

10.5.2024

Robe Flies with Hatupatu / Kurungaituku Production

Products Involved

T1 PC™ LEDWash 600X™

Lighting designer Jo Kilgour created edgy and graceful lighting for Hatupatu / Kurungaituku: a forbidden love, a breathtaking new aerial dance work produced by Aotearoa's boundary-pushing kaupapa Māori theatre company, Taki Rua Productions. The work, written by creative director Tānemahuta Gray and Kapa Haka by Wētini Mītai-Ngātai, premiered at the Tāwhiri Warehouse in Wellington as part of the 2024 Aotearoa New Zealand Festival of the Arts.

Eighteen Robe T1 PCs and 10 x LEDWash 600 wash beams made up an integral part of Jo's lighting rig, which was supplied to this thrilling production by Wellington-based rental company, Grouse Lighting, and project managed by Cameron Nicholls with the assistance of Riley Gibson.

The immersive storytelling was presented in traverse, with the audience standing either side of a central 1.5-metre-high runway stage, relating the tale of warrior Hatupatu and bird woman Kurungaituku in a daring and dramatic anti-gravitational collage of movement, action, and visceral emotion.

A 'spine' truss running the length of the runway in the roof and scaffolding structures either side was used to facilitate the people flying, so finding workable lighting positions was challenging. Upstage at one end was a rear projection screen, with four roof trusses flown parallel to the spine (2 either side) along the length of the space to provide additional lighting positions.

A maximum trim height of 6.5 metres in the lowest venue on the tour also impacted the approach of all technical departments – lighting, rigging, audio, video, flying, etc., who had to work within with these parameters. All the equipment had to be relative to the spatial dimensions and the main spine truss.

Jo worked collaboratively with set designer John Verryt.

For lighting, she needed a solution that was powerful, offered plenty of options and achieved with physically compact fixtures, so she immediately thought of Grouse and their Robe T1 PC luminaires which she'd utilised on a couple of previous projects.

The design process included a pilot workshop staged at Tāwhiri Warehouse in November 2023 with the full set design and a quarter of the then-specified lights, so Jo could establish what worked and what was practical ... or not!

The pilot confirmed that any long snout fixtures overhead encroached too much on the space so they were out, and the exercise also enabled her to identify optimal rigging positions for fixtures that would not interfere with the access needed for the flying artists and climbing technicians.

It also underlined her decision to use moving lights.

Contemporary dance is Jo's favourite performance genre to light, and she takes pride in doing this in unique hi-impact, more nuanced and un-flashy ways. This has become her style as well as her "absolute passion".

The T1 PC's zoom made it a popular choice for the "boom" positions which were mounted on the scaffolding structures only 2.8m either side of the runway stage. To ensure accurate and complete control of the output, she utilised the internal beam shaper (barn doors) to accurately shutter light off the climbers, the audience, and the projection screen.

She appreciates the T1 series' excellent colour rendering which produces perfect skin tones, and being LED, the output was uniform with no bulb changes needed. In addition to side lighting, they were used for specials on the overhead rig and for washing across the space.

The 10 x LEDWash 600s were rigged overhead and used almost like house lights, for general uniform wash coverage of the space, bathing it in pleasant light.

While was tricky containing light from the projection screen and audience with the low height and sometimes substantial overthrow distances and angles with which they were working, the performance area also needed to be opened up at times, so flooding it with light, colour and textures helped build atmosphere for some epic aerial stunts that were vital to the energy and narrative of the piece, also helping to make it a truly 3D experience.

The action-packed 75-minute show saw moments of great beauty and serenity juxtaposed against raw and aggressive fight scenes accompanied by a brilliant soundtrack composed by

Paddy Free. The captivating video images designed by Artificial Imagination included a lot of content from Rotorua, where the story is set. A research trip there gave the creative team the idea of keeping the venue hazy and misty with lots of fog mimicking the mythical geothermal activities present in the region.

Having this many moving lights plus several other luminaires extended the possibilities for lighting, and 9 days of full production rehearsal time in the Wellington venue with the cast - ahead of the first show - was another rare luxury for the creative team.

Tānemahuta Gray's clear visions of the desired aesthetic also made this goal easier to energise for the team.

Jo pre-programmed the show before handing over to Cameron & Riley for the tour. She relishes the chance of being hands on and loves crafting shadows and developing negative spaces and illusion as well as illuminating, once again reminding us that contemporary dance is a fantastic forum for more experimental visual thinking that properly stretches the imagination and involves some risk taking to get the language flowing.

For her, the numerous and varied technical challenges were a major part of the joy of bringing Hatupatu / Kurungaituku alive, alongside the great teamwork and co-operation that created a show of which everyone was proud ... and that was a huge success with the public.

After Wellington, it toured to Auckland's Q Theatre, then played at the Air Force Museum of New Zealand in Christchurch before finishing up at the Energy Events Centre in Rotorua.

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