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The Death of Dull on the Death of a Bachelor Tour

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THE DEATH OF DULL

Panic! At The Disco's *Death of a Bachelor* Tour

By Andrew King
Photos by Todd Kaplan

IN

a sense, Panic! At the Disco's fifth and most recent studio album, *Death of a Bachelor*, finds the band coming full circle.

Whereas its predecessor, *Too Weird to Live, Too Rare to Die!*, saw the quasi-theatrical rock outfit shift towards a darker, synth-heavy sound, their latest builds on that while simultaneously returning to the upbeat, more rock-centric stylings of their earlier material. It's simultaneously grandiose and easy to digest – sonically rich yet undeniably accessible. Basically, it's the pinnacle of their artistic evolution, tapping into each era of their expansive 13-plus-year career.

It's fitting, then, that the band's recently wrapped *Death of a Bachelor* tour would be their most elaborate and dynamic to date. Playing off of Panic!'s twisted cabaret image, the set design – which favoured LED video walls instead of physical set pieces – included five LED video "chandeliers," appointments like gold-painted ladders spanning the rear wall, and the addition of a horn section for a classy, sophisticated aesthetic that could sway from a *Great Gatsby*-inspired '30s motif to '50s Rat Pack swagger to lavish modernity with ease.

The production design was the product of a collaboration between Montreal-based creative firm Lüz Studio and the band's camp, including lighting designer Alex Specht, and the striking visuals did the band justice for their largest-scale headlining run to date.

The Design

Lüz Studio had previously worked with Panic! At The Disco on their 42-date co-headlining run with Weezer in summer 2016. That tour was something of a precursor to this one, with the band performing a set list favouring songs from the new album while also revisiting hits from their back catalogue.

"The Weezer co-headliner was kind of a warm-up phase for us," comments Specht, Panic!'s lighting designer for the past four years. "[Lüz Studio] got to know the show and the differences between the songs on the album and how they come off live, because it's a completely different dynamic."

For the proper *Death of a Bachelor* headlining run, Panic!'s management again invited Lüz Studio to submit a bid for the design.

"It was pretty much carte blanche; there wasn't anything specific they wanted to see," begins Matthieu Larivée, the founder and head designer with Lüz Studio. "Basically, we knew the band and we knew their energy.

We knew it was an arena tour and that it was selling well, so it was easy to pitch ideas because, instead of a general production design, we did our proposal song by song."

Lüz was awarded the contract in mid-December 2016, with the 36-date American tour kicking off on Feb. 24th, 2017 – "so it was pretty tight," Larivée puts in.

When Lüz was starting work on their design for the Weezer run, one of the first things they received to inform their direction was a photo of Panic! frontman Brendon Urie in a "very classy-looking tuxedo," and Larivée adds they were also instructed to play off of the album title and theme.

"We wanted a very dynamic production value for each song," shares Larivée – "very slick, but also very

dynamic, so we could play with lighting and 3D content and be versatile with the architecture."

This time out, the desired overall aesthetic was similar but with some evolution. Instead of a photo, this time, Lüz received an advanced look at the band's new logo – a mysterious cult-inspired mark that belongs in a Dan Brown novel.

"We played with that and tried to mix everything, so the back catalogue fits with the new era," Larivée explains. "So every time we played with that cult-like logo, there's architecture and visuals behind it, so we can do a mix of the band's different eras."

Once the contract was awarded, Lüz and the Panic! camp wasted little time diving into design refinements, going back-and-forth with ideas and

revisions based on Lüz's initial proposal.

"We wanted something big with a lot of negative space – especially with the video – which in turn left a lot of room for me, lighting wise," Specht reports from the band's perspective. "So for a good two months at the beginning, it was a strong collaborative effort and we were really impressed with what they were showing us."

He adds that the idea of video panels comprising the majority of the set intrigued him from the outset. "I'm always open to trying something new," he says. "It let us transform the stage and have a completely different look from song to song, especially with the automation. I quite enjoyed it."

With video being the primary set element, Larivée says they put a strong focus on content creation. "We knew they didn't want generic stuff on the screen. Whenever we were using video, there had to be a reason for it. It could be a reference to a music video from the past, or a specific era, because the fans, they know everything. It's kind of crazy (laughs)."

Indeed, Panic! At The Disco is known for its devout and enthusiastic fan base, which made Lüz's focus on only using meaningful imagery a welcome one, and the company actually created the content for all 20 songs in the set in-house.

Larivée founded Lüz Studio in 2007. While his background is primarily in lighting design, several years ago, he began integrating video into his work and eventually hired a video content director to work with him. Since then, the company has grown steadily, now counting 15 full-time employees and a stable of

about 10 regular freelance collaborators with a multi-disciplinary focus.

"[Lighting] used to be our main business, but as we seek to attract more work in Western Canada and the United States, we often work with acts that already have an LD and work more with video and overall production design," shares Larivée.

The main strength that comes with a diverse team with diverse backgrounds is that they can ensure a cohesive overall design. "So we can bring a unique perspective to let the video breathe and work a lot in negative spaces with black voids to leave the LDs room to play. I really think you can feel that signature in our work."

Once the design was finalized, Sycamore, IL-based production services supplier Upstaging, Inc. was tapped to provide the tour package. The primary fixture families put to use included Clay Paky's A.leda B-EYE K20 LED moving heads, a complement of Robe BMFL Spots, CycFX 8s, and PATT 2013s, and GLP impression X4s.

"We knew we wanted the B-EYEs because of the spectrum of effects you can achieve with them," Larivée says about Clay Paky's hybrid wash, beam, and effects fixture. "That was one of our top choices because of the versatility."

Specht adds that he had a chance to really explore the ins and outs of the B-EYEs and was impressed with the built-in macros and some of the looks they could achieve.

This tour marked Larivée's first experience with the BMFL Spots, and overall, he was impressed. "It was good for this show because we

wanted something very strong that could cut through all of the video panels," he says, noting the fixtures were used for the motion-controlled chandeliers, loaded into the upstage ladder structure, and on the floor.

Specht had previously encountered the BMFLs on some one-off and festival shows, though this was his first time having them on the road. "They definitely make a solid beam," he attests, noting that's where he found them most effective. "I had to work around the video, so if I really wanted to punch through, I could pull down the video with the inhibitive fader and get the beams moving."

The PATT 2013s were used relatively sparingly, loaded atop each of the chandeliers and turned on for two songs in one of the standout looks from the show.

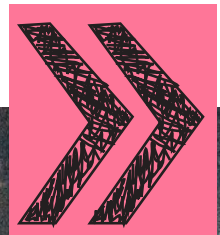
As for the custom-created video content, it was delivered through 130 ROE MC7 7.5-mm LED video panels and 52 ACASS-Systems Modlock 7 interlocking LED panels, arranged into tall left, centre, and right columns on the upstage wall, plus the curved surfaces atop the five chandeliers. Also, Upstaging's proprietary Saber 500 LED strips relayed low-resolution support content.

The content was controlled via a pair of Hippotizer Boreal media servers with Barco E2 Jr Event Master processors, programmed by Lüz Studio's David Rondeau.

Larivée notes the main reason they opted for LED panels across the board in lieu of projection was the scalability required for this tour.

"We're used to doing shows in arenas, but here, we're working in 180 or 220-degree [configurations], so we needed to work really closely with everyone – the sound designer and rigger. We had to identify the middle range of the arenas and adapt the show so it could scale up or down as needed. That's why we avoided projection, because it can be a nightmare when you're scaling the show from day to day."

Another logistical challenge stemmed from the fact that the tour was already routed and a deal was done with promoter Live Nation before Lüz even entered the picture, so there was a set number of trucks and the total package had to fit a predetermined footprint.



DEATH OF DULL



The Execution

Specht says the most unique aspect of the *Death of a Bachelor Tour* compared to the band's previous outings largely came down to the set list. "It's definitely been a great progression, visually, over the past few years, but a lot of it was song selection. It was a really strong set of songs combining the new album with the older hits, and we could get really theatrical with it. Having the piano reveal and with all we could do with the video backdrop, it was a very dynamic show. There was always something different happening."

The show opened with "Don't Threaten Me with a Good Time," the second track on *Death of a Bachelor*, and the accompanying visuals were based on the song's music video – specifically the love-craving squid, which Lüz Studio recreated with 3D animation.

As Specht alluded to, the set was heavy on cuts from *Death of a Bachelor*, including the singles "Hallelujah" and "Emperor's New Clothes"; however, the majority of the performance was comprised of hits spanning Panic!'s four preceding releases, including favourites like "Ready to Go (Get Me out of My Mind)" from 2011's *Vices & Virtues*, the arena anthem "Miss Jackson" from *Too Weird to Live, Too Rare to Die!*, and the song that launched the band to fame over 10 years ago, "I Write Sins, Not Tragedies," from their debut LP, *A Fever You Can't Sweat Out*.

"Nine in the Afternoon," the lead single from the Beatles and Beach Boys-inspired sophomore effort *Pretty Odd*, dials things down in the first half as Urie rises from the stage at a grand piano, accented by heavy beams from overhead and a visual design based on a clock shop.

The second half of the set is punctuated by "Crazy=Genius," featuring a striking mental asylum motif accented with some deep reds.

Specht says he favoured his looks for some of the "moodier" songs from the catalogue, like "The Ballad of Mona Lisa" and "Nicotine." "I really enjoyed the dark light, low contrast looks of those songs and the overall effect," he shares.

A true highlight comes near the end of the show with the song "Girls / Girls / Boys." As Larivée explains, Urie is a strong ambassador for LGBTQ+ causes and people embracing who they are. "So the content for that song used to be a bit more 'sexy,' but for this one, management pitched that we make it stronger to relay that message."



(L-R) IAN DUBOIS & MATTIEU LARIVÉE OF LÜZ STUDIO, P!ATD LD ALEX SPECHT & LÜZ STUDIO'S DAVID RONDEAU

At the first show of the tour in Uncansville, CT, a fan brought in thousands of paper hearts of various colours and distributed them throughout the audience. When the band performed "Girls / Girls / Boys" near the end of the set, which touches on Urie's personal experiences with bisexuality, the fans put the hearts in front of their cell phones and flashlights, creating a truly stunning multi-coloured display throughout the arena that matched the vibrant rainbow-themed onstage visuals.

"After that, fans were doing it at every show, so if you go on Instagram or YouTube and check out some of the footage from the tour, that's probably the moment you'll see the most," Larivée says – again, another testament to Panic!'s loyal following.

The *Death of a Bachelor* spectacle culminates with "Victorious" from the newest album – a favourite for both Larivée and Specht. "It really ends the show

off with a bang," says Specht. The visuals feature a surreal 3D scene with buildings and streets folding over, semi-inspired by Christopher Nolan's visually-stunning blockbuster *Inception*. "I was able to get really intricate on the programming and put a lot of tricks in it," the LD adds. "It's an explosive song, so when you bring it to light in an arena – no pun intended – it's huge."

The *Death of a Bachelor Tour* was a massive achievement for Panic! At The Disco and their collaborators in a number of ways, hitting new highs for the long-running Las Vegas band in terms of venues, attendance, and overall production value. That included a sold-out show at New York City's iconic Madison Square Garden.

Specht offers plenty of credit to Lüz Studio and the various members of its creative team that had a hand in bringing these shows to life. "They've got a great, solid team between the animators and



graphic designers and production pros," he says, "and it's been great working with them. I think we brought our fans something really special."

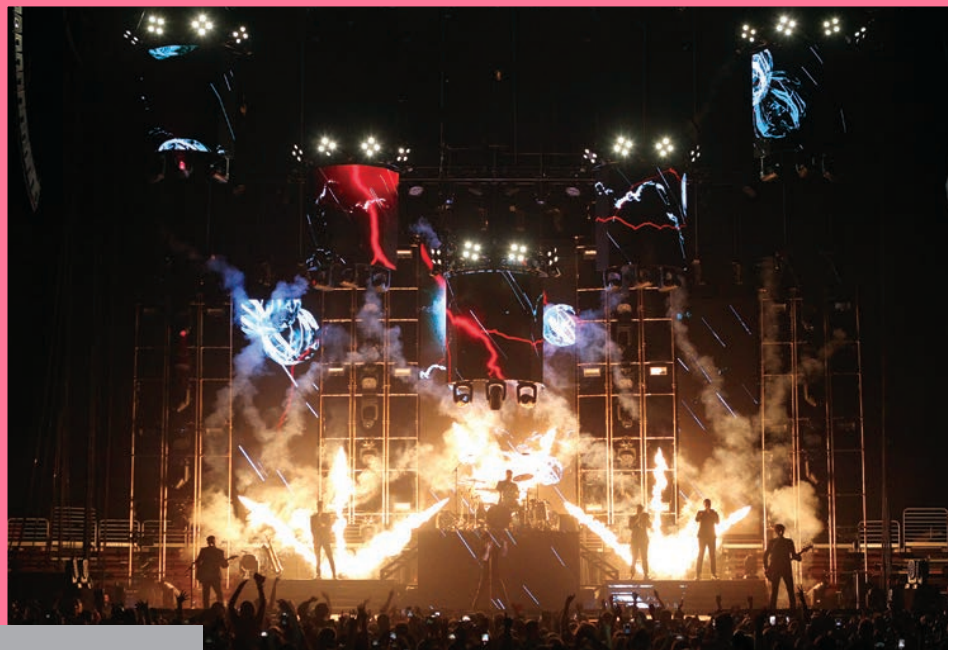
Larivée takes over: "At the end of the day, we were creating something custom-tailored to the band, so it was cool to work with all the different collaborators involved – and again, collaboration is great when you know why you're there and everyone's on the same page."

Death of a Bachelor and its subsequent tour represent a big artistic statement for Panic! At The Disco at this point in their career, leaving many of the band's loyal fans wondering just what they'll do next.

Whatever that might be, it has a lot to live up to.



Andrew King is the Editor-in-Chief of Professional Lighting & Production.



GEAR AT A GLANCE

A look at the production package for the *Death of a Bachelor* Tour

LIGHTING

- 50 x Robe BMFL Spots
- 45 x Clay Paky Aleda B-EYE K20s
- 25 x GLP Impression X4s
- 27 x Chauvet Strike 4 LED Blinders
- 24 x Martin Atomic 3000 Strobes
- 10 x Robe CycFX 8s
- 8 x Clay Paky Sharpys
- 6 x Robe PATT 2013s
- 6 x Vari-Lite VL3015LT Spots
- 5 x Reel EFX Hazers
- 2 x MA Lighting grandMA 2 Consoles (Full)
- 2 x MA Lighting grandMA NPUs

VIDEO

- 2 x Green Hippo Hippotizer Boreal Media Servers
- 2 x Barco Event Master E2 Jr Screen Management Systems
- 130 x ROE MC7 7.5 mm LED Panels
- 96 x Upstaging Saber 500 LED Video Strips
- 52 x ACASS Systems Modlock 7 Interlocking LED Panels

AUTOMATION

- 14 x Kinesys High-Speed Motors

CREATIVE TEAM

- Production:** Crush Music
- Band Manager:** Scott Nagelberg
- Production Manager:** Spencer C. Jones
- Tour Manager:** Tony Marino
- Road Manager:** Zechariah Hall
- Production Design:** Lüz Studio
- Lighting Design:** Alex Specht & Lüz Studio
- Video Content:** Lüz Studio
- Intermission Video:** Brendan Walter
- Lighting, Rigging, Video & Trucking Vendor:** Upstaging, Inc.
- Staging:** All Access Staging
- Pyro & FX:** Strictly Fx