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NRG takes on Arcadia Spectacular's Spider

After 10 years of globe-trotting around the world amazing festival goers with a unique and brilliantly crafted production, Arcadia Spectacular finally made a long-awaited debut appearance in London earlier this month. It was on the UK's early May Bank Holiday weekend that it celebrated its 10th Anniversary and presented its own special brand of immersive production magic in the capital city.

The unique installation that is Arcadia's Spider appeared alongside fellow stages and temporary installations - The Bug and the Reactor - and was the centrepiece at a two-day festival at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, East London.

The 'Spider' installation was the brainchild of Pip Rush and Bert Cole some 10 years ago, although it was only in 2016 that the Arcadia production team invested in their own lighting rig - which features large quantities of Robe and Anolis fixtures. In fact, between all the intelligent heads and architectural fixtures, there are around 200 fixtures on the Spider, linked up by around 8kms of cable.

The permanent Arcadia team remains small and so to supplement the production crew in London, Robe's NRG (Next Robe Generation) was approached to supply some students to become temporary members of the spectacular. Enter Chloe Boucher (National College for Creative Industries), Owen Yelland (Rose Bruford) and James Matthews (LIPA) who spent their early May Day Bank Holiday providing vital crew support for the main Spider stage.

Dorian Cameron-Marlow has been involved with Arcadia Spectacular for 2 years as Technical Production Manager and picks up the story. "At Arcadia, we are always looking for ways to encourage the next generation of fabricators, technicians, performers and creatives. The NRG programme offered by Robe is a great pathway to help develop young talent while giving up-and-coming technicians vital experience at the sharp end of large scale events and so we were delighted to be able to offer some NRG students the opportunity to get involved."

Supported by Tim Steer (Technical Stores Manager and Dorian's deputy) and reporting in to Katie Davies (Followspot Manager), Chloe, Owen and James were invited onsite to join the crew for tech and dress rehearsals and to then be responsible for one each of the six essential follow spots used to track the key elements of the performances.

"It was amazing!" enthuses Chloe, "Thank you NRG for getting us on this job! I took on the role because I love working on live music events. And the scale of performance on a 360 degree stage is something else. It was incredible seeing the show come together from the tech rehearsal to the live shows. The difference two days of work can make is astounding."

Owen agrees adding, "I jumped at the chance to be involved as I have followed Arcadia for years, and it was just incredible to have a chance to see it up close and to work on such an iconic and recognisable stage. Although I have to say one of the most challenging parts for me was trying to spot one of the aerial pieces in the air with no sights built onto our spots!"

James added, "Having already worked as part of the NRG crew on the TPI Awards earlier this year, I knew that I would be mad to turn down this opportunity. It was incredible being on site and involved in the spectacular show. It was an eye opener to experience the intensity and work ethic required to get through a festival of this nature, and to observe how fluid some of the team were when it hit crunch time. It has really renewed my love for live events."

All in all the contribution made by the NRG students was applauded by the Arcadia crew. Dorian couldn't have been happier with how Chloe, Owen and James fitted into the team from the get-go. "I find you can get a really good gauge of where someone is headed by their enthusiasm, diligence and desire to ask questions. All three students stood out in that regard, they did a great job as follow spot operators throughout the 3 shows across the weekend, and they weren't afraid to roll up their sleeves and help out with rigging and hauling cable across both venues. Some of them also got involved in the de-rig."

Katie continues: "Chloe, James and Owen were all great additions to our team. They were able to adapt to followspotting both a called timecoded show and be able to react quickly when followspotting the live acts. As they were all training in lighting, they had a good technical knowledge of the kit they were working as well as being familiar with set up and operation of the comms systems. They were confident and reliable, accurate and calm, with a good understanding of the larger picture of what we were trying to achieve."

So what next for Arcadia, and for the students? Dorian's keeping his cards close to his chest as far as the Spider is concerned! "The Spider is destined for great things abroad this autumn while the Afterburner has quite a few dates across Europe in the summer. As for the new Reactor, The Bug, new shows and other elements we are working on, you'll have to wait and see..." As for a return to London next year? "I know the whole crew loved putting on such a great show in the UK's capital and the reception was phenomenal. We are still processing it all - but watch this space!"

For Chloe, Owen and James they are back to the grindstone and working on other events. Chloe has returned to her apprenticeship at Whitelight although through the contacts she made at Arcadia she is now planning her schedule around Boomtown Fair in August working with Katie. As for Owen, (who is nearing the end of his second year at Rose Bruford); he is currently working on the college's new writing season as one of three production LXs before jumping back on tour. And whilst James has picked up some other work opportunities as well from his Arcadia experience, he is currently working on the LIPA production of Red And Black before heading into festival season.

Whilst Dorian isn't giving anything away about the Spider's next moves, one thing he is certain about is the calibre of the industry's upcoming next generation when he was asked if he would consider working with NRG students again. "Absolutely. It was a pleasure to have them as part of the Arcadia crew."

Tim agrees, "Simply put, Owen, Chloe and James were a pleasure to work with: capable, personable and always on time (or early) every day. I would be happy to have any one of them working on a team with me again."

Photo Credit: Luke Taylor, Lukonic Photography, SHOTAWAY





