

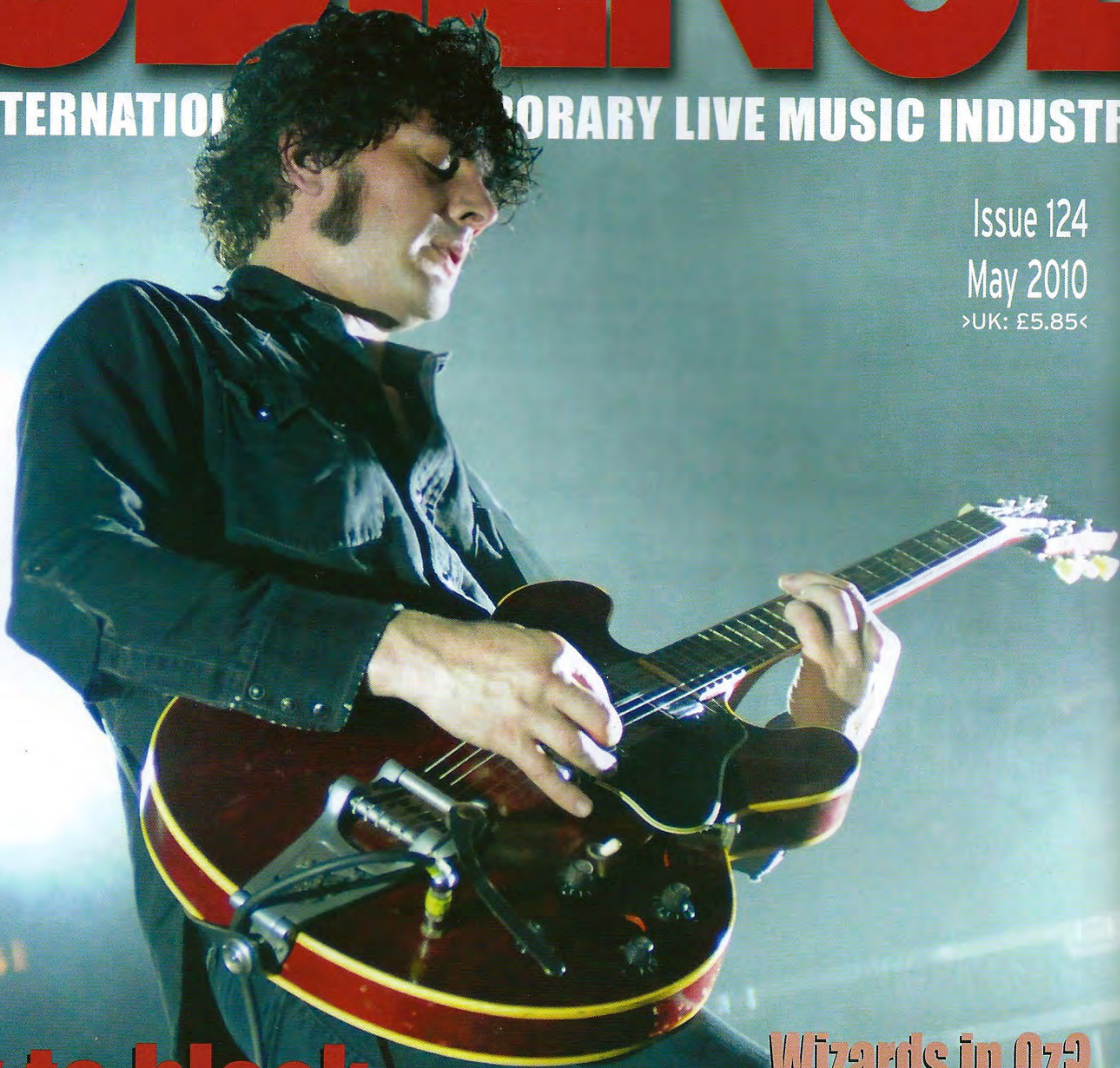
AUDIENCE

FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY LIVE MUSIC INDUSTRY

Issue 124

May 2010

>UK: £5.85<



Back to black

Big buzz for BRMC tour

Wizards in Oz?

Live Nation to compete with former partners

Star supporters

How the staging sector copes with perpetual change

Stefan Breitenmoser of Swiss Music Promoters Association



I think we've reached the limit on ticket prices



All Access Staging - Aventura Tour



The global staging industry continues to boom, with technological innovations and increasingly sophisticated working methods producing greater efficiency, safety and startling presentations. However, high profile incidents at recent Madonna and Elton John concerts highlight the challenges and risks, as Johnny Black reports

Success, as many have noted, can create almost as many problems as it solves.

In recent years, the staging industry has boomed along with the still burgeoning live music scene. But can it continue, or is a slowdown inevitable as artistes begin to seek more economic ways of touring?

Speaking with a range of staging companies from the huge to the more modest, in general, the prospects look good.

UK-based Steven Corfield, founder of Serious Stages, located in rural Pilton in Somerset, puts it simply. "The tour staging sector is in good health. The festival circuit is also growing massively and now forms a significant part of artistes' tours."

Serious is a perfect illustration of how the staging

industry has flourished down the years.

Corfield started in 1970 when a neighbouring farmer got him to knock up a plywood and scaffolding stage for a small rock festival in his field.

That festival grew into Glastonbury, and Corfield's stage was the first of thousands now built by Serious across the globe.

"We maintain strategic partnerships worldwide to provide global solutions to our clients' needs," he says. "These include operations in the Middle East with Al Laith, Australia with Tony Butler of Butler's Hire, Scotland with First Stage and London and Ireland with Atlantic Enterprise."

Recent Serious clients have included Australia's Big Day Out touring festival,

United Arab Emirates (UAE) promoters Flash in Abu Dhabi and Meydan in Dubai, the UK multiple-festival organiser Festival Republic and the BBC.

In America, All Access CEO Clive Forrester shares a similarly global perspective.

"Our main office is in Los Angeles, but we also have a New Jersey office servicing New York and the East Coast, Woking in the UK - covering London and Europe, and Arundel in Australia, servicing Brisbane and the Pacific Rim."

Forrester, who has recently worked on *Star Wars the Musical*, the Grammys, Rihanna and Black Eyed Peas, reports that, "the recent upswing in the economy has



Steven Corfield



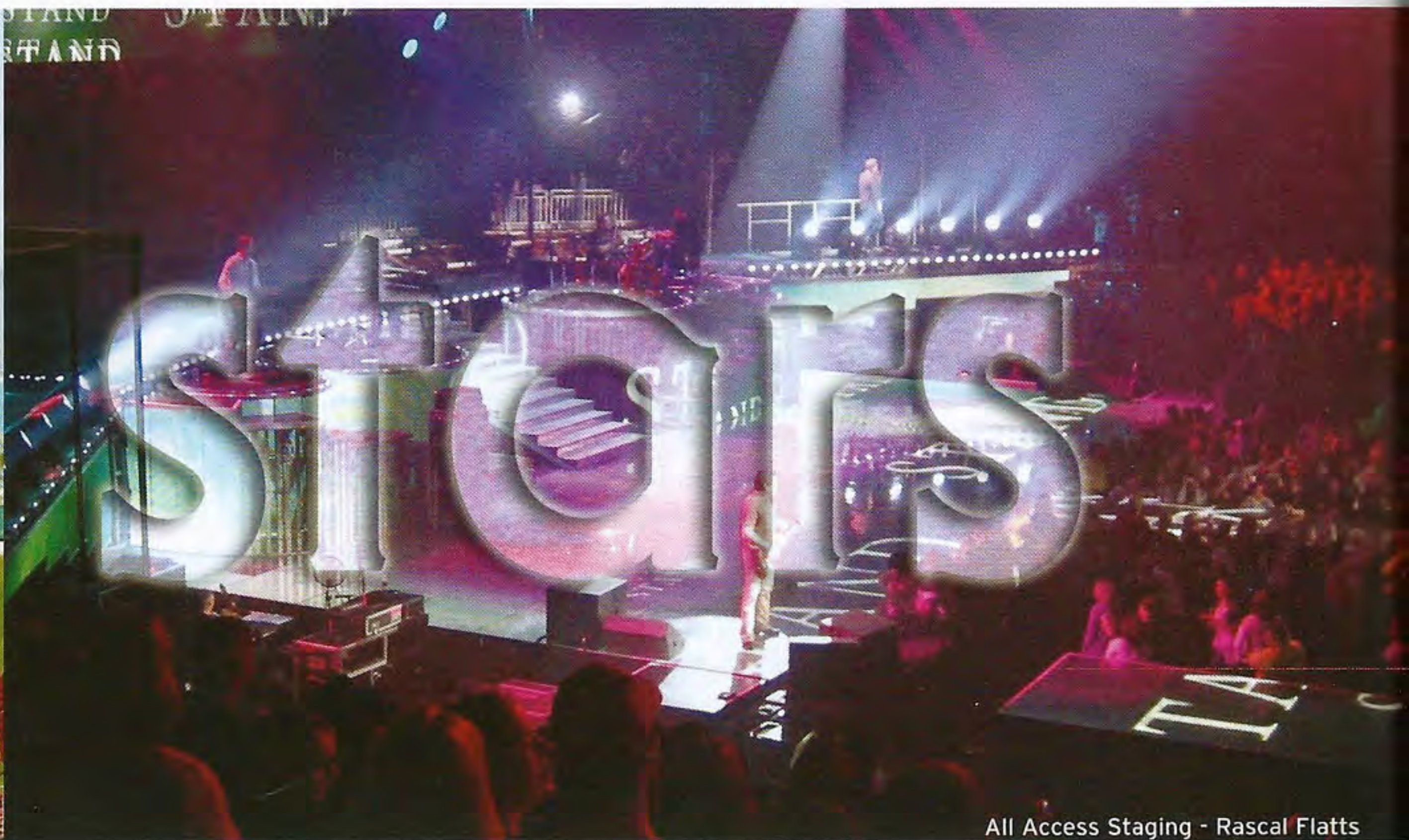
Tony Butler



Serious Stages - Killers



Al Laith - Il Divo



All Access Staging - Rascal Flatts

expanded our workload tremendously. We're seeing bands who haven't toured in some time - like New Kids on the Block and the Eagles - plus teen acts like Justin Bieber and Miley Cyrus, touring to satisfy their worldwide followings."



Clive Forrester

Over in Australia, Tony Butler of Butler's Hire, also says business is good, but particularly singles out the festival market as a huge area of expansion.

Butler's recent projects have included Big Day Out, Good Vibrations, Sydney Festival, George Michael, A Day on the Green and Pearl Jam.

Meanwhile, Tim Dunn, partner-director of the long-established Gearhouse in South Africa, finds business fluctuating.

"We are dictated to by what goes on in the rest of the world, everything from Middle Eastern wars to Icelandic volcanoes and global economic recessions. However, we've got the FIFA World Cup here imminently so there's a lot of tours coming through."

Sun, sea and staging

With recent clients including Elton John, Santana, Sting and Coldplay, Jo Marshall, director of production services for Dubai-based Al Laith Event Services in the UAE, says, "Business is growing here. Al Laith overall employs about 1,100 people, 300 of them in the staging side of the business, and we are about to open an office in Oman and another in Abu Dhabi."

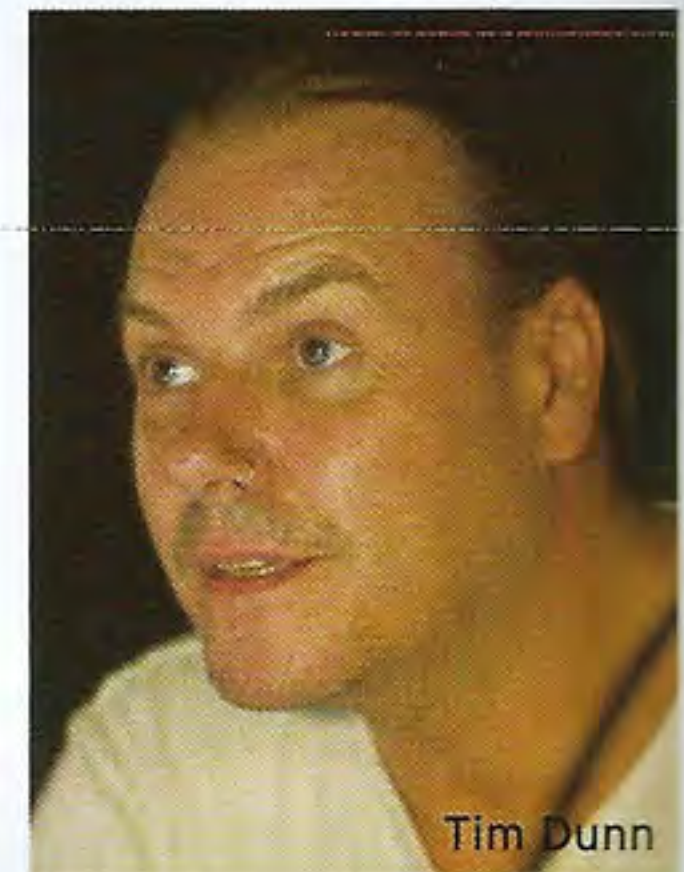
Mikkel Brogaard, whose company European Staging operates from an HQ in Fredensborg, Denmark, focuses on smaller scale projects but he too has an almost full calendar for 2010.

"Rod Stewart has been my staging client for the last 20 years or so," he explains, "and lately we've been doing Depeche Mode, Kiss and Rammstein."

The Stageco Group, whose development of construction methods using cranes shot them to the forefront of the industry in the mid-'80s, remains a world leader.

The company currently employs 170 full-time staff across nine locations, including its headquarters in Tildonk, Belgium, and outposts in Germany, Austria, France, the Netherlands and the US.

Stageco clients range from U2, AC/DC, Muse and



Tim Dunn



Jo Marshall

Building Big Ideas!

Al Laith

Tel : + 971 (0) 4-338 8882 Fax: + 971 (0) 4-338 8802
events@alcaff.com www.allaith.com

EVENT SERVICES DIVISION

In Association with:



Colin Wright

Yannick Noah to festivals such as Germany's Rock am Ring and Rock Im Park (cap. 80,000 each), France's Main Square Festival (50,000) in Arras and the UK's Download (110,000).

In Russia too, it seems the staging business is thriving.

Alexey Kotelnikov of the Moscow-headquartered JSA - Stage & Show Production Company, says, "The size of Russian productions has increased significantly. For example, the stage complexes for the annual celebrations in Moscow and St Petersburg have become bigger and much better equipped technologically."

Russia is now producing concerts at a world level, and Russian festivals, like Rock on the Volga and Festival Krylia, are beginning to invite international headliners.

Kotelnikov points to Roger Waters, Metallica, The Prodigy, Deep Purple and Alice Cooper as examples of acts JSA has worked with in the past two years.

International support

Jeff Burke, director of leading UK staging firm ES Group, mentions Elton John, Leonard Cohen, Green Day, Madonna, Duffy and Fuji Rocks as recent projects, and says the company has lately focussed on "expanding into new areas where the local/domestic market is growing, for example Japan. We work with many of the Japanese and Asian acts across the region rather than world acts."

With clients including The Libyan Government, Saudi Aramco and Pico International Bahrain, it's little wonder that Shane McCarthy, MD of Atlantic Enterprise says he sees "an expanding market



especially in major events in the Middle East".

From offices in London, Ireland and Dubai, Atlantic focuses on major one-off shows and events.

UK-based Alistage does well in its own specialist niche supplying modular staging for static events, anything from 1,000 staging units for Glastonbury Festival to the Eurovision Song Contest's crescent-shaped rehearsal stage.

JSA
STAGE & SHOW
PRODUCTION COMPANY

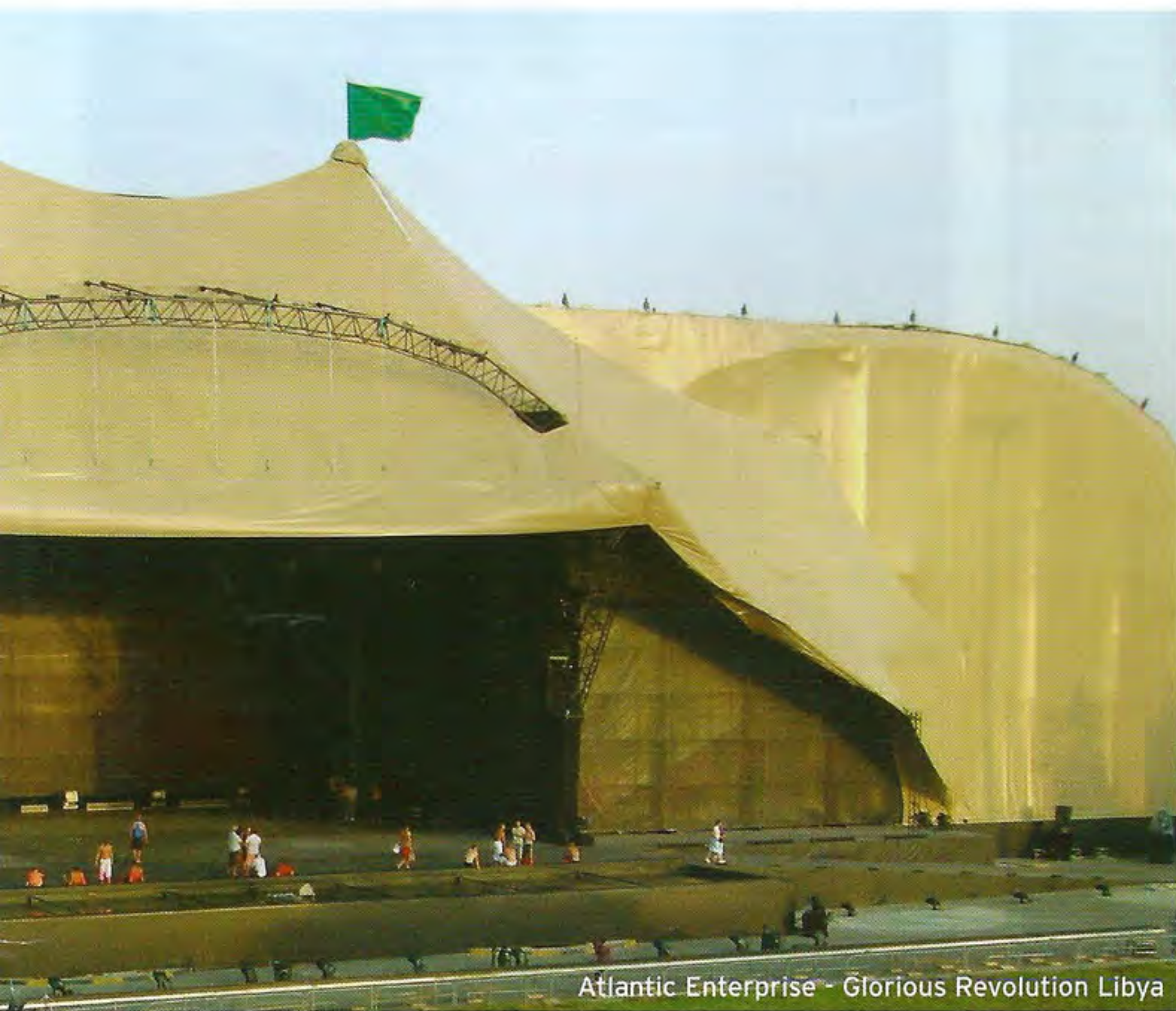
WE DON'T SAY MAYBE BECAUSE THERE IS MORE THAN SOLUTIONS

We are capable indeed of making a great show.
Either an indoor or an open air show we guarantee production and staging on any scale.
Our equipment parks and stuff are always where you need them - in Baltic States, Ukraine, Russia.
Our 15 years experience and best solutions are always at your service.

main office | Baltic States | Ukraine | Russia
europe@jsa.lv | kiev@jsa.ua | moscow@jsa.ru

www.jsa-stage.com

Alexander Strizhak
Founder and president
JSA Company



Atlantic Enterprise - Glorious Revolution Libya

Alistage MD Colin Wright can't help smiling when he reveals, "We supplied a see-through Alidome stage and roof canopy for the recent British Election Night TV coverage outside London's County Hall. We had to be extra careful not to exceed the weight limit, because the stage was directly above the London Aquarium shark tank."

Another UK specialist, Wangos Staging Concepts director Simon McKenna provides structural, level floors for Vert Ramp displays, choral risers, small stages for private functions, large concert stages and rough terrain viewing platforms.

"I'm optimistic about the sphere we operate in," says McKenna. "There's a growing number of smaller less corporate-looking, more intimate festivals, which encourage a better vibe."

Safety conscious

Nevertheless, many have noted that although there is an increasing amount of business out there, promoters and artistes want more for less.

"The cost of putting on events is always rising, so there's increasing pressure on all parties to maintain margins," asserts Steven Corfield. "Clients want stages signed off faster, so they occupy the site for less time. We increasingly have to push for adequate time to build our stages safely."

So does this tendency towards higher date densities on tours, combined with the faster turnarounds it demands, put pressure on staging providers to cut corners which could, in a worst case scenario, result in serious or even fatal mishaps?

Frank Greer, founder of World Stages International in Melbourne, Australia, believes it does.

"Everything has speeded up. Instead of one show a week they try to do three. People are working flat out. We've been very lucky here that nobody has died because of the pressure," he says.

"There are trucking companies running on margins of an hour from one side of Australia to the other, 4,000 kms, from Perth to Melbourne. If they get a flat tyre, the whole show is at risk."

Echoing the view of every staging company interviewed, Tim Dunn of Gearhouse says, "We are 100 per cent on the same team as the Health and Safety people.

"It's an area where you cannot cut corners. From my own experience, I'd say safety standards in South Africa are as high as anywhere. In fact, Gearhouse has been instrumental in initiating a lot of the safety standards that apply here."

"Oddly enough," adds Al Laith's Jo Marshall, "people in the staging industry don't rub their hands when somebody else has a failure."

ALL ACCESS[®]

STAGING & PRODUCTIONS

WWW.ALLACCESSINC.COM

Black Eyed Peas in Nagoya

VERSA STAGE[®] SYSTEMS AVAILABLE WORLDWIDE

<p>LOS ANGELES 1320 STORM PARKWAY TORRANCE, CA 90501 UNITED STATES PH +1 310 784 2464 FAX +1 310 517 0899</p>	<p>NEW YORK 1 NORTH PARK DRIVE NEWTON, NJ 07860 UNITED STATES PH +1 973 579 0067 FAX +1 973 579 0068</p>
<p>LONDON 12 WOKING BUSINESS PARK ALBERT DRIVE, WOKING SURREY GU21 5JY UNITED KINGDOM PH +44 (0) 1483 765305 FAX +44 (0) 1483 763594</p>	<p>BRISBANE 23 DEMAND AVENUE ARUNDEL QUEENSLAND 4214 AUSTRALIA PH +61 (0) 411 656 462 FAX +61 (0) 7 557 2320</p>

You want a revolution?

Employing just seven full-time staff at their UK office, The Revolving Stage Company (RSC) is one of just a handful of firms worldwide that have made the revolving stage an affordable option.

"In the old days, if a theatre company wanted a revolving stage, they built it themselves," says RSC marketing manager Paula Nodwell. "And, when that particular production ended, the revolve would be dismantled and discarded, making it a costly and inefficient practice."

The company, which was formed in 2000, realised that if it could make revolving stages that broke down into component parts, small enough to fit in a truck and through a stage door, there might well be a lucrative untapped market.

"We do everything from little individual revolving platforms - we did one recently for Lady Gaga - to our largest which has a 17m diameter, where you can have a full set and equipment revolving on top," says Nodwell,

"The Max UDL [uniformly distributed load] is 9.8kN per square metre, and it can rotate over 10 tons. We used one at the Foo Fighters Wembley Stadium [cap. 70,000] concerts in the round. That normally takes five people about five hours to install, but if it has to happen faster we can hire extra crew."



Paula Nodwell



Revolving Stages - Wembley set-up

Changing for good

Thankfully, most of the changes in the staging business have been to the good.

In the opinion of All Access CEO Clive Forrester, "The touring stage has been reinvented in recent years with shows like *Star Wars the Musical*, for which we provided the set at The O2 [cap. 20,000] in London. We've seen more creative ways of integrating lighting into set and staging components, as well as advances in electro-mechanical components, including quicker motors, more innovative lifts and better solenoids."

His opinion seems shared by Dirk De Decker, international projects director at Stageco, who says, "Productions have become more creative, incorporating a lot of special effects, moving objects, massive video walls, huge set designs, asking for bigger and more flexible, solid structures to support all that."

Gearhouse's Dunn applauds the increased availability of vital components. "Back in the '90s, there was only a handful of companies, like Stageco and Edwin Shirley [now ES Group] manufacturing roofs. Now you can find practical and affordable large roofs in most major cities of the world."

Dunn is also delighted that lighter sound systems have led to the phasing out of unsightly PA wings. "It means that the shapes of roofs are starting to change, you can design something more aesthetically pleasing. I've always hated designing straight stages, so we can now use a lot of curves, dome shapes and transparent roof skins."

Leap-frogging to music

One well-honed solution to the aforementioned problem of increased date density, particularly in Europe and the US, has been the practice of leap-frogging - having identical stage sets, with the next one going up while the current one is in use. With stadium shows, there can even be a third set being dismantled from the show before.

European Staging's Mikkel Brogaard recounts the details of Rod Stewart's last jaunt on the continent.

"We had seven 40ft staging trucks loaded with 23 tons each, for each stage that would leapfrog. They took seven guys three and a half days to build, with about 20 people - stagehands and riggers, four forklifts and drivers, and a locally-hired crane.

"In certain places, even that didn't allow a quick enough turnaround. So we got in a third stage base and concrete blocks, so when the system arrived, it could be craned straight on, thus shortening the build period."



Dirk De Decker

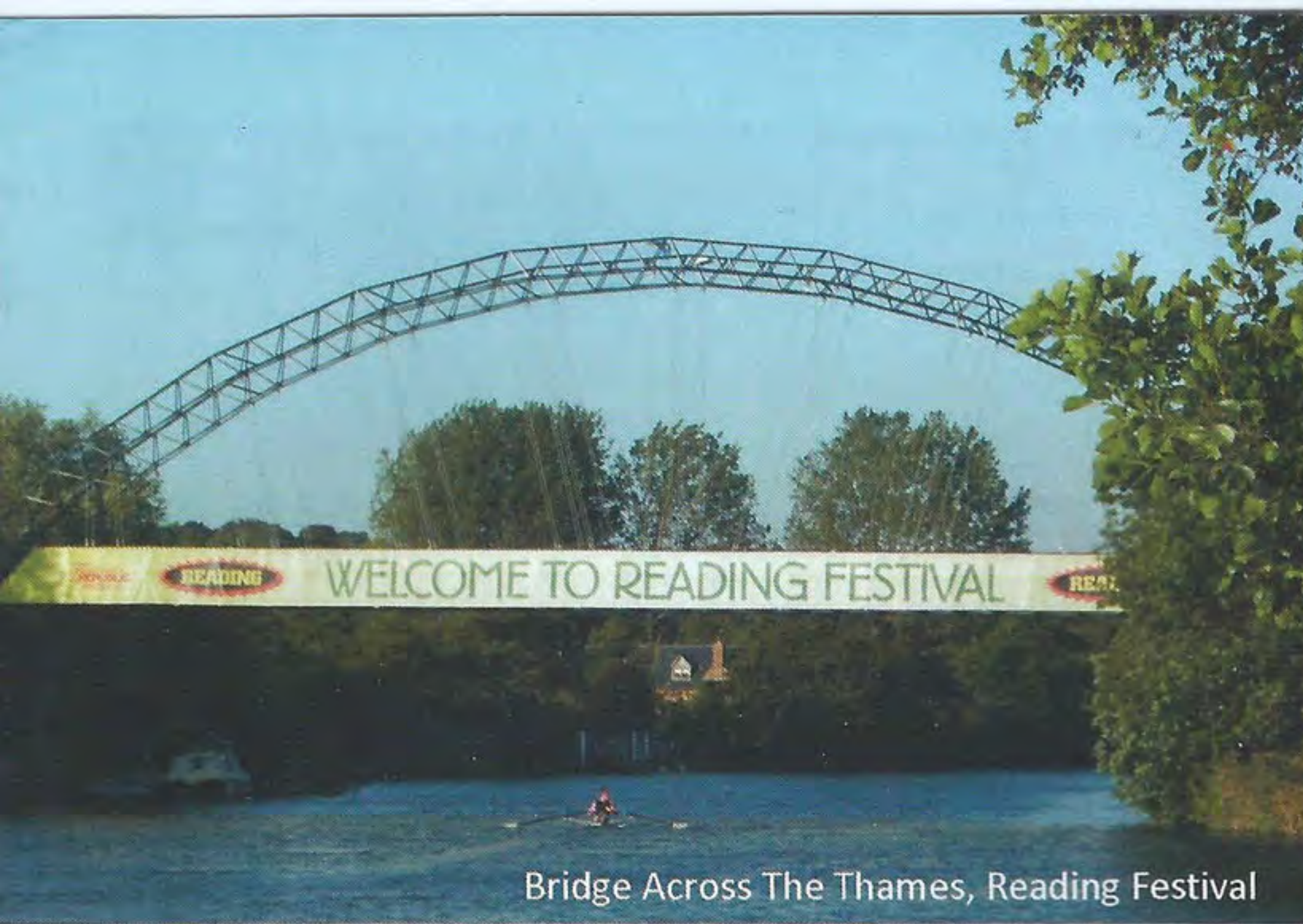
"When the Madonna incident happened in France, or the Elton John thing in Mexico, we want to know if anyone was hurt, what can we learn from it, how can we stop it happening again? So we're glad that Health and Safety has tightened up in the last few years, and we run extraordinary safety factors, just to be really on the safe side."

Serious Stages' Corfield feels the most significant change in the sector has been the introduction of stricter H&S working at height regulations.

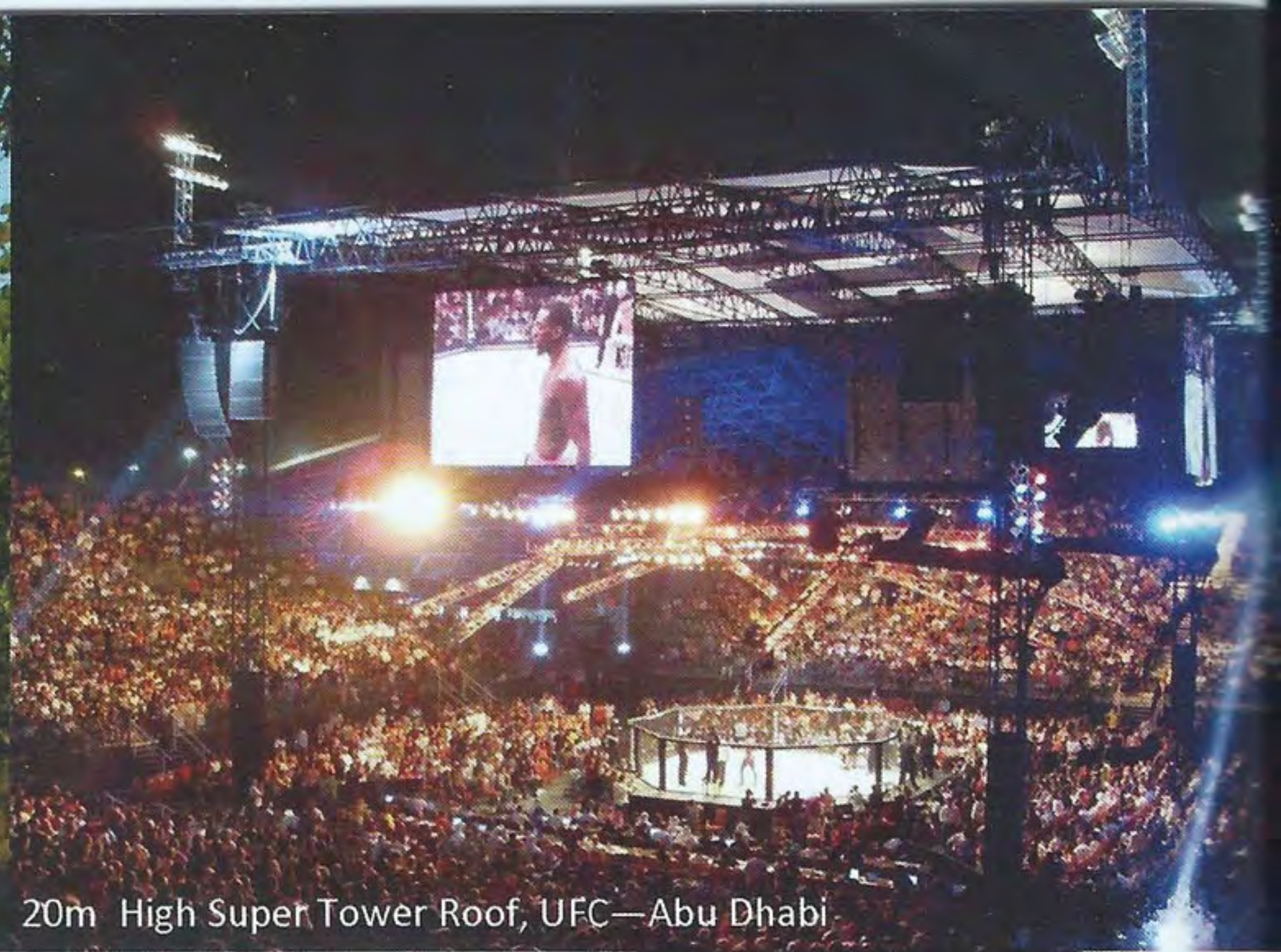
"That has massively changed our approaches to systems. We have developed our Supernova roof and our PA towers to require less manual work and more cranes and mechanical methods," he reports. "We've also introduced rigorous health and safety guidelines and method statements for the construction of all our structures."



Litestructures - Whitney Houston



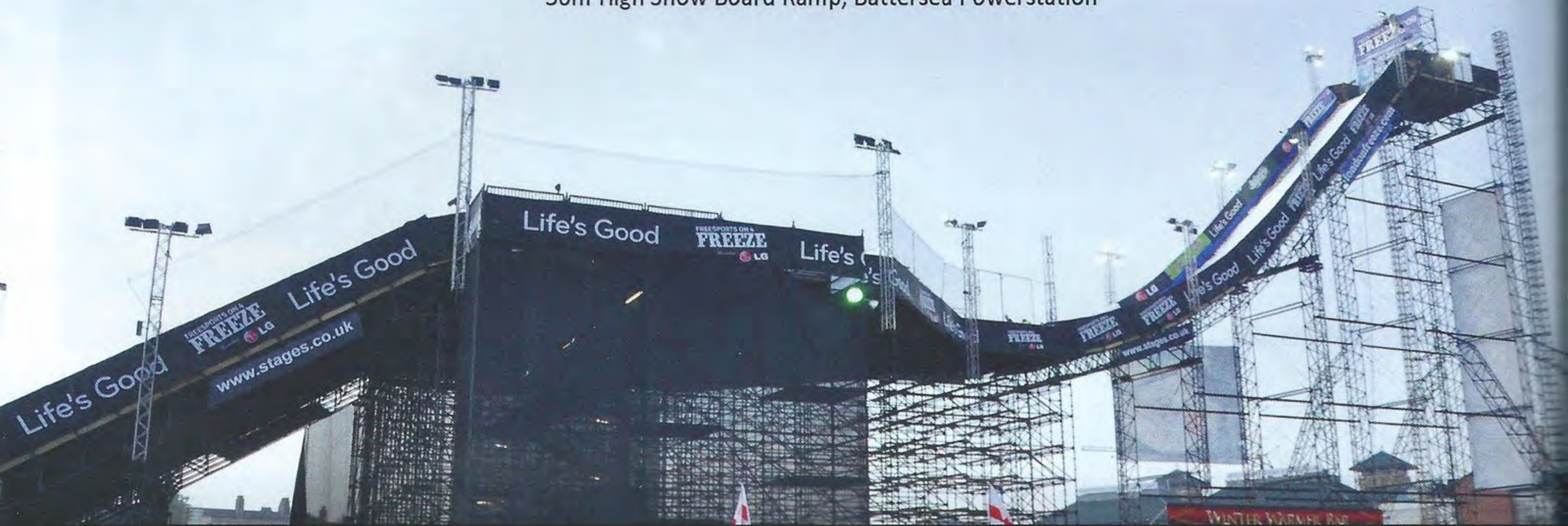
Bridge Across The Thames, Reading Festival



20m High Super Tower Roof, UFC—Abu Dhabi

SERIOUS

36m High Snow Board Ramp, Battersea Powerstation



Innovative. Inspired. Serious.

Not just the Serious Stages you know...

t: +44 (0) 1749 899188

e: info@stages.co.uk

19m Cantilever Roof - 35 tonne capacity for Meydan Racecourse



ESS

Staging

www.ess-uk.com

London • Sydney • Melbourne • Los Angeles • Tokyo • Doha

ESS • bell lane • north woolwich rd • london • E16 2AB



**Temporary structures
for every event**



**IF YOU CAN
IMAGINE IT,
WE CAN
BUILD IT.**

- > Custom built tour stages
- > Festival stages
- > Ground supports
- > Spot & delay towers
- > PA structures & Video supports



**Concert
stages
in all
sizes**



- > Temporary buildings & roof structures
- > Access bridges & staircases
- > Lifts and hydraulic platforms
- > Scaffolding structures like billboards and grandstands
- > Video supports



WWW.STAGECO.COM

T +32-16-60.84.71 F +32-16-60.10.61 E INFO@STAGECO.COM

Worldwide services answering every demand

- > 9 offices covering Europe and North America
- > Experience & logistics to build structures in every location
- > Withstanding all weather conditions : snow, rain, wind and extreme temperatures

STAGECO®
STAGING GROUP

ES Group's Jeff Burke remembers Madonna's *Sticky & Sweet World Tour 2008* as a particularly challenging leap-frog enterprise.

"It was 72 shows in 39 locations across 18 countries in Europe, North America and South America. We were doing up to five shows per week, usually in different countries with the time between shows being as little as 24 hours."

Five complete, duplicate staging systems were required to cope with the logistical requirements. Each system included over 21,000 components and weighed more than 278 tons. A total of 102 trucks and 108 drivers were drafted into service.

But that wasn't all. "The stage roof required a cantilever of 26m and had to support payload of nearly 100 tons," says Burke, "equivalent to the weight of a Boeing 757-200. The main stage was 80m wide x 25m deep x 23m high with a 16m runway into the audience.

"Each show required around 360 tons of production equipment and 278 tons of steel for the staging system."

Leap-frogging, however, is hardly a global solution. Many territories, including Australia, South Africa and the Middle East have very little use for it.

"The two major issues we face in Australia are the lack of population and the tyranny of distance," says Tony Butler of Butler Hire. "We just don't have the population like in Europe where a show or act can play to a series of major cities only hours apart. Here, all of our capital cities are thousands of kilometres apart, so trucking, crew costs and travel expenses are substantially higher."

Yes, we can!

The can-do mentality of today's staging industry means that overcoming obstacles and facing down extraordinary challenges is just par for the course.



Adrian Brooks

For the past 18 years, Lifestructures in the UK, has specialised in the design, manufacture and installation of structural aluminium systems, most recently for Whitney Houston, Westlife, Kings of Leon, Kasabian and Lady Gaga.

"Our LS-Live division was commissioned to design and build elements for Lady Gaga's *Monster Ball* tour,"

reveals company founder Adrian Brooks.

The 30ft high stage set, based on the New York City skyline, incorporated details including an aluminium and perspex subway carriage with automatic doors, authentic neon signs and a rolling staircase, which mimicked a Big Apple fire escape.

"We successfully delivered it within a three-week deadline," says Brooks.

Shane McCarthy of Atlantic well remembers the challenge of the ground-breaking ceremony for The King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia in October 2007.

"We were contacted by a company from Bahrain on a Friday evening and asked to provide a 5000m² temporary structure with a 45m span, capable of flying 10 tons on each truss. Ten days later we were in Jeddah starting construction, having done a site visit, loaded the structure onto an Antonov and flown to Jeddah in the middle of Ramadan."

Hydraulic wonders

Last year, Stageco designed and built a massive stage for U2's 360 tour. "The way it was constructed on site with its own synchronised hydraulic tower system was revolutionary," says Dirk De Decker. "We believe that methodology will remove the need for multiple cranes."

Actually, though, it's not quite so revolutionary on the other side of the globe where Frank Greer of World Stages has been building hydraulic stages for 15 years. "I designed them to be portable, they fit into containers, so they can go on tour," he says.

His Hydro-system uses between four and eight base pods fitted with integral hydraulics and a ram. The roof and stage grid are constructed on top of the pods and then, in Greer's words, "We just pump it up from there, one and a half metres at a time using modular leg sections."

"Everybody who comes here wants to take this system back to Europe. I'm still focussing on Asia at the moment, but I have demand from all over the world, so I will be sending a couple to Europe, probably next year."

Recent clients include Britney Spears, Beyonce, Lady Gaga and Pink.

For the ultimate in 'Yes we can!', though, it's hard to beat Al Laith's achievement at the Dubai World Cup horse races.

"The stage for Elton John and Santana's concerts was directly in front of a 110m by 11m LED screen," recalls Jo Marshall, "We were informed, however, that His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum would not tolerate any obstruction of the LED screen during the racing prior to the concert.

"So we built a scaffolding cage and 274 tons of ballast behind the screen. The stage roof was cantilevered off the cage, and stuck out about 19.5m beyond the screen. Everything, even the PA, had to be dropped to the deck during the races."

Then it was realised that the drum kit's cymbals would obstruct the view. "We had to build a 27m wide by 4m deep motorised stage lift, so the entire backline could be dropped below floor level."

When the final horse passed the post, Al Laith had 40 minutes, not only to get the stage ready for Santana, but to Astroturf the track so the crowd could come in. "Actually we did it 26 minutes," laughs Marshall.



World Stages - Jisan Valley Rock Festival