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Robe FORTES in Heaven

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Lighting designer Mikael Kratt was super happy to be among the first visiting creatives to use the Royal Danish Opera's new Robe FORTE moving lights in a recent production at the Copenhagen Opera House.

This was for Som I Himlen (As It Is in Heaven) a lively and heartwarming musical adaptation directed by Edward af Sillén of a 2004 Swedish movie telling the story of a famous conductor who returns to his small Swedish hometown in the North of the country to retire ... and is asked to help with mentoring the school choir.

It was Mikael's first time using FORTES, 80 of which arrived at the Copenhagen Opera House in summer via Robe's Danish distributor Light Partner. The package features 32 x FORTE Profiles, 34 x FORTE Fresnels, 4 x FORTE FSs (follow spots) and 10 x iFORTES, all part of a technical upgrade that was installed just in time for the restart of the high-profile venue's winter programme.

Som I Himlen is a co-production with Malmo Opera and was first produced there in 2021. Mikael has worked with the director Edward before and was asked to collaborate on this production by him.

There were no Robe moving lights involved in that production as Mikael utilised Malmo Opera's repertory rig. The entire creative team from the popular Malmo show helped to deliver the production in Copenhagen.

When the first discussions started with the Copenhagen Opera House chief LX Sune Schou, he mentioned that the move to having LED fixtures in the rig was imminent, and Mikael was also delighted to see Robe LEDBeam 150s on the kit list, which he has used before together with several other Robe products on his various projects.

With many intimate moments in the show, the set, designed by Kim Witzel, was pushed as far downstage and as close to the audience possible, where there were fewer rigging points for lights, and the orchestra – who figures prominently in the narrative – was upstage on a podium.

This was slightly tricky to manage in terms of lighting coverage, but with the FORTES in the rig, Mikael was able to light the action both efficiently and elegantly using both the profile and fresnel versions of FORTE which he thinks are “brilliant!”

“The punch is great as is the quality of light,” he confirmed, explaining that the show is a pacey mix of classic musical production numbers and operatic drama for which the general style of lighting is realistic and lifelike. “We wanted to present a series of relatable scenarios for the audience, as the story is about everyday people dealing with normal situations that can have a dramatic impact on their lives,” he explained.

Much of the set was woody in colour and texture, so he also wanted to retain this natural warmth and emphasise the subtleties of different seasons and times of the day with lighting.

He loved working with the FORTE fresnels which replaced the 5K HMIs he had used for the same roles in Malmo, commenting that he didn’t need to go above 60% most of the time due to the brightness.

With approximately 10 metres of trim height, and some older hard-edged moving lights to augment, he noted “they are extremely powerful!”

Fifty-seven FORTES are used in total for Som I Himlen, all rigged on house bars in the top rig lighting above the stage and the orchestra, with a couple more behind the scrim in front of the orchestra riser, which flies out to reveal the orchestra – and the full lighting rig in a spectacular moment – towards the conclusion of the story.

Other features he likes include the zoom range, which he says is “amazing” enabling wide shots to even be covered with one fixture in some cases, and no loss of output when zoomed out.

“Overall working with these FORTES made a massive difference to the scope and latitude I had to light the show and the detail that could be added,” he stated, saying that the colour rendition is “beautiful” all the way from the subtle pastels and intricate cold areas of the spectrum to the deep, rich blues and reds which were “gorgeous”.

The density and texture of the reds really surprised him, as LED luminaires can strain in these areas, but the FORTES retained their power and punch even in the darker colours.

For contrast, there was just one number “Fråga Arne” (“Ring til Arne” in Danish) in the show that broke from the realistic lighting aesthetic into a more traditional all-singing-all-dancing musical showstopper, and Mikael was even wondering at one point if the impact of a FORTE colour chasing might have been a bit over-the-top for this, but the treatment worked out perfectly.

The FORTES also assisted in creating different rooms onstage.

The shutters were really helpful here, and some scenes were quite short and rapidly flipped to different places, so he was able to go from the naturalistic looks to harsher more abstract environments just with nuances in the light.

Mikael had initially been worried about the ‘banana effect’ – light beam edge aberrations when zoomed in or out – as all his pools of light needed to be super sharp, “but even with fixtures zoomed out 100%, the edges are clean precise which is very impressive”.

He also appreciated the dimming curve which he describes as “excellent” for some of the very long and slow fade ins/ outs and crosses.

Four of the Opera House’s LEDBeam 150s were used for side fill light, rigged at low FOH positions, and these were cloned from Source Fours on the Malmo plot.

Mikael has used LEDBeam 150s as side lighting before as the dimming, zoom and colours are “all great”, and has 8 on another show, “Änglagård”(House of Angels), which is also based on a Swedish cult movie and is running to sold-out houses in Stockholm, and he spec’d 16 for Tootsie last year – running at the same theatre, Oscarsteatern, where they were used as front and effects lights.

Mikael concluded, “It was great coming to the Royal Opera in Copenhagen, I had a terrific time. It was a delight working with Sune and his team of skilled lighting technicians and also my lead programmer Mikkel Bedsted who did a fantastic job. I had a total blast revisiting this musical once again and everything fell into place enabling us to create a production of which we are all very proud.”

Photo Credit: Camilla Winther





