



Issue 48
LIVE MUSIC INTELLIGENCE
An ILMC Publication, July 2013



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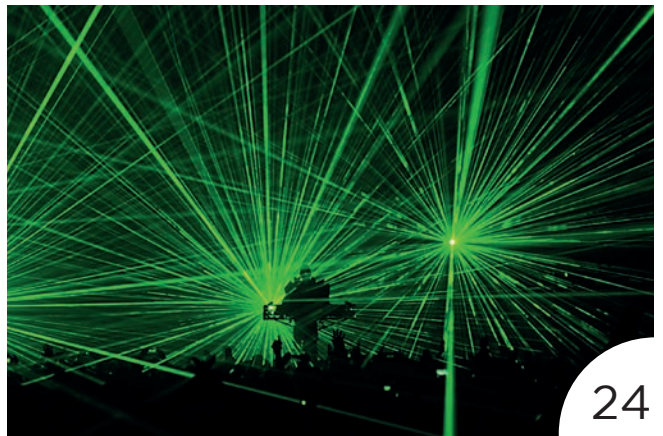
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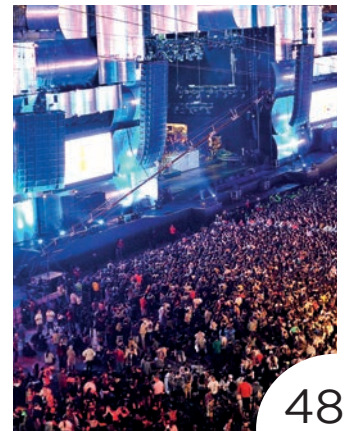
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HERE COMES THE SUN

Gordon Masson prays that the rain (and wind) Gods are kind, and doffs his sunglasses to the promoters who risk all for our festivals...

AFTER WHAT SEEMS like a three-year absence, summer is finally here in the northern hemisphere and stadium tours and festivals are well and truly under way. At press time, arguably the world's most famous festival, Glastonbury, had just finished and the *IQ* team who attended are happy to report that it was a fantastic weekend whose highlights included the Rolling Stones' debut performance at the event.

As the weeks tick by, there will be stories of doom and gloom as festivals around the world fail for one reason or another – and I have to admit, I can be as guilty as the next person in reporting such cancellations (see our Swedish story on page 8). However, by and large, the majority of festival news so far this year has been positive and despite crippling economic circumstances in some countries, the outdoor business remains pretty buoyant as millions of people look for their annual fill of escapism. And for that, the people who risk their money on organising and promoting festivals should be applauded.

In this issue you'll find Adam Woods' fascinating report on Brazil (p.60). As I write, daily protests are being held throughout the country about what many inhabitants believe is the misuse of taxes to pay for stadium building for the forthcoming FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympics, rather than vital public services. Such turmoil is having an impact on the concert business in Brazil, but overall, those working there are upbeat about the country's long-term prospects. 10,000 kilometres away in Turkey, similar demonstrations are taking a toll on daily life too, but while

numerous shows are being shelved, our friends in Istanbul are similarly hopeful that the civil unrest will ultimately lead to better standards of life for the population at large.

Elsewhere in the mag, Nicola Riches takes a look at the growing popularity of crowdsourcing (p.18) to fund shows, tours and festivals; while Christopher Austin talks to some of the biggest staging companies in the world (p.30) for a check-up on the industry, which I'm pleased to report is in rude health. I have the pleasure of reporting on the Pet Shop Boys' latest tour (p.24), which involved some clever reverse engineering to make it one of the most compact big shows ever to hit the road. And I also delve into the rapidly expanding genre of electronic dance music (p.42) to find out just why it is attracting billions of dollars of investment and how its leading lights intend to sustain the good times.

Finally, I'd like to thank rock photographer Guido Karp for allowing us to use the images he took at this year's ILMC to illustrate both the cover of this issue and that of the next. So if Guido captured you on film and you can't spot yourself on this cover, you might just find yourself adorning issue 49. Also on the cover, the eagle-eyed amongst you might recognise the striking yellow and purple colours used in the *IQ* logo. If you are unfamiliar with Edwin Shirley Trucking, you can get an idea of the genuine affection people had for Edwin, who died in April, in the Your Shout tributes. He was a legendary character and it's obvious that he is already sadly missed by many. ●



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SETTING THE STAGE

As festivals and headline tour productions get more and more complicated, the demands on the staging sector to cope with ever greater loads, while ensuring the highest standards of safety amidst tightening budgets, is no easy task, as **Christopher Austin** discovers...

Whether constructing a stage in a swimming pool for the president of Angola or rescuing a stage that has been torn apart by protesters to build barricades on Istanbul's streets, there is rarely a dull day in the international staging business. Those recent respective experiences of Spain's GUIL and German-based operation Megaforce may be exceptional, but leading operators in the event staging business have become accustomed to tackling challenges of all shapes and sizes. Recent years have seen staging companies face growing demands; not only for increased safety and sustainability, but also sophistication, all at a price that meets ever-tightening budgets.

With the outdoor concert and festival season well under way in the northern hemisphere, the summer is proving a period of frenetic activity for the majority of leading staging operations, not least Stageco. With its headquarters in Belgium and offices in nine countries, Stageco is enjoying a particularly busy season, working simultaneously on major projects at a multitude of locations around the world. They include stadium tours by Robbie Williams, Bon Jovi, Muse and Roger Waters with *The Wall*, all of which incorporate bespoke stage set-ups. "We have seen a rise in demand for bespoke shows this year; every band wants to have a show that is completely different from the next. It is our job to help make the show look unique

and provide the designer with the solutions to enable him to do that," says Stageco founder and president Hedwig De Meyer.

The launch of Stageco's XL Tower, the XL Stage and Arena Lift innovations saw the company collect the best staging prize at London's Event Production Awards in February. De Meyer acknowledges that the increasing demand for spectacular productions has meant that groundbreaking solutions have become a prerequisite of any tour within the major league international concert business. "In a way, audiences are spoilt because they have seen so many exciting shows. Video and other visual aspects are increasingly important these days, so we are always looking to find something new that the audience hasn't seen before and that will stun them," De Meyer says.

Stadium shows not only present staging companies with the task of creating something spectacular and unique to satisfy the enormous audiences, the venues themselves are often a demanding environment in which to work. Recent years have seen huge sums of money sunk into major stadium building and regeneration projects, often with event flexibility in mind, but according to De Meyer, even state-of-the-art stadiums present challenges. "On the one hand it gets easier because new stadiums have improved access to the field, but on the other it gets more complex because new stadiums are built in such a way that the audience is closer to the field, so there is ▶



“We have seen a rise in demand for bespoke shows this year; every band wants to have a show that is completely different from the next. It is our job to help make the show look unique and provide the designer with the solutions to enable him to do that.”

– Hedwig De Meyer, Stageco

▶ less room for the stages,” he says.

Working primarily with touring arena shows, All Access Staging and Productions is also concurrently involved in numerous concerts all over the world at any one time. With two offices in the US, a pair in Australia and one in the UK, All Access offers a global sale and hire service that provides equipment that includes rolling stages, lifts, turntables, portable risers and solenoid systems.

Financial Restraints

The widespread economic slump has increased pressure on tour budgets, which have not been helped by the escalating cost of basics such as fuel and raw materials. With that in mind, All Access has seen its global hire business prove popular with international touring acts. “Because we have offices around the world, we can often offer bands 80% of staging from standard stock that

we hold at all our international locations,” says All Access sales manager Matthew Bull. “It means you often only have to ship 20% of the staging around the world. That really helps with shipping and flight costs and with the core of equipment being stock items it means that at the end of the tour there is not the whole stage to dispose of.”

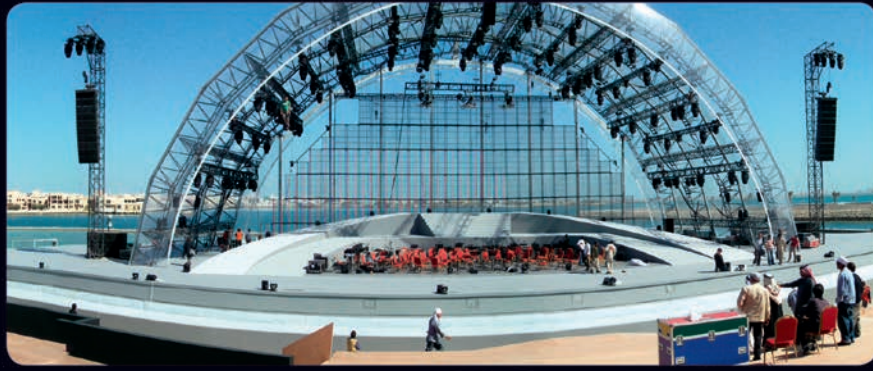
Research, development and manufacture of All Access equipment takes place in the US, with the most recent piece of equipment – a new take on the ribbon lift called the X Lift – making it possible to raise a performer 20 feet into the air in 30 seconds. “It uses a new mechanism and is a considerable improvement on the old ribbon lift – when you are at the top of it, it feels a lot safer,” Bull says.

Each festival season, All Access supplies acts with equipment including drum risers and stairs to enhance their shows. The Wanted, Whitesnake, Paloma Faith and Jessie J are just some of the acts whose festival sets will feature All Access equipment this year. For Jessie J it meant supplying a custom stage that is both visually impressive and extremely portable. “The custom stage for Jessie J involves custom risers with video attached to them,” Bull reveals. “They wanted to be able to roll it all on and off of festival stages easily and were restricted with truck space.”

Founded in 1992, Germany-based Megaforce has become one of the biggest staging suppliers in Europe. This year the company’s equipment will be at nine festivals throughout the continent, as well as about 90 single shows or tour stops. Megaforce sales manager Timo Mathes says, “I believe that even today in a time of overstimulation, a festival organiser ▶



Stageco’s Bon Jovi stage in Vienna, Austria



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Staging

▶ can still have quite good success by having everything planned properly beforehand. That includes working with professional service providers in all fields. An inventive location could also help a lot to make the festival a blockbuster.”

Mathes doesn't just look for business with the mega-festivals, however, and he is adamant that some of the better events Megaforce is involved with don't just rely on A-list acts to sell tickets. “Megaforce is always looking for new opportunities on the festival market and every year we are supporting ‘festival beginners’ with our know-how and gear,” he says. “Many successful alternative festivals show that success cannot only be tailored to famous names on the line-up. It is also about the spirit of the respective festival and the atmosphere the festival organisers create for their audience.”

John Henry founded his London-based operation back in 1976 and developed what was then a unique portable stage riser that proved a mainstay of the touring circuit for decades to come. John Henry's now handles everything from the complete provision of rolling risers at festivals to bespoke stage builds for television and record companies. Among its regular UK festival clients are Latitude, Rewind, Reading, Leeds, V Festival and Proms in the Park, for which it supplies up to 120 platforms with wheels, rigging, carpet and drapes.

With budgets always under pressure, Henry's son, Johnny Henry, who manages the London-based operations, says the company strives to find ways to supply the best possible equipment at an appealing price. “We always try to maintain



“We own an architectural and structural engineering practice, so have highly qualified specialists to make sure that all our Right Structures designs come with detailed engineering calculations.”

– Gerald Borg,
Right Structures

good and long-term relationships with our suppliers, which in turn gives us the room to give our clients the best deal. This is a must in today's market. Although we find that sometimes it's worth spending that bit more to get the best tools for the job; be it gaffer tape or carpet,” Henry says.

One of the greatest challenges for promoters and event organisers is to make sure their stages come from a reliable supplier that tests their equipment for crucial safety factors such as the weights they can support and the wind speeds they can tolerate. As a result, even in a crowded market, there is still room for newcomers to make their mark. One such newbie is Right Structures which having purchased the demountable structure that was the Wembley Arena Pavilion, developed that building into the MFCC as an international venue in Malta.

Now the company is expanding. “Our architects and ▶

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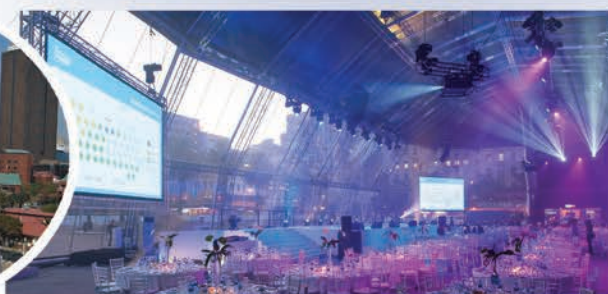
Midi Dome 16m

Load capacity per Arch: 1000Kg UDL
Wind speed: 100Km/h - 60mph (sea level)
Height at apex: 7.9m
Internal width: 15.6m
Dome end diameter: 15.6m
Bay spacing: 4m (to required length)



Combi Dome 20m

Load capacity per arch: 1500Kg UDL
Wind speed: 100Km/h - 60mph (sea level)
Height at apex: 8.9m
Internal width: 19m
Dome end diameter: 20.1m
Bay spacing: 4m (to required length)



Maxi Dome 28m

Load capacity per arch: 2500Kg UDL
Wind speed: 120Km/h - 75mph (sea level)
Height at apex: 12.7m
Internal width: 25.7m
Dome end diameter: 25.7m
Bay spacing: 5.1m (to required length)



Supa Dome 36m

Load capacity per arch: 3000 Kg UDL
Wind speed: 120Km/h - 75mph (sea level)
Height at apex: 15.8m
Internal width: 32.8m
Dome end diameter: 33.7m
Bay spacing: 6m (to required length)

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► engineers turned their attention to solving the challenge of rigging capacity and load bearing in the roof. This was the one area where the otherwise fantastic Tensile Fabric Structure (TFS) offered us limited capability,” says Right Structures managing director Gerald Borg. “Our engineers came up with a proprietary spaceframe system, which led to us designing and manufacturing a curved weight/load bearing arch that followed the contour of the TFS at MFCC. With Malta being an island that attracts some large global artists and corporate events, we adapted the system to be used as an outdoor stage roof, or corporate/advertising structures such as the 10m GeoLandmark globes.”

Following considerable investment from new business partners in 2011, Borg’s company has now launched an innovative staging solution to the international market. “We believe we are unique in that we have a modular system which allows us to design and construct a wide variety of stages and demountable structures with minimal components. This widens design options for weight bearing structures at a significantly lower cost than bespoke manufactured stages or structures,” he says.

Guarding Against Tragedy

Budgetary pressures aside, every staging company *IQ* canvassed for this report emphasised that safety is at the forefront of everything they do. Recent years have seen numerous tragic incidents at concerts, from fires to falls and crowd-related accidents, to stage collapses at events including

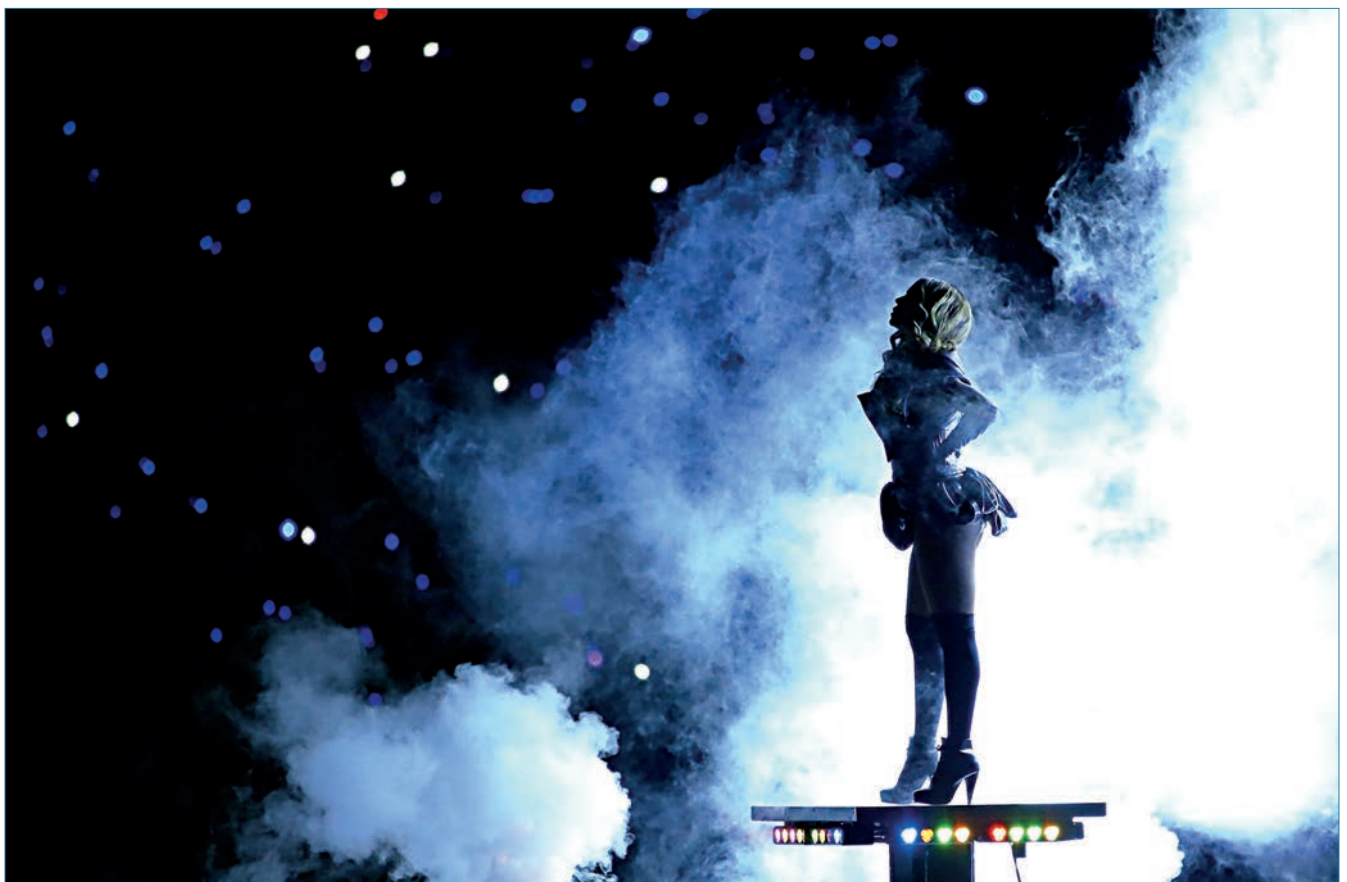


“We aspire to set the standards. We carry out all our own design work and meet all relevant codes of practice and guidance. We do not buy ready-made systems from truss manufacturers like the one that collapsed in Indiana.”

– Roger Barrett,
Star Events Group

the Indiana State Fair, Pukklepop and the Ottawa Blues Fest. A more recent incident, in May this year, saw a man crushed to death during the installation of acoustic equipment on a stage in Moscow’s Bolotnaya Square. No matter the shape, size or location of an event, structural safety is now more of an issue than ever before.

Following the death of Radiohead’s drum technician when the band’s stage collapsed in Toronto’s Downsview Park in June 2012, British operation LS-Live was brought in to pick up the pieces. After an initial evaluation of the damage, the Radiohead production team was under pressure to get the show back on the road as swiftly as possible and a quote was delivered overnight by LS-Live. As there were no original drawings of the set available, the team had to start from scratch based on photographs and the information at hand. Over the following three weeks, the company was involved in structural assessments, re-drawing detailed components from scratch, ►



All Access Staging's X Lift

Staging

► reverse engineering, testing, re-manufacturing, modifications and final assembly.

Founded in 1996 by Alexander Strizhak, Russia's JSA Staging Company was one of the first professional businesses of its type in the territory. It has worked on an array of major local rock festivals, including Nashestvie, Krylia, Picnic Afisha, Maxidrom, Rock nad Volgoj and Alye Parusa and its stages have seen performances by an array of A-list Western acts ranging from Metallica to Elton John. According to Strizhak, JSA's near two-decade history has been devoid of major safety-related incidents, despite the continued need to meet the demands for innovative stage set-ups. As part of the stage structure for a recent show by Russian rock star Zemfira, JSA built a helipad adjacent to the stage that the musician used during a performance.

Right Structures' Borg states, "Safety was at the very core of the system design all those years ago and is integral to the fabric of everything we do, which has been reinforced by our new partners (involved in international hotel construction and management, Corinthia Hotels). We own an architectural and structural engineering practice, so have highly qualified specialists to make sure that all our Right Structures designs come with detailed engineering calculations. The system was designed so that it can be built from the ground up – so our crews work at ground level – removing the working at height risk." He adds, "Each event has its own weight and wind loading considerations, along with ground/site conditions, so we are very attentive to all aspects of safety, which clients seems to be very happy about."

It is not only staging companies but also their clients that



“Many successful alternative festivals show that success cannot only be tailored to famous names on the lineup. It is also about the spirit of the respective festival and the atmosphere the festival organisers create for their audience.”

– Timo Mathes,
Megaforce

have become increasingly safety focused. Switzerland's Fortissimo works primarily with Megaforce and Stageco and is busy this summer putting on shows by Bon Jovi, Roger Waters and Bruce Springsteen. Head of production Kurt Bucher says safety is the operation's single biggest concern. "It is always about safety. I need to make sure that the stage that they develop for me is safe and the next consideration is the price and how it will work; safety is always the first thing we look at," Bucher says.

"Safety is an area that is evolving; 15 years ago safety harnesses didn't exist, it is something that changes all the time and you have to be aware of all the developments in every region," says Stageco's De Meyer. "Recent years have seen increased interest from government officials, but every country has its own rules and it is hard to get the rules in line with each other; what is asked of us in England and Italy can be completely different and that puts a lot of pressure on us."

Among the most highly respected of the many differing regional safety specifications are the UK's BS, Germany's ►



The Script on a stage built by LS-Live

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Staging

▶ TÜV, the European Norm, and American Federal Specifications. All of these standards are fully complied with when an assignment is handled by the staging and structures team at South Africa's Gearhouse. Robyn D'Alessandro, Gearhouse's marketing manager, confirms that many safety measures are taken by the company, including regular inspections and testing of rigging and trussing equipment, while written risk assessments are carried out prior to each project, and portable structures undergo comprehensive load and wind-speed testing. "We are at the forefront of event safety in South Africa. We have an in-house national health and safety manager to manage safety at all events where the company provides its services," D'Alessandro says.

Approximately 80% of Gearhouse's revenue derives from corporate assignments, but being the largest rental company in South Africa it handles many major international tours, most recently Bon Jovi and Justin Bieber. But in terms of spectacle, D'Alessandro says it has proved hard to top the FIFA World Cup opening and closing ceremonies it worked on in 2010.

Aside from helping to stage major international events, Gearhouse is also able to offer entire venues for events via its specialist design and manufacturing sister company In2Structures. The operation's range of custom-designed portable venues come in various sizes and are available for hire or sale. According to D'Alessandro, safety was a key issue throughout the design of these dome-shaped structures. "Unique and extremely versatile, they can be erected almost anywhere, are completely weatherproof and have outstanding safety features. One- to three-tonne load-bearing capacity per arch offers generous rigging capabilities and the structures are certified to withstand wind speeds of 120 kilometres per hour," he says.

Inclement weather is also a major consideration at Star Events, which supplies staging, structural, rigging and seating technologies to numerous major festivals, including Bestival and V Festival in the UK, and the Nike Festival of Sports in Shanghai.

Along with its UK headquarters, Star Events has bases in China, Spain, Portugal, Italy and New Zealand and is well versed in handling events of all shapes and sizes. The most challenging yet, proved to be the construction of a 180-tonne structure in the middle of a river in London's Olympic Park, without any access to the riverbank for cranes or other machines.

Star Events Group technical and commercial director Roger Barrett says that the company constantly monitors the weather at events and always has skilled stand-by crews on site to deal with any issues. "We aspire to set the standards. We carry out all our own design work and meet all relevant codes of practice and guidance. We do not buy ready-made systems from truss manufacturers like the one that collapsed in Indiana," Barrett says.

Indoor Challenges

Weather may not be a consideration when it comes to arena shows but, alongside their stadium big brothers, arena tours have seen a rapid evolution in complexity, brought about by the same desire of artists to impress jaded audiences. "It is not just the open-air shows that are becoming more complicated, the indoor shows are becoming huge, with very complicated stages," says Fortissimo's Bucher. "They are often 20-30-truck productions and more intricate than the outdoor shows. The artists are wanting bigger stages and effects and lights and it is becoming difficult to fit it all under the arena roofs."

LS-Live not only boasts specialist skills in staging, set design, automation, electronics and equipment rental, but a 17,664 square foot rehearsal arena on site next to its rental warehouse and construction division, means staging can be built and tested all under one roof. UK-based LS-Live deals primarily with indoor staging and bespoke structures and a recent project saw it complete the stage set for The Script's tour with the main stage structure being a bespoke variation of one

Megaforce's new R-28 stage





“We always try to maintain good and long-term relationships with our suppliers, which in turn gives us the room to give our clients the best deal. This is a must in today's market. Although we find that sometimes it's worth spending that bit more to get the best tools for the job; be it gaffer tape or carpet.”

– Johnny Henry, John Henry's

of LS-Live's standard touring rental packages. “It was custom-adapted to incorporate three video screens that run up from the floor in front of the audience onto the stage underfoot, then angle up onto a 3-foot-high platform upstage. We fabricated a Perspex cover with an aluminium frame to cover the video screens on stage so that the band can walk over the top of them,” says LS-Live director Ben Brooks.

LS-Live's vast range of rental equipment includes rolling risers, scissor lifts, turntables, LiteDeck, crowd barriers, staircases and man lifts, enabling the majority of custom-built shows to incorporate off-the-shelf pieces which alleviate the pressure on budgets.

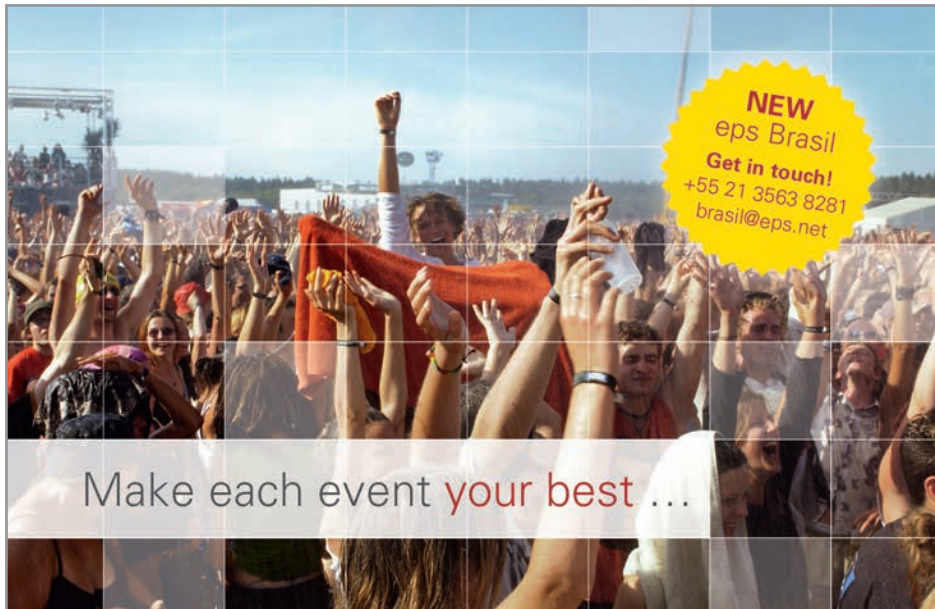
While the faltering Spanish economy may not be helping the local live entertainment business, Valencia-based GUIL is

enjoying strong business from overseas clients in burgeoning territories such as Russia, South America and China, while also providing customised products for major events around the world and exclusive nightclubs in the likes of Dubai and Ibiza. GUIL manufactures five models of stage, which means they can be used for multiple applications from small set-ups in hotels or bars all the way up to large events for stages of over 200 square metres. “Our lightweight version is perfect for conferences and schools and they go all the way up to our heavy-duty platform with a load capacity of 2,600kg for large events such as festivals,” says export head Tracy Hobbs.

GUIL platforms come with a weather resistant, non-slip finish as standard and the use of stainless steel components and connectors adds to their durability. Over GUIL's 30 years in the staging business the company has manufactured equipment for many concerts and festivals along with a broad array of non-music events ranging from fashion shows to car exhibitions. Due to the weather resistant treatments of GUIL's platforms they can handle almost any kind of weather and have even been used in snowy conditions in Norway and Andorra. But one of the most unusual requests for GUIL's services was for 200 square metres of staging to elevate an orchestra in the president of Angola's swimming pool for a performance to celebrate his wife's birthday. “Our platforms are used all over the world, when we develop a product our engineers design them to the highest standards so that they can be used anywhere,” Hobbs notes. ●

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