

# AUDIENCE

FOR THE INTERNATIONAL LIVE MUSIC INDUSTRY

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## Steady as they go

*Multi-tours maintain live Raconteurs*

## CAA opens international office

Banks and Greek to run London operation

## Station blaze brothers sentenced

Jail for Michael Derderian, probation for Jeffrey

Slovenian promoter Mladen Patajac of Lipa Music

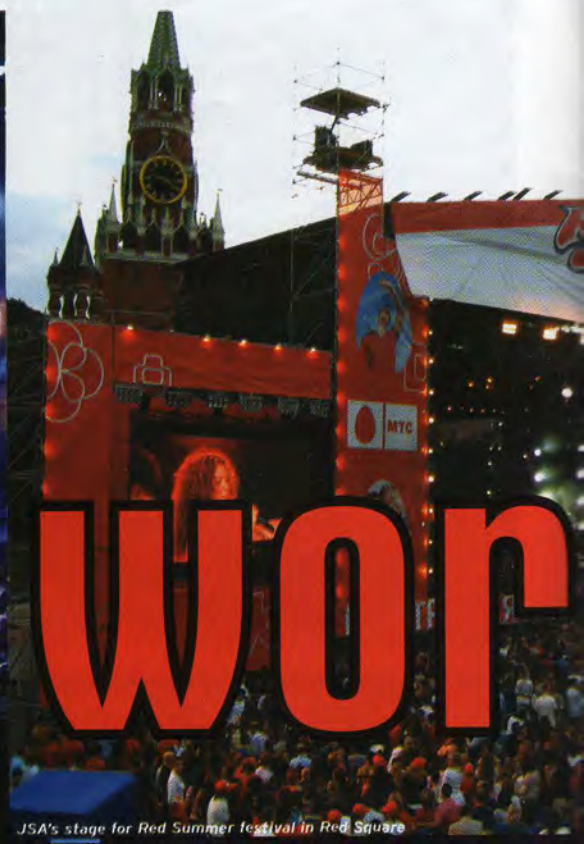


“ One of the biggest problems is buy-and-sell where local promoters find it difficult to get acts directly from agents. ”





Warehouse stage for South Africa Music Awards



JSA's stage for Red Summer festival in Red Square

# All the wor

As the popularity of live music continues to increase, the supporting role for suppliers is driving their businesses to expansion. One of the major beneficiaries of this growth is the staging sector, where the major firms are criss-crossing the globe with huge and complex structures. **Gordon Masson** reports

Technological advances in the design and construction of stages has undoubtedly played a significant part in today's superstar artistes being able to plan productions that a few short years ago would have been impossible.

Stronger stages and towers, using lighter materials and safer construction systems are one side of the equation, but coupled with lighter PA equipment and lighting, staging companies are being allowed to build ever more sophisticated and complicated sets.

"The biggest change over the last few years is the way that the actual sound systems have developed," says Tony Butler of staging firm Butlers Hire in Australia.

"Only a few years ago we needed to support massive weights in the stage wings, with some speaker stacks grossing out well over 6,000kgs per stack. Now with almost everyone touring with some form of array system the weights are incredibly low compared to just a few years ago. Even the large video screens are now much lighter than the original versions."

Having started a fledgling operation that rented out normal, scaffolding-based stages, between 1981 and 1984, Belgian promoters Hedwig De Meyer and Herman Schueremans designed a new tower system, based on crane technology.



Clive Forrester

**“The market is still growing as major acts get more income from touring than from CD sales”**

Tom Bilsen

That development gave birth to Stageco, which overnight became the staging company of choice with a system that involved less man hours to erect and dismantle, provided superior rigging capacity and offered greater safety.

Stageco's Tom Bilsen tells *Audience*, "We're involved in about 440 concerts and festivals all over the world during 2006."

Bilsen contends that some of the major issues in the staging sector stem from the quicker turnaround in the organisation of shows.

"Later decisions make development and preparation times shorter, while demands for larger rigging capacities have arisen due to huge video screens," he says.

## Tough timing

That's a view shared by US company All Access Staging's Clive Forrester.

"The biggest challenge is tardy clients," he says. "They are late to request bids, slow to decide and burn up their timelines. This is not a new phenomenon."

It's an issue that is common globally. Jeff Burke of UK-based Edwin Shirley Staging (ESS) says, "Client and venue demands are becoming more challenging, the





# d's a stage

Gearhouse's Robbie Williams stage

productions are getting bigger, heavier and more complex and the time to do everything seems to get shorter."

Citing an example, Burke reveals, "We have just had a situation in Osaka, Japan where the complete staging system was successfully loaded out in six hours, usually a 24-hour process. This was a venue demand as there was another show loading in for that night. To achieve this takes a huge amount of cooperation between all departments and absolute attention to health and safety issues."

One of the staging sector's giants, ESS began life in 1978 with a Fleetwood Mac show in Geneva.

"We have our HQ in London and we operate through Europe and the Middle East," explains Burke. "We have a well-established office in Australia run by Iain Barclay and for the last 10 years we've had ESS

Japan, which is a joint venture with Nihon Stages. So ESS is a global company and has operated in the Americas as well as the rest of the world."

**“Client and venue demands are becoming more challenging ... and the time to do everything seems to get shorter”**

**Jeff Burke**

Among the acts ESS has supplied stages for recently are Paul McCartney, Coldplay, Elton John, Green Day, Billy Joel and Bryan Adams, while past clients include The Rolling Stones, Michael Jackson, Bruce Springsteen, Bon Jovi, Barbra Streisand and Neil Diamond.

"The biggest thing we have been involved with this year is the Madonna tour," reports Burke. "The rig weighed 90 tons, all of which had to be flown from the

ESS roof grid. The grid extended out into the audience by 54 metres [170 feet], which used a clear span truss held up by two 20m [65 ft] high towers,



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allowing the artiste to perform out in the audience without compromising sightlines."

### Supporting growth

One of Africa's most successful companies is Gearhouse. John McDermott, manager of the company's Johannesburg branch, sums up the reason for growth in the staging sector thus, "The live industry is growing and being managed in a far more professional manner than the past."

"We're involved in 24 to 30 tours annually in stadiums, indoor arenas and convention centres," says McDermott. "We're mainly involved in shows in South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. However, we have serviced events as far afield as Brunei, Seychelles, Mauritius and India."

Among the promoters that Gearhouse has worked with are Big Concerts with artistes such as Metallica, Robbie Williams, Snoop Dogg and Kanye West; Showtime Management - Black Eyed Peas; Morris Roda Productions - Will Downing and Johnny Gill; Out The Box Productions for the SAMA Awards; and Sun International/Gavin Rajah for Seal/Positive.

In America, All Access Staging has been operating since 1991 with offices in New Jersey, California and Oregon, but supplies productions travelling all over the world.

Forrester names acts such as Motley Crue, Nickleback, Kiss, Alicia Keyes, Kelly Clarkson, Dixie Chicks, Bob Dylan and Kenny Chesney among All Access clients.

"Kenny Chesney is probably not well known in Europe, but in the US he is a huge star," says Forrester. "He tours most of the year and every year we build a new set for him with a rolling stage and crowd control barricades."

Highlighting a particular problem with working in the US, Forrester says, "Every state has its hand in the sales tax pie and the regulation is about as grey as it can get. Each state is different and there is tax on tax in many cases. Business licenses are also problematical as many cities want to charge on gross receipts and it gets expensive fast."

On a positive note, Forrester believes better working conditions have improved the lot of stage construction staff, although he notes the inevitable accompanying bureaucracy.

"Safety issues have come to the forefront as more regulation has been imposed," he contends. "Some of it is just busy work with paper, but there are some good regulations as well. New systems that have been introduced include computer controlled winches and motors, and standardisation with DMX control on all the gags, mobilators, turntables, lifts etc."

**“The trend has been to reduce size and weight ... and increase quality and quantity”**

**Adrian Brooks**

### Focussing on safety

On the subject of safety, Burke agrees with Forrester that there have been dramatic improvements.

"All of the staging companies have tightened up in this area," says Burke. "However it's a continual process that has to be attended to constantly."

Down under, Butler comments, "Safety has



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definitely improved, but nowhere near enough. The days of riggers climbing all around the stage roofs and support structures are numbered for sure.

"In some states of Australia we cannot erect our stages without the use of cherry pickers and boom lifts. This is becoming more and more prevalent, so as a company we are focused on only building and purchasing equipment that can be erected at ground level, with very limited aerial work by riggers or crew."

UK-based Star Events Group is another industry veteran, with the company currently marking its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

"We do approximately 200 outdoor shows per year, everything from small corporate stuff through to major stadium shows," says Star Events' development director Roger Barrett. "We operate everywhere - the UK, Italy, Spain, China and we have substantial experience in Africa and South America."

Barrett lists "less scaffolding, more bespoke tower systems and new working-at-height regulations, that are about to make a huge impact on designs in UK," as significant factors in his business.

"In production terms, PA's are getting lighter whilst screens get heavier, so the biggest challenge for most big roofs is dealing with large upstage video screens, often weighing in at six to 12 tons," says Barrett.

Among some of Star Events' most noteworthy shows of late were London's Live 8 concert in Hyde Park, Red Hot Chili Peppers' record-breaking three nights to 250,000 people, also in Hyde Park, and REM's 2005 UK tour.

Barrett cites his major concern as, "Incompetent enforcement, allowing cowboy contractors to get away with murder - well, it will be when they kill someone, and it would help if the Inland Revenue and



HSE [Health and Safety Executive] could agree between themselves on the legal status of the self-employed freelancers we all rely on."

This year's events for Barrett's team have included all of the Hyde Park summer shows (The O2 Wireless Festival, Foo Fighters, The Who, Roger Waters), the Download and V festivals, Red Hot Chili Peppers' UK tour and Scissor Sisters in London's Trafalgar Square.

"We're about to go to Lagos in Nigeria for an Independence Day concert with Beyonce and Snoop Dogg," adds Barrett.



Roger Barrett

### Astra anniversary

Also marking an anniversary is Adrian Brooks of Litestructures. "The company has been running for 15 years, but the Astralite truss system was created in 1982, so it will mark its 25<sup>th</sup> year in 2007," explains Brooks.

"We're involved in countless events at all sorts of venues. Using our product Litedeck as principal, our specialty is creating stage sets for touring bands typically visiting arenas, theatres and outdoor festivals."



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Litestructures stage for Robbie Williams



Litestructures stage for Robbie Williams



Adrian Brooks

With its HQ in the UK, Litestructures also has offices and manufacturing facilities in Germany and Romania.

Looking back over recent years, Brooks observes, "The trend has been to reduce size and weight of products and increase quality and quantity. This satisfies both the visual impact and audience experience of the complete production, and the requirement to comply with increasing health and safety regulations.

"We are always looking at new product development - the launch of our new truss system Digitruss in September 2006, for example - and gaps in the market. It was our involvement in producing stage sets that led to the construction of our Rehearsal Arena, purpose built to withstand the increasing demands of touring production."

That rehearsal arena was used by Robbie Williams for his stadium tour, while other Litestructures clients this year have included The Prodigy's theatre tour and P!NK's arena tour.

"As we manufacture Litedeck, we can supply any size stage at any time. And being an aluminium fabricator, we have unusual requests all the time, not necessarily for the staging industry, leading us to being able to problem solve across various market sectors," adds Brooks.



Alexander Strizhak

### Northern pioneers

On a smaller scale, Finland's Eastway operation is celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> year, but is just as busy as its bigger rivals around the world.

"The live music industry is rapidly growing in Finland, with more concerts than ever, with both local and international artistes," says Eastway's Tomi Lindblom. "So we're doing business with some 1,500 different events yearly, mostly in Finland,

but more than 100 in other European countries."

Among some of the acts Eastway has supplied stages for this year are Juanes, The Beach Boys, Moody Blues, W.A.S.P., Toto, Deep Purple, Gary Moore and Ted Nugent.

"Venues have included the Helsinki Ice Hall, Helsinki Culture House and The Finlandia Hall, so the capacity of crowds has varied from 1,500 to 6,000," says Lindblom.

Yet another outfit celebrating a landmark anniversary is Russia's JSA Professional Stage Company, which has been running out of its Moscow headquarters for a decade.

JSA president Alexander Strizhak tells *Audience* the company caters for about 20 concerts and six festivals per year, as well as about 300 other events and shows.

"Our main projects are in the Russian Federation, but we also have projects in Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia and Finland," reports Strizhak.

Like his colleagues elsewhere, Strizhak cites the "increased number of shows and concerts, and more serious demands from artistes and show organisers," as reasons for growth.

JSA has supplied stages for Jean Michel Jarre's *Oxygene* Moscow show in front of an estimated three million people, Red Square shows for Paul McCartney (30,000), Roger Waters (50,000), Placido Domingo (10,000) and Red Hot Chili Peppers (500,000); the Rolling Stones at Luzhniki (70,000), Metallica at Estonia's Tallinn Song Festival (78,000), Ruisrock festival (60,000) in Finland and, most recently, Madonna at Luzhniki (50,000).

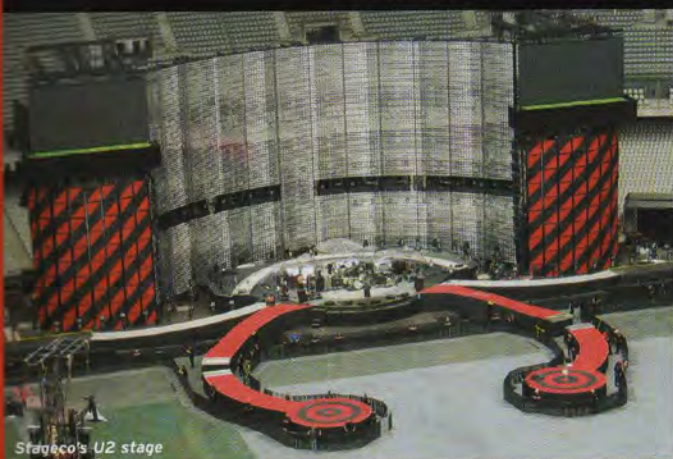
### Flexibility is key

Being a large-scale international operation, among the issues that affect Stageco, according to Bilsen are, "More competition in certain areas, while there is a bad euro/US dollar exchange rate for concerts outside of Europe.

Among the world tours Stageco has recently been involved in are the Rolling Stones, Robbie Williams, U2, Bon Jovi and Johnny Hallyday.

The company also provides stages for such European festivals as Scotland's T in the Park, England's twin V festivals and, of course, Rock Werchter, which was the brainchild of Stageco's Belgian founders.

"This year we had about 50 stages out simultaneously," says Bilsen. "Our covered roofs vary from 8x4m to 36x22m, while tailor-made sets go up to 60x20m."



Stageco's U2 stage





Butler's twin Big Day Out stage

Started in 1970 by John and Wendy Butler to cater for private functions such as weddings and family parties, Australia's Butlers Hire remains a family-run business.

"Today we employ more than 50 full-time staff and operate in every state of Australia and New Zealand, but we have also sent gear to Fiji, Vanuatu and China," says Butler.

Butler notes, "The dollars to be made here in Oz are not the same as in Europe. We just don't have the population and our major cities are big distances apart. This makes touring or producing big shows incredibly expensive, so the promoters are always keen to save money.

"We would love to have bigger, more complex stages, with all the latest technology, but it is difficult to find the return to pay for that kind of investments in Australia."

As a result, Butler reveals, "We would like to focus more on the overseas markets in the next two or three years. I see our neighbours in Asia as a massive market; they have untold amounts of music events and festivals that are enormous by our standards and they are always on the look-out for good solid suppliers to operate in the local regions."

Butler counts shows such as the last concert by Crowded House on the forecourt of the Sydney Opera House in 1996 and the travelling Big Day Out festivals, among his favourite events.

He continues, "Virtually every

every

Australian band in the last 30 years has performed on our gear - INXS, Cold Chisel, Rose Tattoo, Hoodoo Gurus, etc. As for overseas acts, we have done shows with Elton John, Dire Straits, Kiss, The Police, Prince, Guns N' Roses, Pearl Jam - the list goes on and on."

## Growth by stages

Looking ahead, Stageco's Bilson notes, "The market is still growing as major acts get more income from touring than from CD sales. We expect further growth and are also looking toward new areas such as China, India, Eastern Europe and South America."

Star Events' Barrett believes the next few years will bring consolidation. "There will be fewer, but bigger players at international level and lots of small regional companies," he forecasts.

All Access's Forrester agrees. "There will be more computerisation, more acquisitions and mergers, bigger and more expansive companies, and university training for the developed industry."

Those predictions are welcomed by Butler. "I'd like to see some consolidation," he says. "Suppliers have the opportunity to do very well, as long as we don't keep up with the attitude of price slashing to get the job at any price.

"All in all it's a great industry to work in. There are just so many hard working and talented people behind the scenes at all levels in this industry, who never get the recognition that they deserve. It's also good to see a lot of younger people coming through," says Butler.

"Let's just hope that the old dogs in the industry can teach the new pups some lessons."



All Access stage for Sarah McLachlan



Rolling Stones 40 Licks stage by Stageco



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