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Robe UK Colors the Mix for rare opera

Robe UK helped lighting designer Jan Osborne to realise a dynamic and mercurial design for a rare performance of Purcell's Baroque opera "Arthur", performed by the Crickhowell Choral Society. The sole performance was staged in the atmospheric bowels of St Edmund's Church in Crickhowell, South Wales.

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The newly launched Robe UK, direct importer and marketer of Robe Show Lighting products from the Czech Republic, supplied Osborne with six Robe ColorMix 250 wash fixtures for her show.

Arthur was directed and conducted by local music teacher and aficionado Stephen Marshall as part of Crickhowell Choral Society's renowned biennial May Festival. The show featured a cast of over 100 including a full Baroque orchestra, two choruses, dancers and a dozen professional soloists.

Osborne, also course coordinator for the Performing Arts Department at nearby Ebbw Vale College and a lecturer on the College's BTEC Music and performing Diplomas, has lit the last two May Festival operas performed in the church. The 2001 production of "Orpheus & The Underworld" was done with just 12 old fresnels and some imaginative 'mantronic' power switching and mid-performance re-patching!

Osborne was determined that this year's production should move forward in terms of lighting technology and flexibility. She scouted around for a good deal and a willing partner to supply lights for the show's extremely tight budget - and Ian Brown and Nathan Wan at Robe UK came up with the goods.

With the production being semi-staged (costume but no set), lighting was absolutely vital in unfolding the complex and compelling narrative. Osborne needed to light the main performance area just downstage of the pulpit as well as the aisle which saw frequent entrances and numerous dance sequences take place.

Osborne needed small lightweight, high brightness, low power lighting fixtures able to run off one 13 Amp ring main! They also had to be blend unobtrusively into the splendid church architecture, some of it dating back to the late 13th century.

Osborne and her 3 crew rigged the fixtures overnight the Saturday the evening before the Sunday performance. They had a tight slot rigging and programming slot, shoehorned in around the venue's hectic ecclesiastical schedule which included a wedding, a confirmation and a choral recital!

Four ColorMix 250s were positioned down the aisle, stood on vertical pieces of lightweight trussing ratchet-strapped to the church arches. Two were stand-mounted upstage of the pulpit and main performance area, in front of the organ on one side and the chorister room the other.

Osborne borrowed Ebbw Vale College's Avolites Pearl console to programme and run the fixtures. Schedules were so tight that she also had to utilise the only full dress rehearsal - the afternoon before the performance - for programming. Here the speed, ease and hands-on functionality of the Pearl came into its own.

By the end of the dress, there were over 100 cues in the board, and the ColorMix's were doing the business in terms of creating a dramatic and emotional backdrop of Arthur.

"I simply could not have achieved lighting this sophisticated and effective with conventional fixtures" enthused Osborne *"The Color Mix's are quick and easy to programme and rig - and worked without a glitch"*. She also heaped praise onto her trusty Avo console. This joined the College after a successful lottery bid for equipment in 1998, and is used constantly to teach students the lighting design modules of the courses.

The resulting wow factor for Arthur's lighting was incredible. The sold-out audience responded to and greatly appreciated Osborne's technical and imaginative sculpting of the opera's multiple scenes and environments with light beams and colour. Osborne was even invited to come to stage to take a bow with cast and orchestra!!

Others involved in this memorable production included Stage Electrics, who supplied the trussing, additional rigging and extraneous cable requirements, and Osborne's crew - Jim Pollard, Katherine Davis and Michael Jones.

Steve Marshall comments, *"Jan and the lighting took our production into a new dimension. It's been hugely exciting to work with technology on this level"*.

Crickhowell Choral Society's next full scale operatic production will be in 2005. The title is not yet confirmed, but Osborne is already onboard and she's looking forward to pushing the technical envelope further forward.

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For more press information on Robe UK, please call Louise Stickland on 01865 202679, 07831 329888, E-mail: louise@loosplat.com.





