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Music Industry

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Supporting stars



Production Park for Coldplay at Wembley Stadium

Many of the world's leading specialist concert stage suppliers have been in the business for decades, but the ever-evolving nature of the industry means they can never stand still and must always push the boundaries, continuing to pioneer new products and working practices.

Christopher Barrett reports

In the four decades since enterprising Englishman Edwin Shirley began importing American staging to the UK and created Edwin Shirley Staging (ESS), the international event staging industry has transformed into a highly professional multi-million-dollar industry.

Shirley had previously, although perhaps unintentionally, started the first specialist live music equipment transport business by buying an ex-baker's van to move gear around for the young David Bowie and others. Seeing what was happening in America, he soon began importing trucks and trailers, so the staging division was a natural sister operation in those early years.

Festivals have grown from single stage events into sites with

numerous performance spaces, accommodating and entertaining populations comparable in size to small towns.

Just as festivals have expanded, and the number of them has grown exponentially, so has the demand for ever more remarkable stages for major artistes' tours.

Many of the industry pioneers have grown from regional to international operators able to supply a consistent service to events wherever they are around the world.

With its ancestry stretching back to Shirley and ESS, ES Global provides stages and structures worldwide.

Among the tours it has worked on this year are Olly Murs, Little Mix and UB40, and UK festivals

including Boardmasters (50,000) and Lovebox (30,000).

Senior project manager Mark Hornbuckle says Edwin Shirley Japan remains part of the ES business, and with offices in the US it has an international reach. Current contracts include the building of a velodrome in the Indonesian capital Jakarta for the 2018 Asia Games.

As shows get ever more complex and larger in scale, Hornbuckle says it is required to create ever more advanced stages.

"We are about to launch a new stage next year, a monster, it is a massive step up," says Hornbuckle. "It has a huge rigging capacity - each cross-stage truss has a rigging capacity of 15 tonnes.

"There is not a stage in the UK, that I am aware of, that has that kind of rigging capacity."

Arguably the biggest UK-based staging company, also with a global reach, is Serious Stages, which has worked on events as far and wide as Australia, Brazil and South Africa.

Among the British festivals it counts as clients are Glastonbury (140,000), Reading Festival (90,000) and Download (85,000).

Serious Stages has been working with Glastonbury for four decades and this year it supplied almost 60 structures, including the flooring and trussing on the Pyramid Stage and the four main stage roofs.

It was also asked to create a new look Other Stage to accommodate the large incoming band productions for acts such as Stormzy, Major Lazer and Boy Better Know.



Star Events at British Summer Time

Some 20m high and 70m wide, the TZ roof featured a sloped back to give extra on-stage storage for artistes and production, along with clear-span wings creating an improved working area with increased space for the incoming productions.



Mark Hornbuckle

"We worked closely with the Glastonbury team to create this new stage, which was designed

by our in-house CAD team and manufactured by our engineers at our head office in Somerset," says operations manager and director Max Corfield.

"Our project manager Simon Fursman was crucial to the installation and the stage is both technically and aesthetically another progression in our range of large stages."



Max Corfield

Star supporters

With its HQ in England and a full service operation in Shanghai, China, Star Events operates on a worldwide basis and claims to have the biggest rental fleet of mobile stages outside the US.

It works with UK festivals including Barclaycard presents British Summer Time (65,000) in London's Hyde Park, Download,

V Festivals (each 90,000), and provided the stages for tours with The Stone Roses, Take That and Radiohead.

The company also created the stage set-up for Adele's record-breaking in-the-round stadium tour of New Zealand, Australia and the UK, including two 98,000-capacity sell-out concerts at London's Wembley Stadium.



Pete Holdich

Head of structures Pete Holdich says Adele wanted to be closely surrounded by the audience, leaving no space for the usual control equipment. Two shipping containers, suspended 20m above the stage, formed the heart of a high level production area.

The system was required to suspend more than 40 tons before the extensive production install. Star created an eight-spoked grid, with PA cantilevers on each, free-standing on four 100 tonne capacity towers with no ties between them at ground level and no storm bracing.

The system was branded VerTech Ultra, with the components compatible with Star's existing flagship VerTech structure.

"It was custom designed and built from scratch utilising all the technology and expertise we have built up over 40 years in the events industry," says Holdich. ▶

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Acorn Staging at Creamfields

“Show designers are wanting to create bigger and better spectacles”

Pete Holdich

“We always try to adapt to the demands of production requirements. Show designers are wanting to create bigger and better spectacles and we are proud of our extensive record of innovation that enables them to do that.”

Supply and demand

Germany-based Megaforce supplies stages across Europe from Norway to Romania, and among its clients are Austria’s Nova Rock Festival (55,000), Switzerland’s Greenfield Festival (30,000) and Germany’s Southside (50,000).

Touring artiste clients include Kraftwerk, David Garrett and Helene Fisher.

“For David Garrett’s Explosive tour, the challenge was a centre stage with several levels, a turntable and lift platform for

a sensational 360° show,” says Megaforce owner and CEO Michael Brombacher.

The company has benefited from the rise of EDM events across Europe, with demand rising for structures with a small performance area. With that in mind Megaforce founded 12.9 Event Scaffolding in partnership with Gerüstbau Engelmohr. The new company designs stages, stairs, bridges and other temporary event structures for EDM events.

The past decade has seen some disastrous stage collapses, and concern over structural safety has resulted in an increase in demand for steel constructions.

“Many customers have understood that it is worth renting a steel construction, especially in terms of weather safety, load bearing capacity and building heights,” says Brombacher.

With enhanced safety rules there have been comparatively few staging incidents in recent years but

Brombacher feels more could be done in territories such as Eastern Europe.

“The health and safety rules there are still not sufficient,” he says. “In general, compliance with these international rules are taken into account and presented more and more by us as a supplier than they are requested by authorities or customers.”

Double challenge

Headquartered in Belgium and with offices across Europe and North America, Stageco was founded by president Hedwig DeMeyer, who has been supplying

concert stages since the early '70s. Stageco was among the creators of the *Guidance for The Management & Use of Stages and Temporary Event Structures*.

It is also part of two safety advisory groups: the European CEN TC 152, a technical committee handling temporary structures for events, and the Memento



Michael Brombacher

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Photo: Electric Forest / ASK Media



INNOVATIVE MOBILE STAGING

Ensemble Demontables in France.

The vast operation has worked on some of the biggest global tours of the year including U2's Joshua Tree, Coldplay, Metallica and Robbie Williams.

"We are now starting on the Rolling Stones, have done a massive amount of stages for Electric Daisy Carnival in the US and Japan, and have built two new huge structures for the Lowlands [55,000] festival in Holland," reports DeMeyer.

The two newly designed and built structures for Lowlands replace circus tents and are far more complicated than the average festival stage.

"For us it was the biggest challenge this summer," he says. "We constructed two temporary buildings housing the main stages. They are 4,000m² each — one is a dome structure with four legs and the other is a 60m-wide arched structure. The roofs are load bearing so you can hang production on them, there are no towers so the interiors are completely open. They are like small arenas inside a festival."

Educating methods

Based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, TW Stage & Barriers works primarily throughout the country, but also in Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Events it has supplied include Lollapalooza (80,000) and Tomorrowland (60,000), and uses stages designed by Serious Stages in the UK.

Owner Cesar Takaoka says the biggest challenge in the territory is educating clients to accept new working practices.

"In a market where the norm has been stages based on Layher scaffolding or aluminium trussing, which take lots of time and manpower to build, clients start to freak-out when they hear about hiring cranes and forklifts," he says. "They don't readily equate the higher price of the product with the reduced build time, which can be as little as 25 per cent of the more traditional Brazilian stage."

Takaoka says that while health and safety rules exist in South America, all too often there is no inspector on site, and even when



Edwin Shirley Staging for Little Mix

there is an official present, the advice can be inconsistent. He gives a Roger Waters show at the 80,000-capacity Morumbi Stadium in Sao Paulo as an example.

"The fire marshall posted a man at the entrance to the field and wouldn't allow anyone on the field without a hard hat, including the guys laying flooring at the opposite end of the stadium to the stage," explains Takaoka. "Production didn't have enough hats to cover all the none-stage-personnel working so the load-in

stalled for a couple of hours."

UK-based NoNonsense regularly works in South America, continuing the long term relationship with PRG Mexico and promoters OCESA.

NoNonsense director Steve Richards and the team supported PRG Mexico in delivering two Roger Waters shows at the 60,000-capacity Foro Sol stadium in Mexico City and a free show at the city's vast Zocalo main square just one day later.

"With only one production ▶

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Megaforce at World Club Dome

day between shows, two complete stages had to be provided," says NoNonsense director Liz Madden. "The team worked closely with the client, the show designer and their engineer to ensure this epic show would be a huge success."

Back home, NoNonsense clients include Parklife (70,000), Standon Calling (10,000), Boardmasters, Deer Shed (6,000) and Somerset House Sumer Series (3,000).

Branching out

Established in 2011 when ESS ceased trading and became ES Global, Australia's Stageset is one of the territory's leading concert stage design, build and suppliers.

Stageset supplies the structures for festivals and live events



Liz Madden

including Splendour in the Grass (27,500), Groove In The Moo (20,000) and St Jerome's Laneway (15,000).

Alongside festivals, the company counts Sydney Opera House (2,670) as a client.

It conducts around 95 per cent of its business in the East coast of Australia, but has also worked on projects as far and wide as Malta and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates during the past year.

Stageset director Chris Beehan says the next step is branching into New Zealand where he believes the company's self-designed 14m stage will prove successful with small to mid-size festivals.

"It's a hugely popular roof with festivals in Australia," he says. "It is a big little stage and it has a really

impressive rigging capacity. It comes at a really good price point and festivals are always looking to save a buck."

The company's largest stage has a 20x16m roof and is used for some of the bigger festivals including Splendour In The Grass.

After a quiet year for festivals in Australia, Beehan is confident the coming season will be far busier for the company.

"The festival scene in Australia dropped right off last year, there is a bit of a seven-year cycle and last year we were at the bottom of it," he says.

"But this year there are a lot of international festival brands coming in such as Ultra, Creamfields, Austin City Limit, and Storm out of China."

Bridging The Gulf

With its head office in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Al Laith

works across The Gulf and Middle East, including countries such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman and Saudi Arabia.

Among the many structures it provides are main stages, delay towers, spot pods, Heras fencing, crowd control barriers and scaffold structures for VIP platforms.

The company works in partnership with Serious Stages in the UK and has access to its structures and products, although some custom stages are designed, engineered and manufactured in-house.

Events division manager Michael Clark says it has been a busy year, working with events such as Red Fest (30,000), Dubai Jazz Festival (15,000) and Sensation (14,500).

"Everyone wants automation, lifts and other interesting elements to make the set more dynamic"

Matt Booth

"In addition to these, we supplied [promoter] 117's Autism Rocks Arena [30,000] with our Triton stage roof and multi tiered VIP/corporate chalet platform," says Clark.

He says that while demand remains consistent for the traditional stage roof and IMAG/PA goalposts left and right of the stage, the region's event owners are becoming increasingly creative.

"A good example are the guys at Envie Events who run Sensation here in Dubai," he says. "They are always creating wow-factor scenic elements that provide an additional spectacle." ▶

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Serious Stages at Glastonbury

Dream creation

Back in the UK, events company Production Park owns Brilliant Stages and LS Live.

While Brilliant is concerned with custom manufacture of stadium and arena touring stages, LS-Live rents equipment such as rolling stages and recently launched a pre-visualisation suit to help clients realise their set designs.

Production Park client director Ben Brooks says set designers are

always striving for something new, "The use of clear or mirror materials for creating space and depth is something we have seen a lot," he notes.

Among client tours this year are Robbie Williams, Arcade Fire, The xx and System Of A Down, as well as festivals such as Parklife and Y Not Festival (25,000).

"The industry continues to grow and so do we," says Brooks. "We always look to other sectors

including art, brands and sport but our core business is the live event industry and year-on-year business is up."

Acorn Event Structures is also headquartered in the UK, but works as far afield as the Caribbean. Domestic clients include Creamfields (50,000), Boomtown Fair (60,000) and Victorious (65,000), while its tour supply business has increased in the past year.

To meet demand for bigger stage solutions, Acorn recently invested £1.8m (\$2.34m) in a new super structure branded the Steel Yard. A modular 50m x 20m structure with a minimum 100-tonne load capacity – debuted at Creamfields.

"The Steel Yard at Creamfields had an even bigger footprint this year; 6,000m² with over 100 tonne production load- ing," says Acorn MD Andy Nutter.

"Our fully weather-proof super structure has generated a lot of interest worldwide, from the TV and film industries to aviation."

Raising the standard

Launched in the US 26 years ago, All Access Staging & Productions employs 150 people at its Los Angeles site, where all of its structures are designed and built.

The company's global reach – with distribution bases in New York and the UK – means it can distribute stock items, that generally make-up 80 per cent of a touring client's stage equipment, to the shows. Only the remaining custom-designed 20 per cent needs to be shipped with the production.

"This year we have been involved with Kings of Leon, Gorillaz, elements of Take That and Robbie Williams, and



Ben Brooks



Matt Booth

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PHOTO: CARLI AND CREATIVE

very much involved in Katy Perry's festivals shows," says All Access sales manager Matt Booth.

"Everyone wants automation, lifts and other interesting elements to make the set more dynamic," reports Booth. "Whether that's festivals, concerts or X Factor and the Brits Awards; we are always striving to make sure we can keep up with those demands."

Formed in 1987, and headquartered in Canada, Stageline says it pioneered the concept of load bearing hydraulic mobile stages and introduced the concept in mainland Europe in the early '90s.

The company consists of two divisions – Stageline, which designs and manufactures mobile units, and Mobile Stage Rentals which operates a fleet of more than 110 units throughout North America.

"Our mobile stages are used in more than 45 countries for around 20,000 events per year," says Stageline MD Yvan Miron. "We are an innovation-based company and are continually developing new ideas and concepts,"

In June Stageline deployed its

giant mobile stage, SAM750, at the Hot 97 Summer Jam in New York's MetLife Stadium (88,000), which featured a line-up including Chris Brown, Migos and Trey Songz.

Stageline's team had a narrow window to dismantle the SAM750 in order to free up the stadium for another event, and a team of 18 took just 12 hours to complete the task. Barely 19 hours after the concert had ended, the SAM750 had been removed from the venue.

Military matters

With its head office in Riga, Latvia, JSA Europe operates across the region and last year saw it resume business in Ukraine after a quiet two years due to the tumultuous political situation.

This year JSA worked on the Eurovision Song Contest in the Ukrainian city of Kyiv, it also worked on

the 7,000-capacity rock festival Dunaiska Sich (Rock over the



All Access Staging for Ellie Goulding

Danube) in Izmail where acts including TaRuta, Haydamaky, Druzhe Muzyko and Ocheretyanyi Kit performed.



Alexander Strizhak

"The Eurovision Song Contest project was a great opportunity for us to show the market that the company is alive and can still provide a good service," says founder of JSA Europe Alexander Strizhak.

"The Ukrainian market is starting to recover and we have a lot of work lined up for next year; a

lot of new festivals are opening in different regions."

The company, which began working in Ukraine 10 years ago, is now looking to begin designing and constructing trusses, stage decks, podiums and barriers in the country, together with local manufacturer Alvis Stages.

That demonstrates the can-do attitude of specialist staging companies, which have learned to constantly adapt and innovate to stay ahead of the game and meet their clients ever-more imaginative dream. ■

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We have extensive professional experience in the local market since of summer 2007. The company has made a lot of important projects for the development of the market, but in connection with the civil resistance, the occupation of the Crimea and the military aggression on the east of the country in 2013/14, we consciously made temporary break in business. In Spring 2017, 10 years after the start, the company restarted operations. The first project was production management of Hospitality Area for VIP Guests, Sponsors and Partners of Eurovision Song Contest in Kyiv 2017. Next, we continued to create the new structure of the company and did work for different projects. Now we are ready for the service for you and JSA is looking forward to a New Successful Cooperation.



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