

# AUDIENCE

For the International Live Music Industry

ISSUE 186 JULY 2015

UK £6.25 EUROPE €9.60

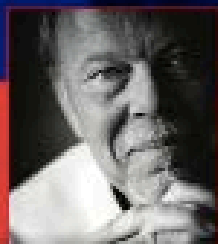
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## Shockwaves

Biggest Euro tour for Joe Satriani

No winners in battle  
for Greek Theatre

Promoters slam Viagogo



“ I have two clients, the artiste and the audience ”

Thomas Johansson of Live Nation Sweden



ES Global - Soundforms Stage

# All the world's a stage

Supplying the base from which artistes greet and entertain their audiences, staging companies bear both the literal and figurative weight of live shows including complex logistics and the safety of the performers and crew. Christopher Barrett reports

**G**iving an artiste a platform on which to perform is no easy business. Meeting demands for bespoke staging while making them affordable, transportable and safe requires years of research and considerable expertise.

A string of devastating stage collapses left the international staging sector reeling a few years ago and operators now work under unprecedented regimes of varying regulatory strictness, while striving to meet the often-adventurous artistic demands of acts.

Many operators are expanding internationally in order to balance fluctuating demand in different territories and help reduce shipping costs for touring clients.

With the northern hemisphere's summer festival season always proving an intense period

of high activity followed by a relatively slow autumn and winter, operating on more than one continent is key to keeping a skilled workforce employed year-round.

The UK's ES Global has had 30 years of experience in supplying concert and festival staging and despite setbacks, has grown into an international operation that has worked with many of the world's most successful artistes, from Madonna to the Rolling Stones.

Based in London, ES has satellite offices in Brazil, Japan and the US, with director Jeff Burke noting, "We are celebrating the 20th anniversary of our partnership with Nihon Stages in Japan this year."

The series of stage collapses in the past two to three years – in Belgium, the US and Canada – has brought the risks associated with the

business into sharp focus. Burke says his company continually reviews and works to improve its systems to eliminate risk, but tightened regulations have proved challenging.

"With international staging it is increasingly difficult to maintain the required health and safety standards and quality of equipment and service at the required price point. This also has the knock-on effect of not allowing staging companies sufficient margin to develop and bring new products to the market place," says Burke.

Despite the challenges the company has recently developed a new decking system capable of supporting loads up to 15 kilonewtons



Jeff Burke



per square metre and is working with Nihon to develop a new roof grid system.

For this year's festival season in Europe, ES has worked with the UK's Liz Hobbs Group, which specialises in open air concerts at horse racetracks and sports venues, to supply a new 12-metre wide, rapid erect roof grid capable of supporting 15 tons of lights and PA.

## Cost benefits

With offices in Australia, the US and UK, All Access Staging is able to use its global reach to help reduce costs for touring acts.

For artistes such as Sam Smith, it means only custom staging elements need be shipped around the world.

"There is less emphasis on having to ship the whole thing. It reduces shipping costs and time, so for some people that is a great option," says sales and marketing manager Mathew Bull.

All Access often starts working with artistes early on, and as their careers evolve so the demands become more complex. The company's US office recently constructed a new touring stage set for Deadmau5, which sees the artiste perform inside a huge globe.



Mathew Bull

For Kylie Minogue's show in the UK at British Summer Time (cap. 65,000) in London's Hyde Park, All Acces provided a stage thrust with a high shine dance floor that enabled the singer to journey far out into the audience.

Bull says the demand for festival packages has grown considerably in recent years, but it also provides an array of full-stage systems including the Versa rolling stage, which was used recently by Spandau Ballet. It enables 360-degree movement and has a spacious under-stage area for quick costume changes and technician pathways.

Automation has been a major focus in the company's research and development (R&D) department in recent years. It offers an array of electromechanical and hydraulic lifts, turntables and other equipment that operate with



All Access Staging - Kylie Minogue at Hyde Park

fully computerised show control capabilities.

"We have been pushing forward with automation and creating more automated control of the systems," says Bull.

## Regional reach

Frank Greer, founder of Australia-based World Stages, has been working in the business since 1970.

Outside Australia, much of the company's work is in China, Singapore and Korea. Forthcoming shows include Big Bang in China, Bon Jovi and Maroon 5 in Korea, and Ed Sheeran, Fleetwood Mac and Elton John in Australia.

"I'm working on Series 2 of the staging system, which will have a huge weight capacity of 200 tons, and I'm hoping to have that out for some big US and South American shows in the coming months," says Greer.

The industry veteran is proud to have exclusively used hydraulic systems for the past 20 years, which means stages and their roofs can be raised without the use of cranes.

"Stadium owners love it as it has a minimal impact on grass surfaces and the lack of cranes means a cost saving for promoters. It also means crew do not have to do risky work at great heights, as the structure is raised from ground level by a hydraulic system," says Greer.

All of World Stages' Hydro Ground Support

Systems are designed by the company and built out of steel in Australia.

"Steel is heavier than aluminium, but much stronger," says Greer. "If you design a steel stage properly it will carry a great deal of weight. In Shanghai recently an aluminium stage collapsed, they ridiculously overloaded the trusses and then it rained and the weight of the water caused the structure to snap."

## New start

Focused largely in north-eastern Europe, JSA Staging Company has had to face more challenges than the average operation in the past year.

It opened its headquarters in Moscow in 1996 with branches following in St Petersburg, Kiev (Ukraine) and Riga (Latvia).

Last spring JSA closed its operations in Russia due to its owner Alexander Strizhak opposing the Russian military aggression in Ukraine. Warehouses were closed and staff dismissed before Strizhak left Russia for Ukraine.

The past year has been spent restructuring the company and the number of live music shows has been minimal due to the conflict in the region. ▶



Alexander 'Yuri' Strizhak



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\* JSA was founded in 1996 in Moscow as the first professional staging company after USSR collapse. The company had a great success on market and it had a great influence on the development of the live music and events industry. Alexander Strizhak founder and owner of JSA Stage Company officially notifies: "The company has ceased activities in Russia from the spring 2014 for political reasons: strong pressure on dissidents inside the country, the atmosphere of "new KGB", false information from the Russian media and disagreement with the military aggression against Ukraine and occupation of a part of territory this country".

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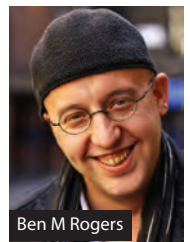


ArchiLX - Nicky Romero

causes of structural failures around the world.

"European regulations, particularly CDM [Construction Design and Management] regulations do not apply to the Ukraine yet, but we have our own standards and we do everything possible to guarantee safety," Strizhak explains. "We use certified professional equipment, tools and reliable constructions from famous producers."

making sure it has cutting-edge pre-visualisation systems, CAD and design. "It means we can prepare and communicate as quickly and efficiently as possible and also explore ideas and concepts in a virtual world," he says.



Ben M Rogers

Recent months have seen the company expand its product inventory in Cyprus to include full service packages of pyro effects and will shortly add lasers. "We did it confident that our in-house event safety planning could ensure our delivery exceeded European [safety] standards," says Rogers.

Among the events it has helped stage in Cyprus in recent months is a Hardwell show at Finikoudes Beach (8,000), Larnaca, which saw the company provide a full production package including site and event safety management.

"Well devised staging and site management is absolutely critical. Trusses and stage systems are modular, no-one said Lego was boring and that's just a combination of similar sized interlocking modules – it's what you do with it that counts," says Rogers.

### Expanding package

The Middle East is another region experiencing instability but ArchiLX helps stage up to 60 events per year and has worked with an array of artistes from Jose Carreras to Armin Van Burren in the territory.

Set up six years ago by Ben M Rogers and Nearchos Pittalis, ArchiLX has offices in Cyprus and Dubai and United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"We principally operate as a production and design consultancy in the UAE and also as a production supplier in Cyprus," says design director and consultant Rogers.

A major focus for the company has been

"It's hard to start a new big business at this time, but we are preparing to better times. The first step has been re-opening the office in Riga, filling the warehouse with structures and equipment and the creation of a new professional team," says Strizhak.

"Ukraine has great potential for development and we will form a new market for staging and professional services for the live industry. "We are optimistic that demand for our services will increase."

While the business takes time out to reform and re-launch, Strizhak says it is a good opportunity to set aside time to closely analyse the

### Safety concerns

Based in central Europe, Germany's Megaforce has supplied staging for numerous artistes including Metallica, Rammstein, Red Hot

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feature

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Timo Mathes

Chili Peppers and Die Toten Hosen.

Timo Mathes, head of international sales, says business is booming and new staff are being taken on to help meet demand.

With the German, Austrian and Swiss markets nearing saturation, Megaforce has been casting its net as wide as Qatar in the Gulf and the US.

"We are decentralising our stock and have already opened warehouses and branches in Mexico and Bulgaria. Now we are looking to spread more material all over Europe," says Mathes. "Transportation is the biggest cost when renting stages, so our foreign clients will significantly benefit from our new international reach."

Recently unveiled products include a new version of its R\_28 "fat lady" stage, used on Helene Fischer's Farbenspiel tour. "Spanning 50m x 21m with 14 trucks and 250 tons of material, it is the biggest and most advanced truss stage we have in our portfolio," says Mathes.

Like everyone in the business Mathes was shocked by the series of stage collapses a couple of years ago, not least the fatal incident at 2011's Indiana State Fair in the US, and feels the industry has not done enough.

"We thought people would only go for safe and reliable stages from then on, but most

buyers of open air stages still opt for the cheapest, not the safest solution. I predict accidents will happen again.

"We are one of the few stage builders building the safest structures in the world that are certified by the German TÜV and built from steel not aluminium," says Mathes.

### Crossing borders

Established in 2001, the UK's Upstaging is a relative newcomer to a staging sector populated largely by industry stalwarts.

Among its clients past and present are Glastonbury Festival (140,000) and artistes such as Kasabian, Kings of Leon and Pearl Jam.

Upstaging UK founder Tom Watson says the business specialises in meeting bespoke stage requirements and is able to supply an array of extra components including roofs, ramps, towers and stairs.

The company uses Layher engineered stock, which Watson says enables it to create attractive bespoke items with no safety compromise.

"We submit our design plans to Layher and they run the safety calculations – obviously they make and sell the scaffolding globally so



Megaforce - Helene Fischer

from a design stability point of view that is the safest possible scenario."

Czech Republic-based Area Four Industries (formally MILOS Group) was launched in 2014 to house the Milos Structural Systems, Litec, TOMCAT and James Thomas Engineering divisions under one brand umbrella.

It now claims to be the world's largest manufacturer of trussing and staging systems.

Area Four operates an extensive global network via production facilities, design and distribution centres located in China, Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, the UK and US.

"The new identity for the corporation enables us to combine specialist resources, research and development plus material purchasing," says sales and marketing director Glen Brown. ▶



Tom Watson



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Upstaging - Roof



Serious Stages- Glastonbury - The other stage

entertainment projects represent 80 per cent of its £6 million annual turnover.

Among the many events Acorn is working on this year are Capital FM Summertime Ball (80,000) at London's Wembley Stadium and the Wireless (35,000) and Creamfields (50,000) festivals.

Like many in the sector, the company works with

Layher scaffolding and uses a combination of aluminium and steel elements to create the most effective weight/strength ratio.

Sales and marketing director John Hart says the company's background in construction means it has been working to rigid CDM regulations from the outset.

"When we moved into events we transferred the knowledge and qualifications across from our work in construction. Health and safety in the events industry is still in its infancy compared to the construction industry," says Hart.

"Our guys are all trained within the Construction Skills Certification Scheme."

Acorn provides staging ranging in size from 12m to 50m wide. Among its many products is the Space Roof. With a stage width of up to 33 metres and max load capacity of 60,000kg it has been used at the Summertime Ball and for stadium shows by artistes including Kings of Leon and Rihanna.

Headquartered in Belgium, Stageco has offices in Germany, France, Holland and two in the US, as well as partner companies in South Africa, Australia and Japan.

Recent tour supply work includes AC/DC, One Direction, Foo Fighters and the Rolling Stones. It has also seen a rise in demand from dance festivals including Tomorrowland (60,000) in Brazil and Electric Daisy Carnival in Las Vegas (130,000).

Stageco founder Hedwig De Meyer says the company's international reach helps it cope with fluctuating demand in different markets.

"Europe was very quiet last year and has

"The unique combination of the world's leading staging brands under one roof enables us to review projects with a much wider scope than ever before to meet clients' exact requirements," he continues.

For outdoor events the company's portfolio of staging solutions ranges from arc roofs and Libera stages to MyT temporary structures for stadium tours and festivals including the UK's Glastonbury and Isle of Wight (65,000) festivals.

### Serious approach

Multinational operator Serious Stages, headquartered in the UK, has built an enviable reputation over the past three decades working with some of the world's biggest events, including the UK's Glastonbury, Reading (87,500) and Leeds (85,000) festivals.

It recently supplied Glastonbury with a new Other Stage structure, which features a state-of-the-art Triton roof.

"We designed the Other Stage for [promoters] Michael and Emily Eavis at Glastonbury and it is now available for other shows," says Ellen Culliford of Serious. "The stage has a large rear cowshed that provides further storage and working areas, and two access ramps stage left and right enable easy load in and out.

"Most importantly for audience members, it provides great sightlines and allows for a better viewing experience."

In order to keep its team of skilled technicians and management occupied beyond the peak UK summer season, Serious has expanded its reach around the world. It partners include Al

Laith in United Arab Emirates, Butler's Events & Staging in Australia and TW Stage and Barriers in South America.

Recent international work includes the One Direction tour, which saw the company create bespoke angled PA wings designed to enable improved audience sightlines.

### "Most buyers of open-air stages still opt for the cheapest, not the safest solution"

Timo Mathes

Culliford says the company has a faultless safety record and has taken the issue extremely seriously from the outset. Alongside other major staging companies, Serious has been striving for safer working practices under the new CDM regulations for construction, design and management regulations in the entertainment sector, which were introduced on 6 April by the Health and Safety Executive.

The result is The Guidance for the Management and Use of Stages and related temporary event structures report, which is now available to all in the entertainment industry.

### Building blocks

Acorn Event Structures was founded in the UK in 1996 and until the economic downturn in 2008, worked almost exclusively in construction. Since then its focus on events has seen

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Hedwig De Meyer

picked up this year but the US is probably having its best year ever," says De Meyer.

The Stageco boss is another operator that has seen the European event stage supply sector become increasingly saturated, particularly the UK.

"Since the London Olympics there is so much gear on the market it has led some operators to provide equipment very cheaply," he adds.

The UK market may be challenging but the rise in demand around the world for ever-larger structures has kept Stageco busy.

De Meyer says, "Events are getting so big and only a few players have enough gear and resources to deal with these kinds of projects,

especially the EDM festivals."

In May 2014 Dark Arches Holdings, owner of LS-Live and Perry Scenic Creative acquired Brilliant Stages and Litestructures Projects from Prolyte Group. It saw LS-Live return to its roots supplying small to medium scale staging for artistes including Radiohead, Pink and The Script while Brilliant Stages focuses on huge stage projects for stadium shows by artistes such as Muse, One Direction and the Rolling Stones.

The first set built by Brilliant Stages under Dark Arches Holdings ownership was Helene Fischer's *Farbenspiel* tour of Germany, Austria and Switzerland in 2014. It has since worked with clients including Take That.

Based in the UK, the companies work collaboratively when needed. "In the past we would have used external suppliers but now

everything is in-house, design fabrication and even automation. Within the group we can almost supply everything and provide a turn-key solution for clients," says Brilliant Stages general manager Tony Bowern.

LS-Live managing director Adrian Brooks says that a lot of its stage creations involve custom-made elements, "You always find artistes have their own ideas so there is always a bespoke part to everything we do. We try and make the process as cost efficient and environmentally friendly as possible."

Despite only having premises in the UK Brooks has found their business is not seasonal. "For us it balances out ok, at the end of the summer season the arena tours kick off and run through to Christmas. Before you know it it's spring and we are working on the summer shows again." ■

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