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LIGABUE

Italian rock star Luciano Ligabue is no stranger to the statement. At a recent series of concerts in Milan, he outdid himself, as Mike Clark finds out.



Two years ago, Italian Wea recording artist Luciano Ligabue staged an impressive concert at Verona Arena which coincided with the launch of his new album. The concert was remarkable for its approach to audio: there were no PA towers installed at the venue and the sound system was actually flown over the arena from two huge truck cranes parked outside.

Never one to do things by half measures, to kick off his latest tour, the rocker recently staged two colossal concerts at Milan's San Siro soccer stadium with a stage set occupying the entire length of the arena and involving an incredible amount of manpower and cutting-edge hardware.

Milano based US designer Jimmy Pallas has years of experience from his time production manager for numerous Italian bands and international acts visiting Italy; he considers the Ligabue shows a welcome return to rock and roll, having worked more recently on prize-winning corporate events. He explains the brief for his special event production and design firm company 9:P.M. received from Barley Arts Productions and Friends & Partners (who produced, organized and the tour) and the artist's manager Claudio Maioli, for the mega events which opened the tour before its country-wide trek. Ligabue wanted to be as close as possible to the audience, so the idea was to change the scenic 'cage', by enlarging it and making it lighting towers or grids. We decided to make the entire side of the stadium one huge set, taking up the whole space and even ceding to the bleachers on either side - as a result, the stage was 48 metres wide by 26 high and the crowd had a 300° view of the band. We also had the telescopic bridge from the Stones' Bridges to Babylon tour, which took Ligabue out to stage B in the

middle of the crowd for a series of acoustic pieces about two thirds of the way into the set." Behind the stage, rather than a backdrop, Pallas wanted to create the impression of an arena, which he achieved by installing a series of scaffolding frames supporting wide strips of scrim - which resembled slides - running up from stage level to form an almost continuous curved wall. Such was the cleverness of the application that these didn't distract too much from what was happening on stage, but worked extremely well as a canvas for projections and lighting.

As well as giving the crowd a better view, the set design also meant that the camera crew filming the show had its work greatly facilitated, as camera sightlines were clear all round the stage. Of the 23 cameras, 14 were used by a separate team to record material for a DVD due for Christmas release, the rest for the live footage screened during the gig.

After the opening acts, Ligabue's first night began with an MC introducing the event and turning a huge lever which gradually started up the machine - lights, audio, etc - then, after about a minute, the whole thing ground to a halt and there seemed to have been a really big technical hitch, with the video screen showing fault messages and stage hands everywhere, apparently trying to get things up and running again. The first song began as they were still working feverishly and the huge LED screen showed a close-up of the artist's eyes, drawing the crowd's attention away from the technicians, one of whom ripped off his overalls to reveal that he was in fact Ligabue himself - before launching into the first number.

In the opening part of the set, each of the six cherry picker mobile aerial platforms behind the stage wings had a huge bell mounted on

the boom which rose up to 26m: since the set began in broad daylight, this was combined with large quantities of smoke to give some depth to the lighting. After the second song, the platforms were lowered and a confetti machine and followspot mounted on each, which thus became the only 'flown' lights used for the entire show. Pallas, who also supervised the recorded footage for projection, commented: "The video system used included a matrix that allowed it to go from images to composite

stands was being demolished for an upgrade, so it hadn't to be hit by the system. It was therefore necessary to split up the control of the system into a series of sub-systems, each dedicated to a specific area."

Since San Siro's stands are very high and therefore hard cover with ground-installed speakers, delay lines had to be flown from the roof. Another problem attached to the Arena is the low volume limit that local authorities insist i respected (if sound bounces off the roof at a



Clearly to be seen are the five scrim 'slides' behind the main stage, the L-Acoustics V-dosc system and the bridge reclaimed from the Rolling Stones Bridges to Babylon tour.



very fast without jeopardizing image quality. We therefore went from images, into video, into camera without losing anything at all."

Mario Pratavera of Eurovideo, the main video contractor on the tour, continued: "Director Amedeo Feroni was in charge of the OB van (specialist 08 firm Frame's digital Truck 2) used to control 10 cameras (three with 70x lenses) and EVS for the projection of 70 different recorded video sequences which, after being fed to our Vector unit, were screened. Electrosonic's Vector is a modular image-control processor able to control up to 16 image sources and reproduce up to eight images (which can be composite video, SDI, DVI, PC or MAC), dynamically reformatting the original footage and positioning the processed images on the screen wherever the ops decides."

The screen used at San Siro and Rome was an LVP20 outdoor LED screen from Lighthouse, measuring 15.36m wide by 3.84m high, flown from the stadium roofing with eight motors, which moved it up and down during the set, lifting it to a maximum of 14 metres above the stage. For the benefit of the sections of the audience who were in the side stands, two Barco DLite 7 video displays of approx 15sq.m each were installed one above the other, enabling full-figure projection of the artist.

Sound designer Daniele Tramontani, called in by Willie Gubellini of audio contractor Nuovo Service, had his work cut out: "The Milan project was complex - we were looking at flying points at a height of 50 metres since the audience seated in the higher parts of the stands was at a height of 40-50 metres. Added to that, another of the

angle, it finishes up in the houses round the stadium and the limit there is 78/80dB). Tramontani therefore had to come up with a set-up giving good coverage with a low volume.

"We opted for two very large FOH grids, flown at a height of 22m and each with a front and side system," explained Tramontani. "The front systems, designed to cover the field, comprised 13 L-Acoustics V-dosc and eight SB 218 subs, while the side systems of 16 V-dosc and eight subs., well as covering the field, also had to address part of the side stands."

Then there was a series of delay systems - three of these had nine V-dosc and four dV-dosc and were flown from the roof on the opposite side of the field, at about 30m from the ground. These had the job of covering the second and third stand levels - the first, as mentioned, being closed for renovation. Then, at the side, were four smaller clusters with nine dV-dosc and two dV-Subs, which fed audio to the side areas on the third level.

"We also had six ground-stacked SB 218 subs at either side, front of the stage - these had to be kept to a minimum, as part of the area contained the pitch's drainage and irrigation system so couldn't support large loads," says Tramontani.

Tramontani had a total of 11 lines to be aligned, and his trusty SIM once again showed its worth, particularly since the main system could only be switched on for a short period the day before the gig, which meant the band rehearsing with a small PA to enable FOH engineer Red Talami to set at least some of his levels.