

# AUDIENCE

For the **Every Live Music Industry**

ISSUE 139 AUGUST 2011

UK £5.85 EUROPE €7.60

ROW \$12.32

## Uncomplicated

Avril Lavigne gets serious on tour

### Shock at stage collapse deaths

Inquiries launched as  
12 die and scores injured



Seven Entertainment's  
Vidmantas Siugzdinis  
in Lithuania

### Lollapalooza in Brazil

Chicago festival adds  
second country in  
global growth plan

With 30 Seconds to Mars... almost 80 percent of leads  
to our ticketing page came from Facebook





Scissor Sisters at Positivus Festival by JSA

# Spectacular convergence

Little more than 25 years ago most stages were built by scaffolders and carpenters. But, as outdoor music events have become ever-more ambitious, veteran rock 'n' roll staging specialists have had to evolve, along with a few newcomers, into high-tech operations with exceptionally skilled staff capable of creating huge and complex structures. **Johnny Black reports**

**A**nyone watching the daily news would be forgiven for thinking that the Western world, from America to Greece, is in the depths of financial turmoil.

But if all the world's a stage, as William Shakespeare memorably wrote, the good news is that the global staging industry has rarely been in better shape.

However, accidents can still happen as recent stage collapses – all the result of extreme weather conditions – in Belgium, Canada and the

US have shown (see panel and news story on pages 4-5).

"In the past four years, since this major economic recession has hit," says Adam Davis, vice-president of America's Tait Towers, "Our business does nothing but grow every year."

Headquartered in the otherwise unremarkable Lititz, Pennsylvania, Tait Towers has lately been applying its expertise to U2's 360° tour, Roger Waters' latest *The Wall* shows, and the *Batman Live* stage extravaganza.

Proceeding in suitably Batman-like leaps and bounds, Tait has not only added a European arm, Tait Technologies in Belgium, and opened an office in London (in conjunction with Stageco), but also acquired FTSI (Fisher Technical Services Inc) in Las Vegas, regarded by many as the world's premier automation company.

Davis says these expansions have been made because, "There's a huge convergence taking place between staging, rigging, LED and automation."





AL Laith at F1 concert in Abu Dhabi

## Reassessing the risk

An unprecedented string of stage-related accidents at four events in the space of a month, resulting in 10 deaths, have left the industry reeling - and debating what must be done to prevent a recurrence.

The first two incidents, at a Cheap Trick show (17 July) in Ottawa, Canada, and a Flaming Lips performance (7 August) in Tulsa, US, were alarming, but resulted in no serious injuries.

Tragically though, a stage collapse during a Sugarland performance (13 August) at Indiana State Fair in the US took five lives, and another five fans died when Belgium's Pukkelpop festival (18 August) was hit by a violent storm.

Following the incidents, two factors were foremost in the thoughts of prominent figures in the staging sector - the drawbacks of aluminium construction and the need for more stringent independent risk assessment.

"Not using aluminum structures is probably the first thing to do," says Tait Technologies' Frederic Opsomer. "We tested aluminum in our warehouse some time ago for the Beyoncé set. I told them to take it down and put steel up. I simply do not trust aluminium structures."

Mikkel Brogaard of European Staging

agrees. "The Sugarland collapse was with an aluminium stage and we don't believe in using such structures. They're too fragile. Our stages are steel with a shelf weight of 100 tons and still you need tons of concrete underneath for ballast."

World Stages' Frank Greer adds, "There have been a lot of stage collapses in China using 40ft and 60ft [12.3m and 18.5m] aluminum stages. The Western world never gets to hear about them."

Greer also points out that Australian government body Safe Work has already issued new rules, including a four-step safety strategy to deal with unexpected weather conditions.

From Finland, Olli-Pekka Kallio of Eastway Sound and Lighting says, "We have government inspectors who check lasers used in concerts and can stop their use, and the same could apply to staging. These decisions must not be driven by the dollar. You cannot put a price on a human life."

It's worth noting that when U2 took their Stageco-built Claw structure on the road for the 360° tour, they also took a weather station set-up capable of predicting local conditions.

He points out that Tait Towers' expertise is in packaging and logistics, whereas Tait Technologies is a competence centre for LED technology, but it's also the European stocking/distribution point for the parent company's rental equipment.

"Fisher is the premier high performance rigging company in the world," he says, "and it also has the best software."

This trinity, he feels, is enabling Tait to provide "systems that work out of the box, purpose made for this industry".

With the top end of the industry demanding fully-integrated solutions that seamlessly combine the stage with stunning sets and elaborate video elements, and former single-country operations finding demand for their products across the world, it's easy to see why other examples of convergence are taking place.

UK-based Serious Stages, started in 1971 by farmer Steven Corfield because the first Glastonbury Festival needed a stage, now boasts strategic partnerships with United Arab Emirates-based Al Laith in Dubai and Butlers Hire in Australia, and recently created ES Global from

elements of the former ESS/ES Group, which collapsed earlier this year.

Although plans for ES Global are still firmly under wraps, Jeff Burke, its head of business development, confirms that it will function in different areas than Serious but, "the ongoing discussions are commercial in confidence," so no more can be revealed.

Late last year, Prolyte, a major UK-based manufacturer of trussing, staging and structural solutions, merged with LS-Live - formerly a divi-

sion of Litestructures - to focus on the rental side of the business and servicing live events. In May of this year another merger was announced, this time with Acorn Event Solutions.

"Andy Nutter, who founded staging and scaffolding business Acorn in 2000, understands temporary structures better than anyone and runs a highly-streamlined transport and crewing system," says LS-Live general manager Ben Brooks.

"With Andy now LS-Live's operations director, the fusion of his knowledge with our experi-►





Jo Marshall



Clive Forrester



Mikkel Broogard



Alexander Strizhak



Ben Brooks



Laszlo Hegedus

ence of designing and building stage systems means LS-Live is in prime position to develop and grow with the market."

Brooks reckons the outdoor staging business is very healthy, saying, "In the last six months we've invested around a million pounds [\$1.65m] in staging products. You wouldn't do that unless you believed in the future of the industry."

### New frontiers

There's no more timely example of the increasing importance of convergence-style staging than U2's recently-completed 360° behemoth (see feature in *Audience* issue 138), an undertaking so huge that Stageco president and founder Hedwig DeMeyer tells us, "We needed double the number of trucks of what we'd ever done before."

"We had 48 for each of three leap-frogging stages, so almost 146 overall, with the production on top of course," he says.

The tour accidentally spurred innovative concepts in stage erection because the original concept had been to do multiple shows in just a few stadiums, but the huge cranes required couldn't get access to many of them.

"So we developed a hydraulic lifting system, which suddenly solved the access problems and

“There’s a huge convergence taking place, between staging, rigging, LED and automation” Adam Davis

we could do it in almost any stadium," explains DeMeyer, "It was a win-win situation. It was safer and it gave us access to a lot more stadiums."

U2, however, are virtually in a league of their own. Can other artistes afford, and will audiences pay for, the similarly huge productions that will be needed to keep this sort of progress going?

Frederic Opsomer, co-founder of Tait Technologies, chuckles as he recounts two encounters with Dave Crump of Creative Technology in the UK, which he believes neatly answers the question.

"In 1997, I made the 700m2 LED screen for U2's *Popmart* tour. I was standing in Wembley Stadium next to Dave, and he said, "Well Frederic, it's fantastic but only U2 can afford this."

Fast forward to 2009 and Opsomer finds Crump standing next to him again in Antwerp during a test set-up for the 360° tour.

"He made exactly the same remark as before. So I said, 'Well, Dave, you've just done a *Take That* tour with an 800m2 LED screen, 100m2 bigger than my *Popmart* screen, which you said was only accessible to U2.' Companies like us don't stop after we've created these expensive new ideas. We look at how to re-engineer them, make it more affordable, make it a commodity."



48 WICKLOWSTREET, WC1X9HY LONDON : +44 20 3119 1270

**TAIT**  
TECHNOLOGIES UK



All of these ideas will become available for many more shows."

DeMeyer makes a similar point rather more concisely saying, "Every time you do a tour you learn something new and then you can use that experience for the next one."

## Expanding territory

"We're not in the same market as the big outdoor staging companies," points out Clive Forrester, the British-born founder of All Access Staging in Los Angeles, created in 1991. "We're about indoor staging and set construction."

Nevertheless Forrester has no complaints about his share of the pie. "We've seen fairly consistent growth over the last three years. We never really felt the downturn," he explains, adding that they now also have warehouses in New York, London, Sydney and Brisbane.

Whatever All Access may lack in size, it makes up for in quantity. "At any given moment we're running about 200 productions," says Forrester, who lists The Voice Tour, *American Idol*, Jimmy Kimmel Live, The Superbowl, Jay-Z, Ricky Martin and Sade among his recent projects.

"The US remains our biggest market," he adds, "but Europe has grown since the Eastern Bloc opened up, and we do good business in Australia. It's a flip-flop market where we have work in our winter months because of it being in the southern hemisphere. It's consistent and the Australian economy is strong."

Australian Frank Greer, who pioneered hydraulic stages with his Melbourne-based company World

# Covering the ground

UK-based Terraplas has assisted staging operations around the globe for more than 20 years, with products that protect turf from heavy stages, construction machinery and fans themselves.

Alongside products such as its terraflor and terraturf pitch covers, the company has recently struck a deal with access supplier TPA Portable Roadways, to exclusively rent its terratrak plus temporary roadway brand for outdoor stages.

Among events serviced with the roadway by TPA was Take That's Progress tour dates at the UK's 60,000-capacity City of Manchester Stadium.

"We developed our products with the original Wembley Stadium 20 years ago. We use virgin material, rather than recycled, because it is translucent which means the light can pass through and photosynthesis still works to help the grass grow, instead of damaging it," says Terraplas director Andrea Fodczuk.

The plastic tiles are lighter and easier to lay than traditional aluminium materials, she says, adding, "For the Take That contract, TPA were telling me they laid 4,500m<sup>2</sup> in about four hours, so it's a quick process. You can have a concert in the evening and it can be ready for a sporting event practically the next day."

Stages 15 years ago, confirms Forrester's assessment, saying "I've been so busy it isn't even funny".

Recent clients have included the Eagles, Lady Gaga and Kylie. "International acts coming to Australia are all selling out and the touring business is very good," says Greer. "Mind you, clients are still very tight. Nobody wants to pay any money, but the bigger bands do because they want better, safer equipment."

Greer has long been taking stages to South East Asia, but says that China in particular is becoming a more lucrative market for him.

"I've always done shows in China, mainly Shanghai and Beijing, but now that Western

artistes are starting to tour there more there's bigger demand," he says.

"Australian and American sound, lighting and production companies are beginning to set up there. We're working together, so when Western acts want to go there we can put it together and they'll get the same quality as anywhere else in the world."

One UK firm making in-roads into China is Star Events Group, whose group sales director Jane Russen explains their set-up.

"Our UK teams work in our offices in Bedfordshire or Manchester, but we also have equipment bases and offices in China, Italy, Spain and New Zealand. We stock in excess of £8m ▶

EUROPE - MIDDLE EAST - AUSTRALIA

## BUILDING BIG IDEAS

- 🔧 Staging and Roof Systems
- 🔧 Grandstand Seating
- 🔧 Large Scale Multi-Purpose Venues
- 🔧 Scaffolding Archways / Towers
- 🔧 Goalposts / Delay Towers
- 🔧 TSG HeavyDeck - Elevated Multi-Level Flooring
- 🔧 Motion Control Screen Tracking System

## AND PROVIDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE

- 🔧 Ablution Units & Temporary Site Offices
- 🔧 Certified Mojo Crowd Control / Police Barriers
- 🔧 Heras / Barasti Fencing
- 🔧 TerraTech Event Flooring
- 🔧 Lighting Towers
- 🔧 Plant Hire and Access Machines

OUR EVENT DESIGN CONSULTANCY WILL HELP DESIGN AND BUILD YOUR IDEAS.

**Contact us today:** UAE office. T: 00971 4 338 8882 e-mail: [events@allaith.com](mailto:events@allaith.com)  
European Office. T: 0044 1749 899188 e-mail: [info@stages.co.uk](mailto:info@stages.co.uk)  
Australian office. T: 0061 (+2) 97 231 799 e-mail: [tony@butlershire.com.au](mailto:tony@butlershire.com.au)

Abu Dhabi • Dubai • Muscat • Sydney • London • Barcelona • Glasgow • Dublin

SERIOUS



[www.stages.co.uk](http://www.stages.co.uk)

[www.allaith.com](http://www.allaith.com)





Take That with Tait Towers

[\$13.2m] of equipment on our rental inventory. With the exception of our large fleet of mobile stages, this can be thought of as a giant Mecano kit, out of which we can build hundreds of different models."

### Economic impact

Alexander Strizhak, is the founder and president of Moscow-based production company JSA, which also has offices in Ukraine and Latvia.

"A lot of artistes are visiting, but usually their shows are indoors which is bad for our market. Only the government and private clients are doing significant outdoor events."

Strizhak counts The Prodigy, Scissor Sisters and Placebo among his recent successes, but is particularly pleased with the Muse show he mounted at the Positivus Festival in Latvia.

"We had very little time to transport equipment from Russia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia and Finland for this event," he explains. "The rigging plot was complicated, but we made special trussing lines for the 24m x 14m Prolyte LT roof system, plus sound and video wings, so, in the end, Muse played an incredible set on our stage."

Another pioneer of touring in what was once



Frederic Opsomer



Adam Davis

called the Eastern Bloc is Laszlo Hegedus, MD of Multimedia Concerts in Budapest, Hungary.

Like Strizhak, he feels there's room for improvement. "Last year was a declining one, but the start of 2011 was promising, although we still have the present currency and economic growth crisis. So I forecast continuing decline for the rest of this year."

Nevertheless, he has been working with artistes such as Elton John, Ozzy Osbourne, Ringo Starr and A-ha.

### Regional cover

Twenty-six years into his career with Finland's Eastway Sound And Lighting, senior project director Olli-Pekka Kallio says, "Our country is very isolated due to its geographical location and it has a population of just five million – about the same as central London – but almost all A-class tours now stop here."

"When a local partner like us can provide the stage, lights, sound, video and event infrastructure, they can save time and money by coming with a lighter set."

Eastway, established in 1986, is one of Finland's biggest full-service organisers, playing

# PROTEC

PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY

Production supply . Set building . Equipment rental . Technical back up . Design consultancy

P.O. Box 71215, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Tel: + 971 4 3473788, Fax: + 971 4 3474818

Email: [info@productiontec.com](mailto:info@productiontec.com), Website: [www.productiontec.com](http://www.productiontec.com)

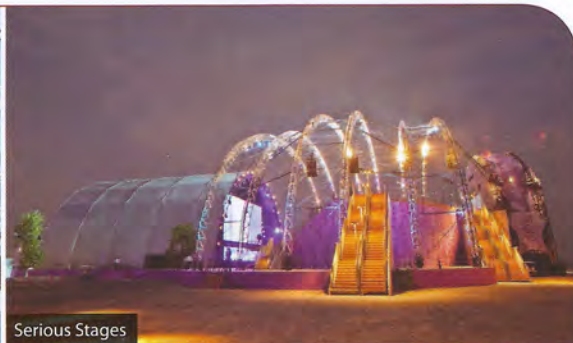




Bon Jovi at the Olympiastadion



Ice Hockey World Championship party



Serious Stages



JSA- Rock-on-Volga



JSA- Russia Day



Tait Towers' Batman Live

a key role in the production and implementation of more than 2,000 events annually. This year's artistes have included Kanye West, Linkin Park and Bon Jovi.

Asked what he considers the major change to have been in the past year, Kallio says, "The only thing I can think of is that LED screens and video content are playing a larger role in the audience experience. These screens are also getting lighter, easier to move and they offer better resolution."

Another Nordic company, European Staging, in Denmark, has found itself working more abroad than at home.

"We did Roger Waters' *The Wall* in Copenhagen, and we did Kiss and Rammstein, but England and Ireland are our main markets through a long-term relationship with Aiken Promotions in Dublin," says founder Mikkel Brogaard.

Instead of establishing a warehouse in the UK, though, Brogaard reveals, "We ship everything from Denmark, but we do not use a rock 'n' roll company. We use people like the Danish shipping company DFDS to get it to England and [trucking firm] Fly-By-Night to ship it between venues. It works out not too expensive."

## World stage

In the UK, Serious Stages' Steven Corfield feels the staging industry is still generally healthy, but warns "it is cyclical and tough economic times are going to be with us for a few years".

In conjunction with its strategic partners worldwide, Serious now has more than 1,000 full-time staff, giving it a truly world-spanning reach. Working with promoters such as Flash in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and with Australia's Big Day Out touring festival and the UK's Hyde Park Proms, Corfield says, "Our usual size range for stages is from 16m to 40m with a load capacity of between 20,000kg and 80,000kg [22 and 88 US tons]."

In the Middle East, Serious partner Al Laith is another major company which has ridden out the economic turmoil of recent years. Founded in 1995 to provide scaffolding services for the construction industry, the company is now a major entertainment business player, with offices in the UAE's Dubai and Abu Dhabi, as well as fellow Gulf state Qatar, and Oman.

Director of event services Jo Marshall says, "Our joint agreement with Serious and the subsequent purchase of ES Group's staging assets in February has also given us a London office."

"We have the lion's share of the large scale work in the Middle East, although we do almost nothing in Dubai for the rock 'n' roll industry as budgets are too tight and ticket sales are highly unpredictable."

So it's not all sunshine and light in the staging industry, but the bigger picture remains one of continued growth and new alliances being forged to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

As Opsomer points out, "When I was 16, going to a concert meant a flat floor and four performers with a couple of lights shining down on them. There's no comparison between that and, say, the current Take That tour."

"Things have come an enormous distance, and even in the last five years there has been a huge evolution. We now have much more to offer people than songs." ■

# ALL ACCESS

STAGING & PRODUCTIONS

WWW.ALLACCESSLTD.CO.UK

ALL ACCESS • ALL THE TIME • DON'T EVEN ASK

Justin Bieber 2011

**UNITED KINGDOM**  
 PH +44 (0) 1483 765305  
 FAX +44 (0) 1483 762594  
 E-MAIL GUYF@ALLACCESSINC.COM

**INTERNATIONAL**

|                                                                 |                                                              |                                                                     |                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>LOS ANGELES</b><br>PH +1 310 784 2464<br>FAX +1 310 517 0899 | <b>NEW YORK</b><br>PH +1 973 579 0067<br>FAX +1 973 579 0068 | <b>BRISBANE</b><br>PH +61 (0) 411 656 462<br>FAX +61 (0) 7 557 2320 | <b>SYDNEY</b><br>PH +61 (0) 2 4872 1232<br>FAX +61 (0) 2 4871 2954 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|