

IMPRESSIVE

OPENER



With a global audience of 1.4 billion, the ICC 2003 Cricket World Cup's Opening Ceremony in Cape Town on 8 February had no room for glitches. Steve Moles talks to the technical crews involved.

Even the sedate world of cricket is not immune to the unsettling waves that currently circulate the globe, but the Zimbabwe controversy and all its ramifications were temporarily put to one side during the Olympic-style opening ceremony at Cape Town's Newlands cricket ground. Beamed to 1.4 billion people around the globe, it was the biggest event of its kind ever staged in Africa, and a boost to South Africa's hopes of hosting the much larger soccer World Cup in 2010.

What made the opening ceremony such a challenge, apart from the logistics surrounding an event of this size, was the fact that the pitch needed to be prepared for the first match of the Games between South Africa and the West Indies, directly after the event. This meant that all the staging and technical equipment required on the field for rehearsals had to be shipped on and off on a daily basis. This included the entire stage and lighting, as well as a large portion of all the speaker cabinets, amplifiers and amp racks.

In the end, such see-sawing mattered not, and South Africa, and the crews involved, did themselves proud. The opening ceremony was nothing less than dazzling, with 24,000 supporters at Newlands joining the global television audience to watch a cast of 4,700 volunteers fill the stadium with colour and song, depicting various scenes celebrating the continent and the country.

Before we fix on the detail behind this, Bill Lawford from Gearhouse South Africa (now independently owned and no longer tied to what was once the mighty Gearhouse Group) who supplied all the lighting, sound and crew for this event, as well as all generator power and power distribution, treated us to a little bit of history. "When the World Cup Cricket contest was first awarded to South Africa, it was

quickly decided that the opening ceremony would be staged in Cape Town. They promptly tore up the pitch at Newlands Cricket ground and have spent the last five years lovingly re-building the hallowed turf. It really is a sight - flat and smooth like a huge billiards table. With Table Mountain as a backdrop, you've never seen anything like it." One wonders what the groundsman said when he was told of the 4,700 dancers who'd be running around for the opening, let alone the central stage and assorted PA and lighting.

AUDIO

Johan Griesel was sound designer for the opening ceremony: by his own admission, this was not a very taxing project, his whole raison d'être being built around getting music and speech up to the spectators. "I've got 36 Turbosound TMS3s - 24 facing the audience and 12 angled towards the dancers. In addition, the stage in the middle has eight wedges around it, and that's it. I've incorporated the event PA with the stadium sound system - a JBL rig - just to help get the information up to the most distant seats." The grandstands around Newlands Park extend upwards to four storeys, so this system link is essential.

"There are just the two distinct elements to content, a speech by South African president Thabo Mbeki, and the music, all of which is pre-recorded. It's all been put together by Doug Jack, the choreographer who also did the Sydney Olympics. Musically, there are a lot of difficult scenes, the music was all written locally, a real mixture of traditional South African with some techno."

The physical structure of the Newlands cricket ground is generally benign to such a sound set-up: "The delay structure is quite complex