

CONCERTS



Photos: Todd Kaplan

CREED

Comes Full Circle

THE POPULAR POST-GRUNGE BAND RETURNS, AFTER A SEVEN-YEAR HIATUS, WITH A WHOLE NEW DESIGN APPROACH

By: Sharon Stancavage

After seven years apart, the members of Creed have returned to the stage with a new concert tour; a new album, *Full Circle*, is also on the way. Although the band's sound is much the same, its look is different. There's a very different attitude, too, as evidenced by the directions given to the tour's production designer, Butch Allen, of Ugly American Productions. "Their creative direction was to keep it ominous and dark—the opposite of how it looked last time," Allen reports.

And ominous is what the band got. The show featured sinister imagery, a saturated color palette from lighting units that insinuated themselves in and out of one's view, and a battery of explosive pyro effects.

Although Allen was given the direction to change the band's look as much as possible, he did work with a rather large item left over the last show: the set. "It's a Mark Fisher set, built by Tait Towers, and Tait did the rehab this time—we just tarted it up a bit," says the designer with a chuckle. The set consisted of a drum riser and upstage ramp that ran stage left to stage right. "It just proves that, with Mark Fisher, you can't go wrong," adds Allen. "Six or

seven years later, we could take the same stage, barely change it, and it would look like you've never seen it before."

Since Allen wasn't involved in the band's previous tour (tied to the album *Weathered*, in 2002) he turned to YouTube for research. "We watched the old show and looked for the items we could change most drastically," he says. He noticed that the previous show featured a great deal of video, most of it comprised of IMAG. Therefore, he planned to use video, but with a greater focus on content. The absence of IMAG at the center of the action wasn't really a problem, he notes: "Fortunately, side screens have become *de rigueur* in touring, and you don't need to feel compelled to always have IMAG on stage."

The tour's original video content was provided by Seattle-based MODE Studios; the firm has worked with Allen on several projects. "Bob Bonniol, from Mode, knocked out countless storyboards while the band was in rehearsals," Allen recalls. Once again, "ominous" was a key word in terms of content development. "This time around," says Bonniol, "they

wanted to speak to the dark journey of the mind, the darkness anyone might go through before seeing the light at the end of the tunnel."

To fulfill this brief, Bonniol created visuals designed to illustrate those dark journeys, using photos culled from his own collection. "I habitually take pictures wherever I go on the planet, so I have a fairly deep pool of stuff to reach into," he says. "I'd taken in pictures from Australia, New Guinea, and various Far East locations, which suddenly were immensely useful and topical." Such imagery was featured in "Faceless Man," while images of New York buildings were found in "Higher."

At times, Bonniol's image contained subtler revelations. "Our way of representing people was of paramount importance," he says. "When we revealed them, it was often only through shadows or a sliver of face—just enough to transmit the emotion they might be having."

To create the custom content, Bonniol and his team, which included Pablo Molina, Laura Kozuh, Colleen Bonniol, and programmer Sean Cagney, used a variety of programs for both Macs and PCs. "My number-one tool is

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After Effects,” Bonniol says. “I’ve been using it for 17 years. We’ve also started using Luxology’s Modo 401 for 3-D work at the studio. It’s just incredibly intuitive. For the Creed show, I used it to create deep 3-D compositions, particularly in content that featured fluid animations, like cloud stuff, and the super-popular exploding heads.”

The Mode Studios media server of choice is the Green Hippo Hippotizer, and the firm’s Hippotizer programming guru is Sean Cagney. “Sean is one of the few people on the planet I fully trust to go off in my stead and design a show that was as complex and involved as Creed, on a very short time frame,” Bonniol admits, noting that, due a previous commitment, he left Cagney to finish the project.

Working with Allen and the lighting programmer Corey Fitzgerald, Cagney created a variety of content. (Both programmers worked on MA Lighting grandMA consoles.) “Bob’s stuff is much more detailed and much more complex to build,” Cagney admits.

His own designs incorporated a wide variety of images layered into, over, and around IMAG in almost every other song. With this approach, Cagney avoided big blocky pictures of the band, or, as he puts it, “the band, with a TV of the band behind it.”

Cagney’s images included clouds and fire in “What If,” as well as some effects deployed in conjunction with the IMAG: “‘Never Die’ was a neon effect stacked with black and white on the IMAG,” he says. “Everything has this really gritty, pencil-drawn feel to it, but it’s full-on live IMAG, a dark heavy song that came out neat.”

Creed’s video system consisted of two separate elements, both provided by Nocturne Productions of DeKalb, Illinois: a 48’-wide-by-18’-high V7 LED wall, and a 50’-wide-by-10’-high V-Brite low-resolution wall hung underneath it. “Their original stage had a fascia that went all the way around it; we peeled the fascia off of it and dropped this V-Brite wall in behind,” says Allen. In this arrangement, “there was some wallpaper behind as you looked

through the set itself.”

Cagney was handed two V2 Hippotizers, which are several years old—Green Hippo is now up to V3.0.13—but their age didn’t dampen his enthusiasm. “Version Two of the Hippotizer has a lot of really powerful stuff in it,” he says. “You can make a gorgeous stuff out of it. I’ve done it before, and had no problem making it happen again.”

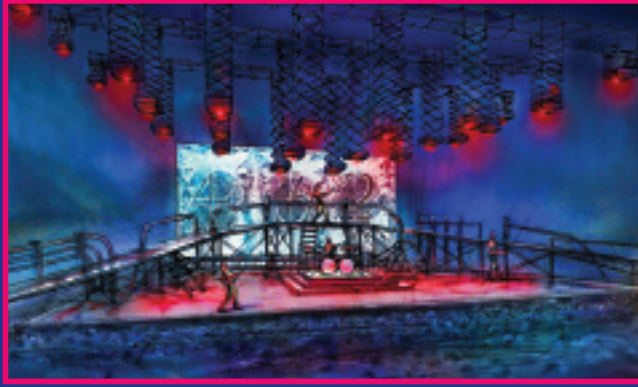
The Hippotizer also helped with synchronization, which is important, since, says Allen, “they are a real band, and the show didn’t run to time code or click track.” Cagney adds, “With the Hippotizers, I’ve had fantastic success with hitting ‘go’ and playing clips off multiple machines at the same time—with them in almost perfect sync.”

The parade of the pantographs

With the set and video system in place, Allen moved to the lighting: “Because the majority of the shows on the tour played sheds, I started out by drawing straight trusses. Then



Lorenzo Cornacchia, of Pyrotek, notes that the show made use of a variety of effects, including gerbs, cryo, and flames.



The above two sketches show how Fisher's set was adapted, as well tour's

I thought about how to break it up and make it interesting. That's when the pantographs came into my head."

Allen likes pantographs. A lot. "I thought, what's the most of these things I've ever seen?" he says. "It's always six or eight of them. So I started drawing them until I couldn't fit any more. The magic number proved to be 20, all of them moving throughout the show. "The bottom of each pantograph had a [Martin] MAC 2000 profile and two Martin Stagebars; at the top of each were two more Stagebars that acted as toners," he adds.

Allen was able to distinguish this tour in another way, as well. Since Creed was last on tour, the range of gear available to lighting designers has expanded greatly, especially in the area of LEDs. The design also featured 12 Philips Color Kinetics ColorReach Powercore in the trusses. "It's an architectural fixture," says Allen, and, indeed, Color Kinetics lists them for outdoor use. "Kevin Forrester, from Epic Production Technologies [the tour's lighting vendor] turned me onto them. They're a big block of LEDs, and each has a very tight beam spread with optional lenses." The ColorReach has an output of 5,000 lumens, and can reach over a distance of 500'. "Everyone who sees them can't believe them," he adds.

Also, Allen says, "Each [ColorReach] unit is broken up into two cells—a top and a bottom—so,

using the bit-mapping feature on the grandMA, we were really able to do some interesting things with them."

The rig also contained 23 Vari*Lite VL3500 washes, eight Robe Eight-light Moles, nine Philips Color Kinetics ColorBlast 12s, and 14 Martin Atomic 3000 strobes. "It was basically hard edges in the air, wash lights on the floor, and never the twain shall meet—at least not on this one," Allen says.

The band's original key word of "ominous" could be felt in the color palette as well, says Allen. "There was a lot of primary saturated color in the show." One color that didn't make the cut was pink. "I guess when people are screaming about blood and hellfire, pink is a bad choice," the designer adds with a chuckle.

Working alongside Allen's lighting rig was the pyro. "The band loves

AGP (the tour's management), Cornacchia immediately focused on the song "Bullets." "I told them I was keen on doing something huge for it, and they were into that," he says. The pyro team, which consisted of shooter Adam Biscow, gas specialist Norm Sigal, and pyro technician Kenn MacDonald, put together something huge: Lazy flames burned upstage throughout "Bullets," occasionally punctuated by puffs of apocalyptic dragon tails. Comets, strategically placed on Allen's pantographs, appeared during the song's last moments, for a big, dramatic finish.

In fact, pyro was featured in five numbers, including "Higher"—which was about fire in all shapes and forms—and "What If" and "What's This Life For?"—both of which featured cryojets. The latter song concluded with a stage-wide golden

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pyro," he confirms. The show made use of many effects—gerbs, cryo, and flames. "There's a lot of flames, but they're all different-looking," explains Lorenzo Cornacchia, vice president/director of operations of Pyrotek Special Effects of Las Vegas.

In the initial meeting that included the band, Allen, production manager Chris Kansy, and Steve Wood, of

gerb waterfall that seemed to last forever. "Would it be Creed without gerb waterfalls?" asks Cornacchia with a smile.

Then there was the concussion—and it wasn't your grandfather's concussion either. "For them, we used a concussion sampler," explains Cornacchia—in other words, an audio effect triggered by the pyro operator,



A Jands lighting console was used to control the flame effects.

but sent through the sound system.

It wouldn't be a Creed show without a big pyro finish, and Cornacchia didn't disappoint. "'My Sacrifice,' the last song, started with a pyro look, with gerbs, and the chorus had the dragon hits and all that sort of stuff," he says. At the very end, Cornacchia pulled out all the stops and unleashed his Pyrotek pyro prowess. "It looked like the whole set was going to blow up," he says.

A Pyro Digital PD controlled the effects, while a Jands lighting console controlled the flame dragons in all their forms. "Everything was DMX-capable and there were chasing capabilities, thanks to the Jands console," explains Cornacchia.

Studio sound on the road

The production's sound was handled by Greg Price, a road veteran who, among other gigs, spent 14 years

with Ozzy Osbourne. For Creed, Price used the latest Clair I-5 PA, provided by Clair Brothers Audio, of Lititz, Pennsylvania. "It's unbelievable," he says. "It's like no other PA system—this is a milestone in sonic ability and accuracy." The new system, which includes updated software, has obviously impressed Price: "I would have to say that all parts have come together, from the design of the cabinet, to the architecture of the networks that drive the system, to the software that has been applied to the system to make it perform."

The sound rig consisted of 12 I-5A and 12 I-5B (bass) cabinets hung side by side. "I also have I-3 cabinets for side fills—they're a one-system box; there is no bass cabinet with them, so I had eight of them hanging in a line array per side," he reports.

Price's PA rig also included eight Clair BT218 sub bass cabinets, which

are nicknamed "Bow Ties" because do they indeed look like large black bow ties. "Originally, the system was designed for these subs to go in the center on the floor, with the steering software—you delay each pair as they go out," explains Price. However, he eventually moved them, because of their proximity to the fans. "When people are paying extra money for sound checks, having subs in the center is tough, because of the barricade and the access that everyone has. So I put them out on the wings underneath the PA system," he notes.

Although the tour generally played sheds, there were arena dates as well. "I designed the system so I could do 20,000 seats in an arena, and then do 7,500 in a small shed," says Price. In larger venues, the main PA expanded to 14 I-5As and 12 I-5Bs per side. "We also had six P-2

front-fill cabinets that we used on a per-show basis; they were placed where we thought we'd need near-field coverage for those outlying arenas around the stage."

The I-5 system was managed by a Dolby Lake processor. Many use this product for tweaking a system for a particular venue, but it offers other benefits, as well. "The DLP enables us, on the user end, to report back to the engineering tool at Clair Brothers," says Price. "All of my shows from every venue are stored on the computer, so every setup I've ever done is available to me."



The band's requirement for an "ominous" show extended to the video imagery.



Allen's rig mixed moving lights and LED units in a way that was new for the band.

For mixing, Price's console of choice is the Digidesign VENUE D-Show console, which, he says, allows him to bring studio sound to a live venue: "When we started this tour, I set up in a recording studio-type atmosphere. While the band was rehearsing, I was in another room with my studio speakers, my ProTools 8 rig, and my Digidesign Venue D-Show. As the band was rehearsing every day, I was recording and building my mix with ProTools, and, by the time we left rehearsals, I had it sounding like a record." Thanks to the technology in the new Clair I-5 cabinets and the D-Show, Price could replicate that sound outside of the

studio: "We showed up at the first venue. I plugged into the I-5s, and now, from a small recording studio to a 20,000-seat arena, I had it sounding like a record with very little change."

Since the D-Show is a digital console, there was no need for external outboard gear. However, Price had plenty of virtual gear: "I had tens of thousands of choices, from vintage gear to the latest offerings from t.c. electronic." These plug-ins included four vintage Fairchild compressors guitars and a plethora from Waves, located in Knoxville and Tel-Aviv. "Wave is really the premier plug-in—they have modeled vintage Neve strips, as well as the SSL

console," says Price. "I have every Solid State Logic plug-in, including the G console inputs." Those items, as well as Wave's Live Bundle, gave him unlimited flexibility, he says: "I was able to have some NEVE strips, I had some API and some SSL. They're modeled after vintage analog sound, and it's ridiculous how good it is."

On stage, Price used a variety of microphones. "We had Sennheiser's latest and greatest vocal mic—it's so new, I don't even know the number," he says with a laugh. "For the record, it was the MD 5235 wireless."

Like all front-of-house engineers, Price has his favored microphone brands. "I'm a big Sennheiser and Audio-Technica fan; Shure Brothers are not too far behind," he admits. The drums featured a mix of Price's favorite brands, along with Beyer Opus 88s on the toms, and AKG 41s on the overheads. Many of the guitars were on DIs; however, Price had an EV ND/38 on the bass.

Price is, of course, very particular about his gear. "I want to collect equipment that enables me and empowers me to give the best possible product that I can produce," he says.

Creed's tour wrapped up in the U.S. in October. Expect a new album out for the holidays and a tour in 2010. 📶