

LIVE DESIGN



JEFF RAVITZ ON THE WRECKING BALL TOUR, PART 4: PROGRAMMING AND CONTROL

Jul 11, 2012 10:39 AM, By Marian Sandberg



Click to enlarge rendering (courtesy of Bruce Rodgers, Tribe inc.).

When it came time to program Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band's *Wrecking Ball Tour*, designer Jeff Ravitz notes that they went right to an extensive onsite rehearsal and programming period at the Asbury Park Convention Hall in New Jersey with the entire rig and stage, a setup Ravitz calls the best previz imaginable.

Ravitz had to keep from obstructing sightlines with his lighting rig, thereby creating a horizontal, low-profile system. Because I like to keep the floor lighting as invisible as possible, we have integrated most of it into the stage, shooting up or out through holes and gratings, the designer says. Even our shin busters are buried halfway under the deck so only the head of the moving light is visible.

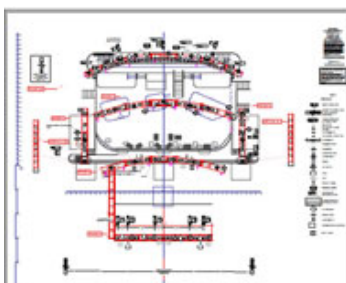
The lighting is operated on an **MA Lighting** grandMA for color and movement, effects, and level control of most automated lights and also on an **Avolites** Diamond 2 for wash and key light levels. The Avo gives us a very locked-in feel for musical accents and also allows for very quick recovery when the show changes unexpectedly, says Ravitz. By the way, that happens a lot.

Ravitz's team includes tour lighting director Todd Ricci, who just celebrated ten years touring with the band. He is the one that deals, on a daily basis, with the strengths and weaknesses of the design, says Ravitz. So, his input is of paramount importance. I regularly discuss my ideas with Paul Weller and Mark Fetto, who run **Morpheus Lights**. They both have a design sensibility, a broad knowledge of the pros and cons of particular equipment choices, and they can rein in my sometimes impractical notions, or help me achieve them when I can't be dissuaded. And, when I'm wracking my brain and twirling my fingers through my hair trying to make it all work on paper, my associate Kristie Roldan is a wonderful sounding board and voice of reason, as well as a knowledgeable resource to me. Once we get into rehearsals, Jason Badger, our programmer, helps make my wincing, guttural utterances, and arm waving into actual cues brilliantly. And then Todd, along with our grandMA operator, John Hoffman, actually execute those cues as good, if not better, than I imagined them to be. Finally, we can't do much until the system is up and working. Brad Brown is the genius behind that every day and also in the planning stages.



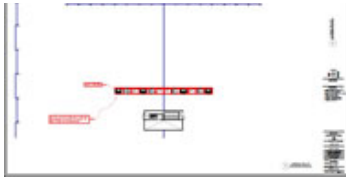
Click to enlarge rendering (courtesy of Bruce Rodgers, Tribe inc.).

Ravitz notes that, because the show is so dense with song material and cues, the lighting team tries to retain cues from previous tours. That is, we keep what worked and tweak what didn't, he says. That way, we devote our precious programming time to the new material. It would take a year to do justice to this show by reprogramming every song for every tour. So, Jason and I always work out the best way to port the old cues to the new equipment that sometimes is used to update our fixture choices tour by tour. Updates this time around included adapting the **Morpheus Lights** FaderBeam fade times and colors to the **Ayrton** Wildsun 500 LED fixtures Ravitz added for this tour. The show's DMX channels jumped up exponentially, and that needed to be wrangled between the programming side and the physical distribution side, he says.



Ravitz's choice of color varies, sometimes layering opposing colors against one another, while other times going more monochromatic. There was a time I was hyper-chromatic, but years of therapy cured that, he jokes. It's all about dimension for me. I really work hard to create shape, depth and separation from the background to convey the message of each cue. Color is a powerful tool for that.

Once the show was up and running, the daily challenges of lighting such a large band became a reality, but Ravitz gives props to his team. When this show runs as planned, it's difficult enough, he says. There are 19 people on stage, and we use 13 followspots. Todd is running a complicated show on the Avo, keeping an eye on John's running of the grandMA, all the while calling the 19 spots. When the show goes off book, so to speak, that's when the fun starts. The entire game



plan changes on a dime, and the operators must zero in on Todd's new cueing or else the house of cards will quickly collapse.

As for the biggest challenges in creating this tour, Ravitz recalls the period at Convention Hall when he spent days trekking back and forth between band rehearsals and programming sessions. Things were going slowly at band rehearsals as they worked out arrangements, and Bruce came up with new ideas, Ravitz says. Also, a percussionist was hired, and that required a lot of practice just to get him worked in.

Click to enlarge light plot (courtesy of Intensity Advisors).

Then, the lead singer went to Convention Hall one day to see some of the lighting elements. When he liked what he saw after a few tweaks, he signed off on it. Signed, sealed, and delivered, right? Not really. A few weeks later, when all departments finally came together for full rehearsals, Ravitz says, It took all of two hours for Bruce to walk out to front-of-house, scratch his chin, and change it all. That is, band members started moving right and left, back and forth on the stage, until he liked the composition better. Remember what I said about my perfect angles? All gone to seed in one fell swoop. So, we started rehangng lights and eating into programming time just doing physical changes. Then, it changed again and again over the course of a couple of weeks. Nobody had any hair left on their heads by this time. The stage crew dismantled and rebuilt the custom tour stage three times. So, it wasn't just lighting that bore the burden.

And how does Ravitz think that all worked out? When it was all done, once again, Bruce's instincts were completely right on. Damn it.

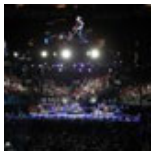
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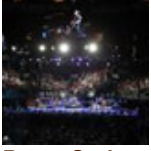


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