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LIGHTING DIMENSIONS®

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Darius Khondji's "Evita" experience

The London Trocadero
blasts off

New looks for
Neil Diamond and
Melissa Etheridge

Plus

Vari-Lite in motion

And

Live from LDI96:
An all-in-one
Orlando report



struggle over one cue. The way I design is to rough out an entire song, and then you get to see what you like and what you don't like. At least you've created something, and then when you see it, you know whether it's going to work or not and you can work from there. I'm not labor-intensive over one cue. Plus, you'll never get done that way. And we had some challenges with the Wholehog II as well. It hadn't yet been used on a show this large, so the board locked up. We worked with the guys from Flying Pig Systems hand-in-hand also, and it's been great."

Programming the desired cues took all three weeks at 10-11 hours a day. "But it's fine because there were no distractions," Lowey says. "No people vacuuming or cleaning or hammering." Although Diamond did add some new songs from the *Tennessee Moon* album to the show, Lowey has designed most of the numbers many, many times before. But this time, she has a whole new set of tools to work with. "The cue placement is the same, because the music is pretty much the same—the crescendos are in the same place, but I did try to make some changes.

"'Song Sung Blue' is pretty much a given and 'America' is obviously red, white, and blue, but aside from that, I try to change, if only for me," Lowey continues. "My basis is that if it's interesting for me, then it will be interesting for the audience. I try to come up with a completely different look for each song, whether it's different patterns or different color combinations or different movements. You've got to do something different—you've just got to, as the band does too."

Having done the show in-the-round before, Lowey was prepared to take a few more chances this time. "It's not that difficult working in-the-round, it's just that you need to get a better understanding that the audience is your stage and it becomes scenery. Once you break through the barrier of the stage into the audience, it's another world—and I think we played around with that a little more this time than we did last time," Lowey says. "The types of lights that we use made it a little more interesting for the audience, because you can put certain kinds of effects on them that they've never seen before."

During the show, lighting director Jim Smith calls the venue followspots and

runs the Avolites Diamond console for much of the show. The Artisan controls all the VL5s and the dozen VL6s™, and a Wholehog II controls all of the hard-edge fixtures. After the equipment has been loaded in and the stage put together and rolled to the center of the venue, the lighting crew uses a rather unique technique to focus the show.

"We've got a security camera that is hung dead center in the middle of the highest truss, and it's a wide-angle lens that takes in the entire perimeter of the stage," Lowey says. "Everyone at the console area gets their own monitor that can view this perspective, and then they can focus the lights because there are different focus points on the stage and different gobo configurations for different songs. And everyone can do that on their own. It really saves time and you get a perfect perspective on the diameter of the stage and Neil's riser and the location of the band. It took us a while to figure out that we needed that, but it's worked out great."

Because the tour opened in Australia in March 1996, the actual stage and a completely different set of lights and trussing were shipped overseas to avoid air-freight costs. On the last tour, Lowey pioneered the use of Morpheus' then brand-new Lighting Design System [LDS], and this time out affirms that her trailblazing instincts are still intact. The rig features a large number of moving-mirror luminaires (Coemar NAT lights and Clay Paky Golden Scan HPEs) combined with Vari*Lite automated luminaires—and a total of 24 PAR cans.

The tour also marks the first use of Wybron's Autopilot system in an in-the-round situation, which, like most technical innovations, was not without a few initial glitches. The Autopilot was used to run the Coemar NATs. "After a very rocky start, it worked out really well," says tour manager/production Patrick Stansfield. "It was really interesting actually: We e-mailed Wybron a huge block of data, which they took into their computer in Colorado Springs, analyzed, and then discovered a transposition in their mother code. It was an error that made all the lights point down when transferring data from quadrant to quadrant in an in-the-round situation.

"They diagnosed this from 12,000 miles away, which was just astonishing," Stansfield says. "But having fixed that problem, the return on the cost savings

NEIL DIAMOND'S "TENNESSEE MOON" TOUR

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Marilyn Lowey, Lowey & Company

LIGHTING DIRECTOR
Jim Smith

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR
Patrick Stansfield

**TECHNICAL DIRECTOR/
PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER**
Doug Pope

STAGE MANAGER
Michael Weisse

OBIE LIGHTING CREW
Clay Brakeley
Martin Phillips
Tom Mayer
Bob Fry
Chuck Larou

VARI*LITE ARTISAN OPERATOR
Greg Wershing

VARI*LITE TECHNICIANS
Dave Evans
Ken Young

LIGHTING SUPPLIERS
The Obie Company
Vari-Lite, Inc.

SET DESIGN
Railton & Associates

SET CONSTRUCTION
Tait Towers

CHIEF AUDIO ENGINEER
Stanley Miller

**MONITOR ENGINEER,
CHIEF RECORDING ENGINEER**
Bernie Becker

ASSISTANT MONITOR ENGINEER
Greg Lopez

ASSISTANT AUDIO ENGINEERS
Karla Hixson
John Drane

SOUND SUPPLIER
Maryland Sound Industries

LASER SUPPLIER
Laser Media, Inc.

LIGHTING EQUIPMENT

- (20) Clay Paky¹⁰⁸ Golden Scan HPEs
- (51) Coemar¹⁰¹ NAT 1200 TMs
- (4) Coemar¹⁰¹ PC 1200 HMI NATs
- (6) Coemar¹⁰¹ NAT 2500 TMs
- (106) Vari*Lite¹⁰⁴ VL5s
- (12) Vari*Lite¹⁰⁴ VL6s
- (12) Vari*Lite¹⁰⁴ VLM™ moving-mirror units
- (2) Vari*Lite¹⁰⁴ Smart DMX™ units
- (24) PAR-64s (12 with PanCommand¹¹⁴ ColorFaders)
- (12) 8-lights with Wybron¹⁰⁰ Colorams
- (1) Wybron¹⁰⁰ Autopilot control system
- (1) Flying Pig Systems¹¹⁵ Wholehog II console
- (1) Avolites¹¹⁶ Diamond console
- (1) Vari*Lite¹⁰⁴ Artisan console

Neil Diamond

of not having to pay four local union spot operators everywhere was so significant that we kept the faith and allowed it to become a very successful innovation."

Lowey has been pleased about taking the risk. "I had used truss spot operators for years and I really wanted to take one step beyond that and see if the technology really worked," Lowey says. "Plus, it was about making cost-effective decisions and implementing technology for us. We had it working within the first three or four shows. In the round, it's broken up into zones: upstage and downstage and left and right. So this is a whole different slice of pie when you start sectioning it off that way. But it works great."

Although this tour posed several technological challenges for the production crew, all involved seem to feel it well

worth the effort. "The system that we originally rolled out had some problems—its complexity in general forced us to make some hard decisions in terms of truss moves and numbers of spares we could carry while we were in Australia," Stansfield says. "We boiled about 24,000lb out of the show, which from an air-freight standpoint is a very significant amount."

"But it's been exciting to develop," he continues. "We think the VL5/Coemar NAT combination has been just the ticket—because the Coemar NAT is such a wonderful instrument. It does all the things a designer wants it to do and fills all the gaps of several different instruments. Plus, it's really got a terrific hard-edged beam, it's versatile, never screws up, and it's relatively low-maintenance. If we were going to take this show out in another version for proscenium or for shed tours, those instruments would

carry the show in the long term."

The tour ended December 29 in Las Vegas, after which all involved planned to take a much-deserved rest. While there are no concrete plans for another Diamond tour anytime soon, the next time out Lowey will certainly be looking for some new lighting tools.

"The technology is changing so quickly that I encourage the people who are manufacturing to continue the road that they're on, because when I was in school they told us about all of this stuff that would happen and now it's a reality," says the LD. "They should keep going. It's not about getting bigger and better, it's about getting more sensitive to the needs of an artist to create that beauty. Let them continue to create the magic systems and fixtures, because that helps us to 'Go and make magic' and do our jobs better."