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Robe for Melodifestivalen 2021

Products Involved

MegaPointe® **LEDBeam 150™** **RoboSpot™** **BMFL™ WashBeam**

Enthusiasm for the 2021 Eurovision Song Contest is bursting every disco bubble this year, especially in the wake of last year's first ever cancellation due to – we all know what – as competing countries ramp up the glorious glitz, glamour, drama and pop moments with gusto!

No country takes the ESC more seriously than Sweden. It is one of the most successful competing nations with a total of six victories and the most top five results of the 21st century, with 11!

Melodifestivalen – 'Mello' for short – the annual competition to select the Swedish entry is organised by Sveriges Television and is a phenomenon in itself! In recent years, it has been a touring show visiting six key cities, but due to Covid restrictions, this year the six rounds – four heats, the 'second chance' and the final – were staged in one place, the Annexet arena in Stockholm, part of the Globe complex, and broadcast live on STV1.

It was lit – for the 20th time – by Fredrik Jonsson who utilised 200 Robe moving lights and four RoboSpot systems among other fixtures on the rig.

Taking this fund of experience into account, Fredrik always relishes the challenge of making Mello look fresh, exciting and fun each year and 2021 was no exception ... offering the rare opportunity to work in what was effectively a very large studio space without an audience, which opened new doors for technical experimentation.

Fredrik once again worked closely with set designer Viktor Brattstrom, another long-term member of the Mello creative team. The two enjoy a great imaginative synergy, and usually start throwing ideas into the mix the previous summer and autumn.

Video content was supplied by Green Wall Designs, another regular collaborator, who had their content wranglers onsite together with a disguise operator.

With a trim height of around 10 metres – and without the limitations of having to tour the rig – the circumstances gave rise to an idea floating around for some time which involved integrating a roof into the set design.

This resulted in shiny black rectangular scenic roof sections being rigged in the upstage / downstage orientation, with lighting trusses filling the gaps in between.

With the 24-metre-wide by 28-metre-deep stage to achieve the desired catwalk / runway perspective, the whole roof system needed a lower trim, so this was set at 4.9 metres from the stage floor, resulting in the fantastic epic cinematic look that they had been dreaming of for some years!

The low trim also meant that any big bulky lights were out, so Fredrik wanted as many compact powerful fixtures as possible on the rig ... and turned to Robe, choosing MegaPointes and LEDBeam 150s to be at the core of the main lighting system.

The 88 x MegaPointes and 82 x LEDBeam 150s were rigged in triangular-shaped trusses to maintain the linear perspective at the heart of the set concept.

The next challenge was the rear follow spot positions!

For Fredrik, the choice of follow spot fixture was easy – BMFL WashBeams! However, with this design, it was impossible to rig them on the back bars and keep the clean lines due to the larger size of the fixture compared to the LEDBeam 150! After some experimentation, Fredrik opted to use six MegaPointes as his rear follow spots which retained the aesthetic integrity of the rig. These six fixtures were hooked in to the RoboSpot system.

Some applied rigging magic from rental company – and lighting equipment suppliers – Creative Technology Northern Europe's crew combined with short pipes and swivel couplers enabled the LED Beams to sit slightly lower from the trusses so their lenses aligned trim wise with the MegaPointes.

Also on the rig were 27 x Robe BMFL WashBeams utilised for key lights, four of which were the front follow spots, also running on the RoboSpot system.

MegaPointes were the main workhorses for creating all the effects in the stage area. Most of them were in the roof rig, with a few on the 'flowerbox' set pieces ... two sets of lights on shelves running US / DS on both sides of the stage.

MegaPointes were chosen for their size and weight in conjunction with the many features and huge scope for producing stunning effects. "Given the low trim, I needed a good zoom and LOTS of options to give each of the 28 competition songs plus around 20 interval acts a unique and distinctive look," explains Fredrik.

The LEDBeams were rigged in almost identical positions as the two types of fixtures were essentially working in tandem so that alignment was also important.

The LEDBeam has been a favourite of Fredrik's since he started using them a couple of years ago.

"It's outstanding 'bang-for-buck' considering the tiny size," he commented. They create impressive ACL style beam effects, big voluminous washes and can even be used for key lighting at specific times. "It's a great little fixture with plenty of tricks up its sleeve". For Mello this year, they were even pixel mapped via the disguise video system!

Fredrik's key light of choice is still the BMFL WashBeam.

For this show, BMFL WashBeams were used as the front follow spots and key lights for the main stage, the B stage and other critical positions like the hosts, etc.

"The BMFL WashBeam optical system is amazing!" he stated. He loves the big chunky lens and the "wonderful texture" in the beam that "really looks and acts like a 'real' follow spot when used as key light".

The high CRI of the bulb means it looks great on camera, and to date he's never run out of punch using a BMFL WashBeam as a follow spot and can also drop in cool colour effects during the song – like going red for an emphasis moment – all without any loss in intensity!

"I absolutely love them!"

Two lighting operators worked alongside Fredrik on the show – Danne Persson and Timo Kauristo – using a combination of grandMA2 and grandMA3 consoles. The disguise operator was Fredrik Stormby.

The biggest challenge was the low trim height, but the creative team turned this completely to their advantage, even though it made other aspects of lighting the show – like keying – that bit more galvanising.

Given the depth of the runway and the overall feel of the stage with a lot of artists moving, walking and turning in all directions, with a good trim, key lighting can usually be solved by a fixture at a distance or height ... but not in this case, explained Fredrik. Some serious time and energy was dedicated to programming multiple key and back lighting solutions to cover the many different positions and locations around the stage.

Without a live audience, they could completely control the darkness and look of the arena and transform it properly into a black box without high ambient light elements like cell phone reflections, merch stands and other signage, and that also had a profound effect on how the show looked.

The darkness factor unlocked another world of possibilities and made props, dancers, etc., really able to 'pop' up and vanish theatrically in the darkness, something that's difficult to achieve in an arena with standard levels of light pollution.

The blackness also assisted in getting maximum drama from the set and stage itself, which comprised some impressive and primarily shiny black gloss surfaces, plus glass and LED screens.

To ensure the whole event was delivered Covid safe, the production worked in 'bubbles' that didn't mix. The 'FOH bubble' even had their own toilet! They resided in a hotel connected to the arena during the weeks, meetings were all online and face masks were mandatory in the arena. Everyone was also issued with distance tags that emitted an excruciating sound when anyone inadvertently got closer than 1.5 metres to someone else ... which was highly effective at maintaining distance!

Fredrik broke a few personal records during Mello 2021!

The sixth and final broadcast ... was his 115th Mello broadcast, and by that time he had designed a staggering 612 competition songs – excluding all the interval acts and opening / closing / linking performances!

Mello 2021 was won by charismatic singer Tusse with the foot-tappingly catchy "Voices", who will represent Sweden in the 2021 Eurovision Song Context Final in Rotterdam on May 22nd.

Photo Credits: Danne Persson, Fredrik Jonsson





