 24 x MegaPointes and 36 x Tetra2s.

Fifty-six FORTES were then rigged on 12 offstage side trusses, six a side staggered at three different heights to bring more depth to the performance space, with the lights blasting super bright beams across the 120ft-wide stage.

Another 8 FORTES lined the upstage truss for powerful and dramatic back light and effects.

While it is an ‘open brief’ stylistically, the key is ensuring that nothing is repeated – especially as superfans will come to show after show – so Bobby needed extremely versatile fixtures that gave serious scope to change the environment with every cue.

Bobby appreciates the brightness and punch of the ESPRITES and FORTES together with their “sheer quality of light”, also the continuity and uniformity between the two types of fixtures, the beautifully matched color mixing, and “the fantastic CRI” great for lighting faces.

The accuracy of the shutters enabled him to highlight specific sections of the stage and set when needed, infusing his very multidisciplinary approach that merged spectacle with precision with some intricate theatrical treatments.

As Bobby also works a lot in the TV world, lighting any show or event for camera is another prime consideration, and that was the case here.

MegaPointes were his trusty workhorses – still massively popular some years after their multifunctionality brought new realms of dimension to shows – they became a firm favorite after Bobby programmed an American Idol season for Tom Sutherland of DX7 Design that utilized masses of MegaPointes.

“They were easily the best choice for the moving circle truss with their nice tight aperture for crisp clean lines of light and the near infinite choice of effects,” he commented.

Bobby also likes and utilizes the lensing and aperture effects of the Tetra2s which combined with the MegaPointes made the circle concept so much more than geometric eye candy.

Bobby was hugely enthused by the additional optical opportunities Tetras brought to the party, “From super-sized to surgically tight beams to amazing individual pixel control, they just rocked the whole show,” he declared.

In addition to all the aerial razzamatazz, he used them very effectively for creating crazy patterns on the floor, and then on top of all that “using the flower effects unlock whole new looks not otherwise found in traditional strip lights.”

He admits that much of a 311 show will be operated properly live, improv style, with him grabbing presets and going with what he’s feeling. “I just need a real vibrant mix of layers that I can snatch and go for,” he commented.

Bobby also managed all the show’s video content – his company Notan Creative was founded to specifically deal with this aspect of visual design – and video is part of the visual equation that he has consistently built on since stepping into the design hot seat in 2018.

In that time, he’s built up a huge library of video materials to be recalled and trawled when creating show or tour specific visual materials.

All the 311 Day playback video was programmed onto an Avolites AI server and Bobby operated this live using his own custom video control set up.

Having all visuals under his control means he can construct complex or simple collages of imagination, color, and movement, all interrelated.

Video is generally used in a more abstract and edgy context, and he sees it as essentially “another set of moving lights” which he can also call on for detailing and adding subtleties to specific parts of the music like intricate guitar work, drum solos and riffs, etc.

He also took feeds from the IMAG mix being fed by Kevin Garcia’s team into his playback environment, throwing further effects onto this for the rear screen to complement or contrast the main live camera mix appearing on the side IMAG screens.

On top of that, he liaised closely with the SFX team – flames and lasers – from Strictly FX.

When 311 are touring, Ryan Alexander is the lighting director and operator on the road, but for 311 Day events, Bobby will operate himself, with Ryan calling follow spots.

All the lighting kit – together with rigging and automation for the 2024 311 Day was supplied by 3G Productions, Las Vegas, account managed by Eric Cruz.

As well as being a great advocate for Robe products, Bobby also notes the great relationship he enjoys with the team at Robe North America, and all the time and energy that goes into developing and maintaining relationships with end users.

Bobby had known the late Craig Burross for some time, and like everyone who knew or had the pleasure of working with him, is heartbroken by the news of his passing.

“Craig was a dear friend and a huge part of the bedrock of our little niche industry!

He took an interest in me, and so many of us, when we were just getting started and had very little to offer as end users, and he then continued to champion and support us throughout our careers.

Craig never missed an opportunity to say something positive to, and about, everyone he came into contact with. No matter if we were controlling 6 small lights or 2500 big ones, he made all of us feel like the most valuable and important person in the room!

He was like a father to our industry, and he loved to bring us all together.

His infectious smile and optimism would permeate the room and make you feel warm inside.

We just had dinner very recently, and I left thinking how fortunate we were to have him in our lives. I hope, in his memory, we can all be a little more like him. He never spoke ill of anyone, and found the good in, and brought the best out of, everyone he met.

His absence leaves a dark hole in our community, and things amongst our colleagues won't be the same without Craig smiling and beaming, at the head of the table.”

Photo Credits: 3G Productions, Josh Spodick, Gentle Giant Digital



