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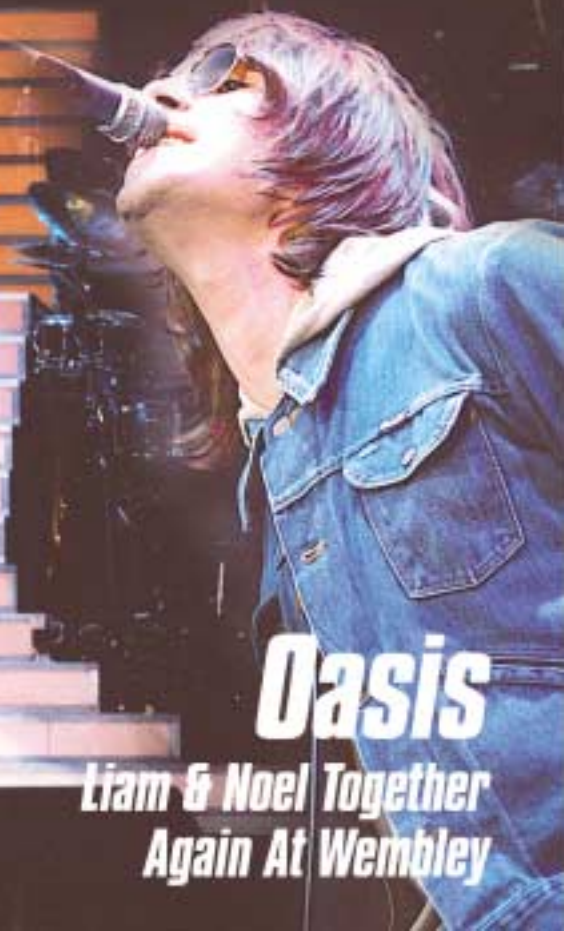
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Supreme Sound

*Diana Ross & The Supremes Debut
New Electro-Voice X-Line System*



The Witches Of Eastwick

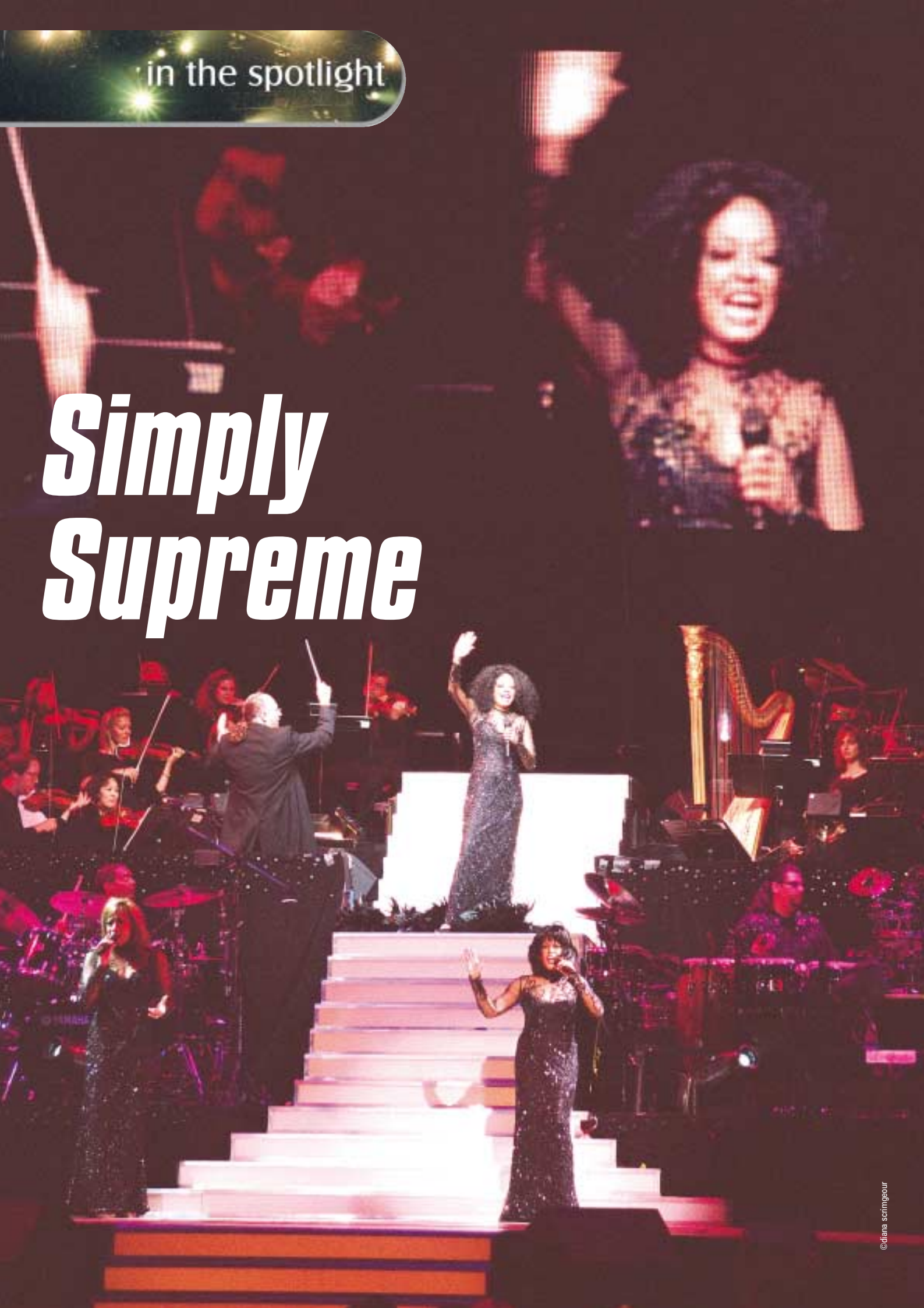


Oasis

*Liam & Noel Together
Again At Wembley*

in the spotlight

Simply Supreme





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DIANA ROSS & THE SUPREMES The Return To Love Tour In Toronto & New York City

The Supremes reunited with Diana Ross, and touring with Electro-Voice's new line array system? It was enough to get TP's Diana Scrimgeour across the Atlantic, but little did she know just how exclusive her coverage would turn out.

Diana Ross' much publicised *Return To Love* tour started out with the best intentions. Rather than her and the band, as in her previous outings, this time she decided to also incorporate a 38-piece orchestra, throw in a number of supporting dancers, and lest we forget, two '70s period Supremes.

The tour was planned as a 28-date intensive back-to-back around North America, playing to medium and large indoor arenas. Unfortunately, it kicked off amidst gross media hype surrounding the dispute between Miss Ross and original Supreme Mary Wilson, who reportedly turned down a \$2 million offer to join forces again. Whether this impacted on the public's perception of the tour is open to dispute, nonetheless there is no getting away from the fact that ticket sales did not live up to expectations.

By the time I arrived in Canada for the large Toronto show there were rumours abounding that dates would be cancelled, but it was hardly anticipated that two nights later I would be present at the final performance of the tour at Madison Square Garden in New York, pending the announcement of its termination by the promoters TNA/SFX the following day.

Lucky, then, that we got the coverage we did. I witnessed two memorable shows which ably illustrated Ms. Ross's vocal talents and ongoing showmanship. She clearly still has a devoted following, not least amongst her band and crew members who were all shocked by the sudden termination of the tour, not least because a great amount of planning and design had only just begun to realise its results.

Far from a small production, the tour had eight 53 foot trucks full to bursting, led by Production Manager/FOH Engineer Lars Brogaard. Originally, Diana involved producer Scott Sanders who recommended using TV and installation designer Jeremy Railton as her Set Designer. While Diana prefers an in-the-round show, which brings her into greater contact with her audience, this time around the



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Top: Taidus Vallandi and Lars Brogaard get to grips with the FOH mix. Above: Making its touring debut on this sadly short-lived tour, Electro-Voice's new X-Line vertical line array sound system overlooks X-Array sidefills at the Air Canada Center in Toronto.



promoters favoured the proscenium alternative.

With production meetings taking place over the set until the very last minute, this finally left Tait Towers with three and a half weeks to complete the build. It was tight, as Brogaard recalled: "We had set pieces coming in on the morning of the first show day."

A large-scale, 56 foot deep set, rising from the front stage in tiers with a central dividing staircase, it had to accommodate the orchestra at the top (on three levels), the 14-strong band in the middle, and still leave a stage large enough to accommodate Diana, the Supremes and 10 dancers. The space underneath the orchestra was put to good use, with the backline under the first level, a walkway under the second and the busy dressing rooms under the third.

X-LINE DEBUT

This tour significantly marked the first outing of the latest in PA line array technology. Resulting from a collaboration between Electro-Voice in the US, EV/Midas/Klark Teknik in the UK and Westfalen Sound in Germany, EV's new X-Line system is the next technological step forward from L-Acoustics' V-DOSC predecessor.

Bob Doyle of Klark Teknik, Carl Cordier of Westfalen Sound and Lars Brogaard have long enjoyed a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and equipment. This latest venture is the logically

progressive step in their collective quest for the best and the result is a product which is born of hands-on knowledge.

Mike O'Neill and Dave Carlson of Electro-Voice have been totally dedicated to the success of this new product, and to this end sought the expertise and input on the development of their new X-Line system from many eminent sound engineers. Previously, Westfalen Sound had been very

committed to the development of V-DOSC, training engineers extensively in its use and refining the product as far as it could. Brogaard explained: "The V-DOSC system that Westfalen Sound has and the one that everyone else has is completely different,

for one thing it has different amplification. It doesn't sound the same as one that goes out with another company — it's a different product, and we took all that knowledge with us to work on this EV box." Carl Cordier concurred: "EV has brought out something which is very different although the idea of the line array is based on the same principle. I think it will be very successful, not least because it is available to everybody. For Westfalen, it is a good tool to add on to the V-DOSC system which after all is 10 years old now. We definitely were ready for something new on the market which is a step further on in the right direction."

Brogaard explained: "The EV guys have been great. They are some of the nicest designers you could ever meet; their egos are not in the way and they are open to suggestions. Anything we have come up with so far has been taken to heart and they've done something about it. We are still working on making it better and better every day. It has been very exciting to have been involved right from the start. I believe David Bryson [monitors] and I were the first engineers to go up and have a listen to the four new prototypes of the system in March. It was the best sounding system I had ever heard without having spent time equalising it. They have done a fantastic job to get it out here for us to road test it."

The now in-vogue line-array technology has actually been around since the 1930s. Bob Doyle expanded on this: "For the last 30 years as live shows marched down their evolutionary path, we tended to put more speakers up, thinking that the more we put up the louder it was going to be. In one sense that's true, however, you get to a saturation level and cone filtering/time arrival problems and phase cancellation, and while you might get a cabinet which sounds good on its own, when you start piling them up eventually they start to sound pretty horrible. There's also the issue of cost as you increase the size of the system to get that extra 3dB."

The Line Array, Doyle explained, avoids this by employing the phenomenon of summing. "The trick is to specifically design a cabinet so when it's placed adjacent to the next one, the audio effect is 'summed' and



Special guest Luther Vandross made an appearance with Miss Ross.



Some of the best ears in the business: (L-R) Dave Cousins of Winnipeg PA firm Sound Art, Klark Teknik's Bob Doyle, Taidus Vallandi, Lars Brogaard and David Webster of Klark Teknik, plus (inset) Carl Cordier of Westfalen Sound.



A new look Mark Payne on lights.



Video Engineer Andre Nolan and Video Director John Basile of Video Pac Systems.



Screenco's Dave Crump.

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not subtracted. The only way you can do that is by hanging them in a line, and the trick in SPL applications is to really fine-tune that summing capability. For instance, the kelp angle between the cabinets is very critical, as it will virtually collapse the vertical dispersion [which could excite the roof and cut down intelligibility] and enhance the horizontal dispersion which is exactly what you want. Things that worked against you actually work WITH you in a line array."

EVERYTHING CHANGES

Powered by EV P3000 amplifiers, each enclosure in the X-Line system houses two 15-inch low frequency drivers, a proprietary cone-driven mid-range arrangement designed with neodymium magnets, plus three high frequency compression drivers, also newly designed for this cabinet. Each box has an intrinsic dispersion characteristic of 10° vertical and 90° horizontal, but once hung to produce a line source, the stack will deliver 5° of vertical and almost 100° of horizontal dispersion.

It is natural for comparisons to be drawn with V-DOSC, X-Line's direct competitor in the marketplace. Especially since, over the past three years, Brogaard had been championing V-DOSC exclusively. Asked about his change of allegiance, he replied philosophically: "You know, everything changes all the time. There's always going to be a new product coming out that's better, and while V-DOSC is still a fantastic system if there's something better out there I will take it. Even without taking the sound quality into account, mechanically this system is a lot easier to work with. It rolls in and out, it flies in no time, the handling of it is much easier which makes it much faster to work with than

V-DOSC."

He laughed: "AND you don't have to be a rocket scientist to use it either! It's a lot more user-friendly which I think is very important. Sonically, it has a great low end which is much more powerful, and the projection is truer than with V-DOSC. For example, with X-Line, the system sounds identical from the front to the back of the auditorium, as opposed to V-DOSC which loses a large proportion of its high end

"We have come a long way with this system in the three weeks that it's been out with this tour; it's been an invaluable opportunity to fine tune it. I must say, however, that this is by no means the final launched product. It will be launched officially in September at the PLASA Show in London and at AES in Los Angeles, and by the time we get there some quite fundamental changes will have taken place. In fact from a technological standpoint we'll be fine-tuning this for quite a while."

There is no exclusivity in X-Line's availability and since Line Array technology needs to be understood, EV is planning a course for those who wish to learn it. Telex Communications will run a Telex Learning Academy to educate people in its use and how to get the best results, and distributors worldwide will have access to it. Doyle concluded: "We want to make this knowledge available to every serious player and be able to train them in its use."

On the Ross/Supremes tour, for the larger 16,000 to 20,000 seat arenas, they were using 40 cabinets, flown as a front stack of 12 per side and, being a 270° show, there was a slightly delayed back stack of eight per side. In the smaller arenas they were going down to eight and four per side, making a total of 24. This made for excellent coverage, as

Brogaard pointed out: "This way we haven't needed to sound correct them when we've been selling tickets way up high. People can hear clearly right at the back because they're all up there singing and dancing!"

The system was supported by EV Xds 2 x 18 sub-bass cabinets on the floor, eight per side. Due to the nature of the stage, which had to be completely open, these were positioned in a row rather than



In monitor world, the one and only David Bryson was making the stage shake. Mixing on a Midas Heritage 3000, his monitor system incorporated 32 JBL 2450CM active three-way compact wedges. Sidefills were three Xb bass cabinets and three Xf long-throws per side, from the EV X-Array series.

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once you get into the reverberant field. The amazing thing with X-Line is that you're not even aware that you're listening, standing or sitting in the reverberant field of the venue."

Bob Doyle added: "I think this is the most open and most musical line array available at the moment. It has also, importantly, been designed to enhance and build on our existing X-Array product. The systems are totally complimentary.



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being stacked in a block. They were also using six of the smaller EV 1152 cabinets (three per side) for the near-field, and an underhung EV 1122 on the front stack to cover the very front rows.

FRONT END

At FOH, the Midas logo reigned supreme. Brogaard was mixing the band on an XL4 while Taidus Vallandi handled the orchestra on an XL3 with an added stretch. Both consoles were fully automated with flying faders. Between them they were running over 100 channels, including all the effects and returns with 90-plus inputs from the stage for the band and orchestra.

Effects included AMS reverbs and delays, and Lexicon 224s. Brogaard commented: "We don't actually use many effects — mainly reverbs to enhance the voices and the snare, and sometimes the keyboards." Meanwhile, both the X-Line system and monitors are processed by Klark Teknik's new four input/eight output DN9848 digital processor, which is remotely computer-controlled via its own proprietary software combined with Stardraw. Doyle explained: "We've been fine-tuning that as well — we've altered some of the software operations and de-bugged it further."

More KT gear came in the form of DN1248 12 input/48 output active splitters which were largely responsible for the complete absence of system noise prior to the shows. Notably, its mic input is the same used for the mic-pre in the Midas Heritage 3000.

In use were some close-up contact Schertler mics for the orchestra string section which enable high level output but pick up no external noise. Each and every member of the orchestra had their own mic. Furthermore, there were 16 EV S40 speakers mounted on stands and scattered around the orchestra for monitoring.

Certainly having to carry out staggered soundchecks, to accommodate band and orchestra in advance of the singers, meant a tighter than normal schedule. Since it did not make economical sense to take a resident orchestra on tour, Chicago-based Arnie Roth of AWR Music had the formidable job of rehearsing a new group of players at each venue, prior to the full soundcheck with the band. The punishing schedule was looking remarkably effortless, probably because, as Brogaard pointed out: "We've got the 'A Team' out here, and it doesn't get any better than that! Some of us have worked together for around 20 years and we're one big happy family."

Asked to comment on Ms. Ross's extraordinary voice, Brogaard replied: "She's a great singer and the amazing thing here is that all the songs are song in the same pitch they were recorded in 30 years ago. It blows you away. I love working with her because she gets so involved with everything she does. She's hands-on and always available to discuss things. There are very few artists you can do that with."

LIGHTING THE 'BLACK BOX'

Set Designer Jeremy Railton brought in Marilyn Lowey as Lighting Designer who hired her own programmers to work alongside Lighting Director Mark Payne. "I think Marilyn did a good job under the circumstances," said Payne, referring to the fact that the eventual set did not match his expectations. "Essentially, we were lighting a black box and it's very difficult to get a black box to do anything! Marilyn did a great job of cueing everything up and programming it, but at the end of the day they wanted something a little more hands on with a slightly more rock'n'roll feel to it."

However, the end result was still more cabaret than hard core rock'n'roll, which after all is more the nature of the artist. The set also lent itself to this genre: the stairs lit up from beneath in different colours, and starcloth edged the different stage



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levels.

Supplied by Light & Sound Design, a lot of the original lighting was cut back during the start of the tour, due to the fact that it wouldn't load in and out with ease, and also that the original design incorporated two tower hanging side arms which blocked too many seats. The horseshoe-shaped lighting rig was designed around the semi-circular curtain which hid the orchestra and band for the overture at the start of the show. The curve was reflected in the downstage truss which was supported by a lot of side lights stage left and right for the orchestra and the dancers downstage.

There were eight spots at FOH, two rear spots on Diana, one rear on each Supreme, and head and shoulder spots on the front truss for Diana. These were usually colour-coordinated to match the girls' matching costumes. Hence it followed, as Payne pointed out: "When you've got the video, and a shot of the three girls all wearing a steely green sparkly suit, green is dominating the scene. It's better to just compliment it."

Payne laughed when trying to name his kit. "I really can't remember it all! We've got Hogs, Scans, Studio Colors, CF7s, Colour Faders, Molechangers, 9-Lites... we also need a bit of smoke so we have a few crackers on stage at the sides. When working with LED screens, if you get too much smoke in the air it starts to take on a blob vibe, so I like to keep it to a minimum."

Miss Ross likes to see her audience as much as possible and consequently there was a lot of

audience lighting. Payne continued: "I am very aware of people getting fatigued with audience lights so we try and balance it between the soft molefays and the hard edged stuff. It's a very well-constructed show and it's started to get a really good flow to it. We didn't really get a full rehearsal so the first few shows were like dress rehearsals for us. However, I do a lot of manual stuff because it's all so different every night."

"I've got my standard set list, but towards the end of the show when the audience are going for it, I like to make it a bit madder. But if Miss Ross isn't really buzzing I don't do that. I'm very much in tune with her, and we're all here to look after her interests. I'll get a message from her backstage during the show saying that on the next song she wants to be in darkness until she sings, for instance, so I have to dive in and adapt to that. At the end of the day it's a blinding show. It really rocks."

VIDEO

Since he was involved with Prince's shows, Lars Brogaard has been using the well-trusted combination of Video Pac Systems (VPS) and Screenco to supply video to all his tours, and this time it was no different.

Along with Barco Reality projectors for the side screens, VPS supplied five Sony D30 cameras whose signals ran through Grass Valley 110 and Sony 3100 mixers, with tape playback from BVW75 Beta SP machines. The system

featured an Alta DVE and both the programme and preview outputs were both fed into an Electrosonic Vector video wall processor supplied by Screenco. Purchased by Screenco for the last Eurythmics tour, this clever box of tricks enabled them to stitch two images together or show one image across two screens. This process was used a great deal during the entire show, keeping Video Director John Basile of VPS and Engineer Andre Nolan very busy.

Diana Ross had been impressed by the screen on the last Rod Stewart tour and wanted to achieve something similar on hers. Screenco supplied the central video screen, which was in fact two entirely separate 15mm Saco LED screens, five modules by five modules (each one 5m wide x 3.5m high) each with separate processors, joined together to appear as one 10m wide x 3.5m high screen.

Dave Crump of Screenco explained: "We perfected this with the Eurythmics along with the Vector which enables us to do things that other videowall processors probably wouldn't. We're able to either show one image stretched across both screens or two entirely separate images side by side, which is what happens throughout the show."

Tim Parry was Screenco's man on the road, having had enormous experience both with previous Rod Stewart tours and the Eurythmics. Because the tour was confirmed so late, Screenco had to sub-hire the system from Saco, the only difference being that all the systems Screenco owns and operates elsewhere have had their modules completely rebuilt, making them mechanically better, quicker to

DIANA ROSS & THE SUPREMES

rig and with a totally invisible join between the screens.

Crump pointed out: "The major difference with the system we operate is that we have a new serial digital data distribution system which is unique to Screenco. None of the other rental companies who claim to be operating Saco have this system, and it significantly improves the visual performance of the screen. Unfortunately, all of our stuff was booked out on other things and unavailable. We have a very long-standing relationship with Lars and the last thing I want to do is let him down, therefore we sub-hired it."

Artistic Director Phil Griffin, assisted by Rosanne Shelnut, sourced the video imagery. They were using a combination of live footage (Martin Luther King at the start of the show), some old film clips from the

days of the original Supremes, plus a range of interesting graphics. John Basile commented: "It took us about four shows to find the right balance", while Andre Nolan added, "We've got tons of footage, but you have to work out what you can use and then edit it." Unfortunately, as it transpired, they never had the chance to achieve this.

AFTERMATH

As TP went to press there was still confusion over what actually happened to this tour. It appears that the promoters TNA/SFX set ticket prices too high (the best seats were US\$250) and couldn't fill the arenas they had booked, although Diana Ross was adamantly against the cancellation. We were told that ongoing talks between Miss Ross's management and the promoters about reinstating some of the dates would

be fruitful, but from the production point of view it appeared impossible to put the exactly the same tour together again. Then, on July 23 came the news that the tour was officially cancelled.

Even before the band and crew received the news that they were being flown home from New York, people were on the phone putting feelers out for other work and a number of crew members flew straight to other tours. The implications of this situation bode ill for the touring industry.

Back in London, Lars Brogaard said: "I don't understand the policies. There were some dates that really should have been cancelled because when the costs of loading the show in and out exceed ticket revenue it doesn't make any sense. There was a financial side that couldn't be worked out and it's a great shame. Miss Ross is bitterly disappointed."

DIANA ROSS & THE SUPREMES — Key Production Crew & Suppliers:

Promoters: TNA/SFX • Show Director: Steve Binder • Artistic Director: Phil Griffin • Supremes Tour Manager: Bianca Henderson • Tour Accountant: Dave Clarke • TNA Tour Manager: Craig Evans • Band Tour Manager: Peter Mackay • Assistant Band Tour Manager: Stefan Baker • Choreographer: Paul Househam • Production Manager & FOH Engineer: Lars Brogaard • Production Assistant: Elizabeth Duncan • Stage Manager: Carl Tovey • PA: Westfalen Sound • FOH Sound Engineer: Taidus Vallandi • Monitor Engineer: David Bryson • Sound Crew: Paul Johnson, Aiden Thompson, Martin McLoughlin • Backline: Trevor Dawkins, Michael Laing • Lighting: LSD • Lighting Designer: Marilyn Lowey • Lighting Director: Mark 'The Pope' Payne • Lighting Crew Chief: Ian Tucker • Lighting Crew: Nigel Monk, Roy Hunt, Vivian Slodki, Virginia Corbet • Head Rigger: Peter Rayel • Video Screens: Screenco • Cameras: Video Pac Systems • Video Director: John Basile • Video Engineer: Andre Nolan • Video Cameras: Bart Norman • Video Projection: Jeff Crane • LED Screen Tech: Tim Parry • Set Design: Jeremy Railton/Entertainment Design Corp. • Set Construction: Tait Towers • Carpenters: Corrado Cecere, Terry Ryalls, Gary Jacobs • Special Effects: Artistry In Motion • Trucking: SOS Transportation Inc. • Buses: Senators Coaches • Freight: Rock-It Cargo • Catering: Eat Your Hearts Out

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PA Towers
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