28.1.2025

Robe Helps Lift the Mask in South Africa

Products Involved

ESPRITE®   LEDBeam 350™   iSpiider®   MegaPointe®   miniPointe®   RoboSpot™

LEDBeam 100™   CycFX 4™   LEDWash 300™   MMX Spot™   ROBIN® 600E Beam

The second series of The Masked Singer SA was one of the most successful music TV shows of 2024, broadcast on SABC, and featuring an outstanding production lighting design created by two of the country's most talented LDs, Ryan Lombard and Joshua Cutts, based around the core components of 150 Robe moving lights.

All technical production was supplied by Blond Productions for the series which was recorded at the Studios on Harley facility in Randburg, Greater Johannesburg.
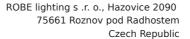
Ryan and Josh had previously worked together on Family Feud and SA's Got Talent so it made sense for them to once again pool their expansive imaginations for The Masked Singer SA to give it a unique look and identity.

With Josh coming in as a designer as well, Ryan made some changes to the original design based on what he had learned during season 1, which Josh looked at, adding some of his own ideas and finishing touches and building multiple fresh new lighting looks bursting with drama and style.

Josh oversaw the lighting set up, programmed, and started off operating the run of shows as Ryan was busy with prior commitments, then Ryan took over once these were completed.

The Robe set up included 12 x ESPRITES, 12 x MMX Spots and 12 x 600E Beams, 48 x LEDBeam 100s, 12 x miniPointes, 24 x CycFX4s, six LEDWash 300s, 24 x LEDBeam 350s – newly purchased by Blond for the production – 12 x iSpiider wash-beams and four MegaPointes plus a RoboSpot system controlling selected ESPRITES.

Ryan has worked extensively with Robe products throughout the last decade of his career, and Robe is a go-to for him, while Blond continues to steadily invest in Robe kit year-on-year,

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supplied via South African distributor, DWR.

The ESPRITES were a major element of the design, utilised to follow the artists during the performances, allowing Ryan and Josh to lower the general lighting levels and achieve a greater depth through multi-layered separation effects.

"I love ESPRITES for their brightness, colours including white range and for the general quality of light," Ryan stated, "they were also our essential 'surgical' front lights which also helped keep the giant scenic masks that were part of the set central to the action. We love these luminaires for the additional control they offer in a situation like this!"

The iSpiiders and LEDWash 300s were front light, used for audience washes and to create specific back and front light looks, sometimes augmented with LEDBeam 350s running in wash mode. The LEDBeam 350s were also used as more traditional beams technology.

MMX Spots are still among the hardest working fixtures in Blond's inventory, and Ryan still really likes them. They were used for side light and nice dappled gobo work on the stage as well as to infill on the masks in some songs to enhance the projected images. "As always, they were a great multifunctional tool," stated Ryan.
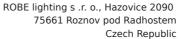
The 600E Beams were rigged strategically to fire beams in from the sides for extra effect, while the CycFX4s provided additional rear eye-candy and pixel effects behind the audience.

miniPointes were positioned behind the scenic masks where they created excellent visual effects when the masks opened, and these compact fixtures also generated general visual interest around the stage including beam-work.

Many of shows were pre-recorded to preserve the mystery surrounding the stars behind the masks, and the studio's cosy 6 metres of headroom heightened the challenge of maximising the space available.

The studio's house lighting grid was used for hanging lighting positions, using the fixtures to craft plenty of low angled lighting which looked fantastic on camera – both wide shots, pans, zooms and close ups. The stage was 900mm high, and the masks were 4 metres high, leaving just shy of a metre's space for squeezing in the lighting fixtures! "Nice and snug," as Ryan puts it!

"The calculations for where lights were rigged were complex," explained Ryan, "they had to be spot on", and the overall high profile and popularity of the show ramped up the pressure

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on all departments to make it as epic as possible. "Having this diverse collection of Robe fixtures available certainly helped us create some memorable WOW moments," elucidated Ryan.

Michael Gill's set design featured several video walls with content run via the media server – including virtual lighting scenes created in Unreal Engine – all triggered by the lighting console.

Ryan, Josh and Michael all worked closely to evolve the aesthetics and ensure production values matched the stature of the Masked Singer franchise and the expectations of producers Rose and Oaks. Integral to this process was Michael's drafting expert Nico Potgieter, who produced all the visualisation files.

The studio schedule was tight.

Josh and Ryan would plot songs at the weekend, nailing as many as possible ahead of the shoot days Monday through Friday, with only a small daily window to catch up on those they didn't manage to deal with during the previous weekend, or to plot those tracks that they had only just received.
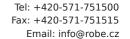
"We had to be VERY flexible as things changed and swapped constantly," noted Ryan, adding that while it was very exciting to work like that, it also had its challenges!

Josh was "incredible in getting the show up and running," Ryan stated, adding that he also set the tone perfectly in the first episodes, "pushing the visual standards to international levels." They have very different operating styles on the consoles, and Ryan described the collab as "a great learning experience that I can and will apply to my future projects."

One episode a day was shot over a 3-week schedule, during which 4 songs a day were recorded, adding up to approximately 24 songs a week.

A large upstage screen was flanked left and right by two 4-metre-high scenic masks a bit further downstage. The judges panel was in front of that mid-way back in the middle of the audience, with another screen behind them, showing logos and backgrounds for reverse shots.

Projections running via two media servers were mapped onto the two scenic masks, with video content – CGI and graphical elements – created by Digital Union.

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The series was directed by Jonathan Bullen, who assisted and guided the visual teams and oversaw the initial episodes, after which Nadia White - who had– also the Season 1 director - took over.

"The production was a huge improvement of Season 1 – many small things contributed to this that increased our opportunities for efficacy and creativity, and it was great having two minds on it as well as all this Robe kit at our disposal," concluded Ryan.

Photo Credit: Rose & Oaks Media

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