

PANIC! AT THE DISCO: PRAY FOR THE WICKED

The American rock band, fronted by charismatic frontman Brendon Urie, once again hit the UK, this time bringing their outlandish production to arenas. TPI caught up with the crew keeping pace with the band's recent upsurge in popularity.





For anyone reading this who is in their twenties and thirties, with even a passing interest in rock music, there is no doubt you will know of Panic! At The Disco (PATD). As a kid growing up on Scuzz TV (RIP) I was more than familiar with PATD with songs such as *I Write Sins Not Tragedies* ever present in the mid-noughties rock psyche. TPI first got to experience the new look of the band almost three years ago during their *Death of A Bachelor* tour; an extremely tight show with the ambition of an arena performance. Fast forward to early 2019, and the PATD family had a full run of the Manchester Arena, loading-in an impressive video set up, an arsenal of pyrotechnics and even a flying piano... Told you they had ambition.

Although many of the core crew from the *Death of A Bachelor* tour were still present on the crew roster – including Tour Manager Tony Marino, FOH Engineer Spencer Jones, Monitor Engineer Jeremy ‘Spud’ Groshong and LD Alex Specht – with a growing production, the PATD family had to get a little bit bigger...

PRODUCTION

Leading the crew was Production Manager Aaron Draude. Having worked with the likes of One Republic and more recently Camila Cabello, he is more than used to handling a large pop production. “I got brought in last year in August,” began Draude, speaking from the bustling production office. “In terms of the suppliers we have brought on this run, most of them I’ve had a previous relationship with. Due to time constraints, we kept the same suppliers from the previous US run to this one.” The supplier roster consisted of SGPS providing rigging and automation, Fuse for video, Eighth Day Sound for audio, PRG for Lighting and Strictly FX. Also present were Mojo Barriers, The Powershop, Fly By Nite, Beat the Street and Bittersweet

Catering.

Although relatively new to the PATD camp, Draude gave his thoughts on the band’s rise in popularity, not to mentioned production. “The feeling I’ve been getting from the crew and the management is they are now at the level they should have been. It’s got a lot bigger in a relatively short space of time but all the crew have dealt with the growth really well.” During our conversation, the PM cited reports released that day stating the *Pray for the Wicked* had become the band’s biggest grossing tour in their career. The new single, *High Hopes*, had also just become the longest-leading number one on US Billboard’s Adult Pop Songs radio airplay chart in more than 10 years – further proof of the level at which the band now operate.

DESIGN

The visual show seen on the *Pray for the Wicked* tour had certainly expanded since TPI’s last encounter with the PATD team thanks to the lighting package, LED screens and the impressive special effects departments. Additionally, the production went all out on their automation department, which oversaw everything from video panel movements to the impressive spectacle of Brendon Urie and his flying piano.

The show design was a collaboration between GPSK, Scott Nagelberg of Crush Management and the band’s road management team made up of Tony Marino and Zack Hall. Discussing the growing ambition of the band’s stage show was Lighting Designer and Operator, Alex Specht. “We certainly have a few more tricks up our sleeves these days,” began Specht as he walked through the progression. “Right now I’m looking at upwards of 250 lighting fixtures in the rig, not to mention all the additional elements we have out on this run.” These days Specht holds the mantle of Show Designer as well as LD. “I always look at shows within a frame,” he began, describing

the delicate balance of ensuring each departments work harmoniously. "For example, in the song *Casual Affair* I've designed my whole lighting rig around the laser looks. It's the same with video. I don't want the lighting to be fighting the video and vice versa. It's all about making a whole show."

With more elements layered out in front of him, Specht has adopted timecode into his live set up. "All the way up to our last album cycle, I had never used timecode," he commented, expressing how he had some reservations concerning the move over. "The way I look at timecode is to compare it to a musician recording an album – it's my 'best take' of a light show presented every single night. Also with the sheer number of fixtures I'm just not sure it would be possible to do it manually. It also makes troubleshooting a lot easier. But there are still one or two moments within the show I've programmed to be launched live which scratches my 'wanting to rock-out' itch."

With the tour heading across the globe, Specht explained how he had to adapt his fixture list several times. "I think we are on rendition number six," he laughed. The main source lighting for the tour came from 5 fingers of truss which, for the UK, featured a collection of Robe BMFLs. "They're a fantastic hybrid fixture," enthused the LD. "They have a slightly fatter beam than others on the market which has really helped make the rig look larger in some of these bigger rooms." Also on the rig were GLP JDC1s. Although this was the first time using them, it was an addition Specht was "really digging". He elaborated: "They're a real three in one fixture – a great strobe, and fantastic LED wash and even some eye candy moments. I'm also been a big fan of the tilt factor which is a subtle look but one I think makes a real difference."

One of the pillars of both the design and the stage set was the ability to create a multitude of looks throughout the show. A clear example of this

were the 6 upstage LED towers which turned 90° to reveal a selection of Martin by Harman MAC Viper AirFXs – 72 to be precise.

Elsewhere, up in the air in a truss which mirrored the triangular thrust on the floor, were 21 PRG Icon beams used by the LD to create a cage effect. Then, on the two side toms, a total of 16 PRG Best Boy 4000 Washes.

"We've also brought out the Robe RobeSpot," continued the LD. "We've got 4 in total with 2 focused on Brendon and the other 2 on the guitarist and bassist. It's an incredibly smooth operating system which we are able to arrange backstage without taking up too much space."

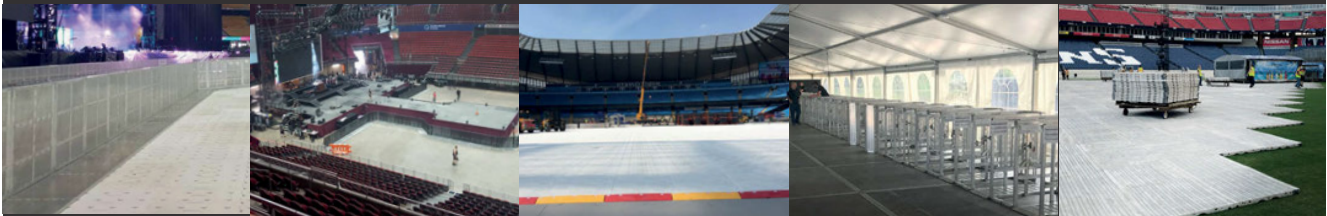
An MA Lighting grandMA2 was the console of choice for the tour. When TPI first met Specht in 2016 he had just got hold of a grandMA2, and apparently, he's never looked back. "What I like about the MA is that you can set it up how you feel best and no one ever runs it the same way. It leads to some interesting conversations when you meet other LDs or programmers. There is always something else to learn."

On a final note, Specht commented how the crew, who had been brought on by PRG, had been incredible. "I've got a total of six lighting crew out with us," he commented. "A lot of them have come from the Bruno Mars camp and are all very hard working constant professionals."

VIDEO

For the stage set, LED panels were a major part of the design. The first were 6 LED towers up stage on the riser, which also had the ability to turn 90°, along with 6 more towers hung in the roof. Talking through the video set up for this tour was Charles Ford, Media Server Operator. "There is video everywhere!" he laughed as he stood behind the solid block of LED panels. Across the board the ROE Visual MC5 was product of choice alongside Brompton processors. "Although I don't deal with the processors directly,

MOJO[®] RENTAL



WORLDWIDE EVENT INFRASTRUCTURE

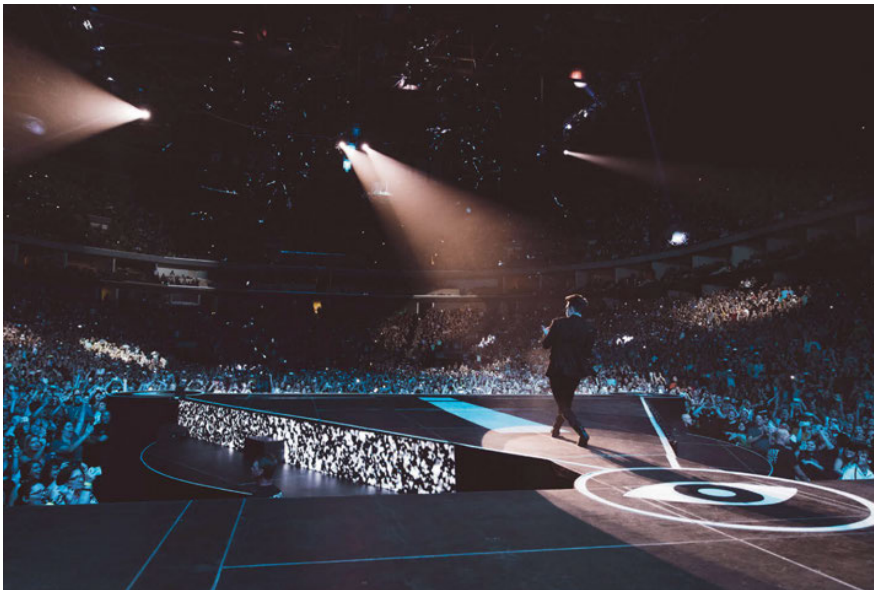


MOJO[®] Rental is the exclusive rental partner for **MOJO[®] Barriers** and distributor of **TERRAPLAS[®]** turf protection products. We provide the full scope of event infrastructure equipment. With a focus on **Crowd Safety, Turf Protection, Touring Equipment** and **Site Infrastructure** and the experience of the MOJO BARRIERS staff.



www.mojorental.com

PROUD MEMBER OF THE EVAG[®] GROUP



all of the video team have been raving about them," commented Ford. "They haven't had a single problem throughout this run."

He continued: "One of my initial goals when I got brought on was to make the video package as simple as possible. We got everything from the media servers going straight into the Brompton processors." The server in question was PRG's Mbox which, according to the Media Server Operator, was "an incredibly stable system". He continued: "To be honest, for this show we are doing a lot of relatively simple playback and therefore didn't need an overly complicated system. The content was already mapped out before I joined the crew, so I just needed a simple setup able to run the show reliably each day." Hello Charlie and Trigger and Bloom produced all the custom content for the tour.

Alongside the stage LED screens, were a plethora of cameras to feed the flanking IMAG screens. Responsible for producing the cut each evening was Video Director, Jack Edinger. Behind his Ross Video Carbonite Black, Edinger oversaw a 12-camera package. "There's certainly a lot of them out with us," he began, pointing to the various feeds on his console. "The main goal from my standpoint is to keep the look of the IMAG very clean. It's not the kind of show with lots of visual effects. It wouldn't fit into the vibe." He explained his main objective was to ensure all the fans got to see enough of the frontman. "Back in the day, Panic! used to be an emo band and, although we have kept the rock feel, this is a pop show," he explained. "The fans are so passionate about Brendon and I want to make sure he gets enough screen time." To ensure those moments were captured, the video department opted for some rather innovative discrete cameras thought the set. "There is one gag where we have Brendon play a piano at a FOH b-stage which is then lifted above the audience and tracks back to the main stage," stated the Director. "To capture the moment, we used the Blackmagic Design Micro Studio 4K placed on the piano. It's just one of those discreet cameras that captures all the various moving parts of this show. Another

highlight, and in a similar vein, is during the song *Death of a Bachelor* when Brendon walks through the crowd for which we have a Teradek Bolt Wireless Transmitter with one of the Micro Studios which produces a great look as he walks out through the pit." Elsewhere, in the pit, were a selection of Panasonic Studio 4K cameras. The Director was quick to compliment the work of video supplier Fuse and their "top of the line kit" which made his life a lot easier.

PYRO

Lending a hand to the overall visual aesthetics of the tour was Strictly FX. Talking TPi through the special effects setup was John Lyons. Having been involved with the band's last run, Lyons has spent a fair bit of time with PATD and built up a great deal of respect for the group. "It's a really entertaining show," he stated. "But more than that, Brendon's charisma is infectious and when he's up there you can tell he's having a great time."

The SFX Crew Chief explained some elements had carried over from the last campaign, including a flame bar for the song *Crazy = Genius* along with a streamer effect at the top of the show. "Other than that it's a completely new design," he stated.

One of the latest additions was an impressive laser package. "Lasers were brought in this past summer," stated Lyons. "It's something they had specially requested. We got our inhouse laser guy at Strictly, Doug Cenko, to come up with the design and it's just phenomenal. I really do see him as one of the best in the business and he did a fantastic job on this tour. Both he and Alex [Specht, LD] did a great job on the collaboration." On the rig were a total of 8, 15w Arcos lasers and a selection of 30w Stellas that shot down from the truss to create a selection of cone effects. For control the SFX department utilised a Pangolin Laser System Beyond software.

Elsewhere on the Strictly FX rider were a variety of effects, which came with their own set of challenges. "It all really came down to space,"



Founded on the legacy of the previous grandMA consoles, the grandMA3 represents a radical re-think of what's possible from a lighting control platform.

3



UK Distribution:
Ambersphere Solutions Ltd - Phone: +44 (0) 208 992 6369
sales@ambersphere.co.uk · www.ambersphere.co.uk

PANIC! AT THE DISCO



The Panic! At The Disco production office team; Media Server Operator Charles Ford; FOH Engineer Spencer Jones; Monitor Engineer Jeremy 'Spud' Groshong.

explained Lyons. "Early last summer we began to see drawings and we realised there was not a whole heap of room to give us a safe distance from performers - as well as to avoid damaging the abundance of LED screens around the set." Also, in-keeping with the set's slick design, Lyons did not want to have pyro fixtures left on the stage. "After mapping out a safe space for the effects we actually opted to build the fixtures into the set itself," he stated. "From a visual standpoint it looks much cleaner but also, from a safety standpoint, it means they will not be tripping over cabling on the stage."

During the performance, Lyons shot the show via a FireOne controller from stage right, with complete line of sight with a second spotter on stage left.

RIGGING AND STAGE

Discussing all the overhead elements of the tour was Head Rigger Jerry Ritter. He was called up by Production Manger Aaron Draude during a break from his recurring job with Bruno Mars, and Ritter jumped aboard the PATD bus to take on this ambitious project. "It's a massive set for sure," he began. "Every day I'm hanging close to 130 points for a 130,000lb payload. With the flying gag there were always going to be more considerations than your standard rock show." Ritter explained there were 4 main grids he and his team of in-house riggers hung each day, with all the production hung underneath. The grid system was a "natural choice" considering the video and lighting were so "intertwined" and the look was based around clean, straight lines, "rather than trying to weave your way through various buildings to try and replicate those looks". From a speed stand point, Ritter said it helped to keep load-in to schedule, which usually sees him marking out around 7am with rigging beginning an hour later. "I'm usually set by

11am then hand over all the points to the other departments."

But one question had to be asked - how are you dealing with that flying piano? "Well it's certainly one of my top priorities during the start of the day," he noted. "I'm fortunate I can bring in local riggers and really facilitate all the moving parts. So much of this set is intertwined and there is not a lot of flexibility in terms of positioning." Collectively with the piano and Urie, there was a dynamic load of 2,000lb. "When it flies, the system tacks the load transfer. The main goal is to ensure you have pure load disbursement throughout the rig."

Meanwhile on the ground, the SGPS stage had various automation tricks up its sleeve, including a toaster which gave Urie and dramatic entrance at the top of the show, flying into the view of the audience. The set also had a triangular truss extending out into the audience.

Creating a safe distance between the audience and the stage, as well as following the curvature of the stage, was a Mojo Barriers barricade system. "We were approached by Production Manager Aaron Draude a few months before the tour started," stated Mojo's Stanley Jilesen. "The band had a very long runway in their set and in the UK it was even longer. The production wanted it to follow the b-stage, runway, and FOH lines as neatly as possible. With our variety of corners and specials we were able to successfully follow the shape of the set and keep everyone safe." More than 150m of barricade were supplied for the tour. "This package included lots of the special G2 black Mojo Barrier," commented Jilesen. "We always use our G2 barrier on touring productions as it's lighter and smaller when collapsed so it takes less truck space."

AUDIO

At FOH, TPI met up with two familiar faces from the audio department; FOH

MORE HEADROOM. LESS DROPOUT.



PSM 900 In-Ear
Personal Monitoring System



PSM 1000 Dual-Channel In-Ear
Personal Monitoring System



NEW BODYPACK RECEIVERS RAISE THE BAR FOR IN-EAR PERSONAL MONITORING SYSTEMS

Artists and engineers around the world depend on Shure PSM In-Ear Personal Monitoring Systems to deliver a great performance. Now new P9RA+ and P10R+ bodypack receivers* significantly enhance the industry's favourite in-ear monitoring systems with even more headroom, better stereo separation and higher fidelity, along with strengthened RF stability, increased protection against RF dropouts and extended battery life.

* Backwards-compatible with existing PSM 900 and PSM 1000 systems.

www.shure.com/psm



Improved
sound quality



Better RF
stability



Increased
battery life



Lighting Designer and Operator, Alex Specht; Video Director Jack Edinger; SFX Crew Chief, John Lyons.

Engineers Spencer Jones and Monitor Engineer Jeremy 'Spud' Groshong. Having been with the band eight and six years respectively, both men have integrated themselves into the audio fabric of the band, seeing PATD grow into the arena act they are today.

"We've certainly expanded the crew over the years," reflected Jones, who used to juggle the roles of Production Manger and FOH Engineer. Clearly happy to now dedicate more time to audio.

Audio supplier Eighth Day Sound provided a d&b audiotechnik system consisting of 20 KSL8's for the main hang along with 6 GSL subs in the air. For side hangs there were 16 J-Series and 8 V-Series for the 270° hang. On the floor the low end came courtesy of 12 B22S with an additional 8 Y10s for front fills.

"I'm stoked to be using the new GSL and KSL from d&b," stated Jones. "In terms of PAs I think it's one of the best sounding systems in the world and one of the truest and most transparent boxes. Tons of power and punch without transforming your inputs."

He continued: "We have used Eighth Day as our supplier in the states numerous times and they have always been able to provide us with great PA's and control packages. Having a base in the UK made a nice transition as we brought the tour over." Also in the name of consistency, Jones was able to bring his entire control package with him for the European leg. "Over the years, this package has become more and more specified and detailed so it just made sense to bring it over rather than try and replicate it this side of the Atlantic."

At the core of the system was a DiGiCo SD5. "I really like the surface," Jones enthused. "For me, it's one of the most 'analogue' feeling surfaces but it also gives flexibility for workflow." The engineer has recently moved away from Waves plugins, opting for a more traditional outboard setup.

"For me, I just like having tools at my fingertips rather than screens and a mouse to control my mix."

The FOH Engineer elaborated on some of the necessities in his outboard rack. "Smart Research C2 compressor and Graphics for the mains, Distrsors for vocals along with a Bricasti M7 for reverb. I'm a big fan of the M7 as it's very warm and versatile." Another highlight on the rig were two Eventide Eclipses which he used for doubling alongside some light distortion for vocals.

"In terms of the show, one of my main concerns is keeping Brendon's vocals crisp, clear, and free from any feedback on the 32ft thrust, or the flying over the crowd piano. People love to sing along. It's certainly a vocal heavy show but I still love getting a nice big punch from the nine piece band. Full drums, plenty of low end, huge band sound but at a reasonable volume where the crowd's singing sits right in the mix. Sometimes you can't compete. It's a lot of fun when the room plays along. The d&b has certainly given me plenty of power, clarity, and head room to create a balanced mix."

In monitor world, Spud also opted for a DiGiCo system with an SD12. "I'm still rather new to the world of DiGiCo," admitted the Engineer. "This is my first album cycle using it and I was a bit apprehensive to make the change. It's been a bit of a learning curve and in the beginning I had to have a fellow engineer help set up my show file. But now I've been with it for a while I really don't see myself going back. It's pretty flawless." Part of the necessity to move over to the brand came down to the demands of the band's recent stage show, he explained. "We're now up to 80 channels. As well as the expanded sting section, we've also added a few new elements, especially on the drums." This included a Shure SM7 over the kick drum along with an additional overhead microphone. "I know Spencer is using a lot of the overhead mic in his mix to give more life to the drums. I'm using



See our new HDR technology powered by the Tessera SX40 at Infocomm 2019

World Leading 4K LED Video Processing

Booth 2889 (Use VIP Code BR0542)

BRING YOUR PERFORMANCE TO LIFE WITH HDR



www.bromptontech.com