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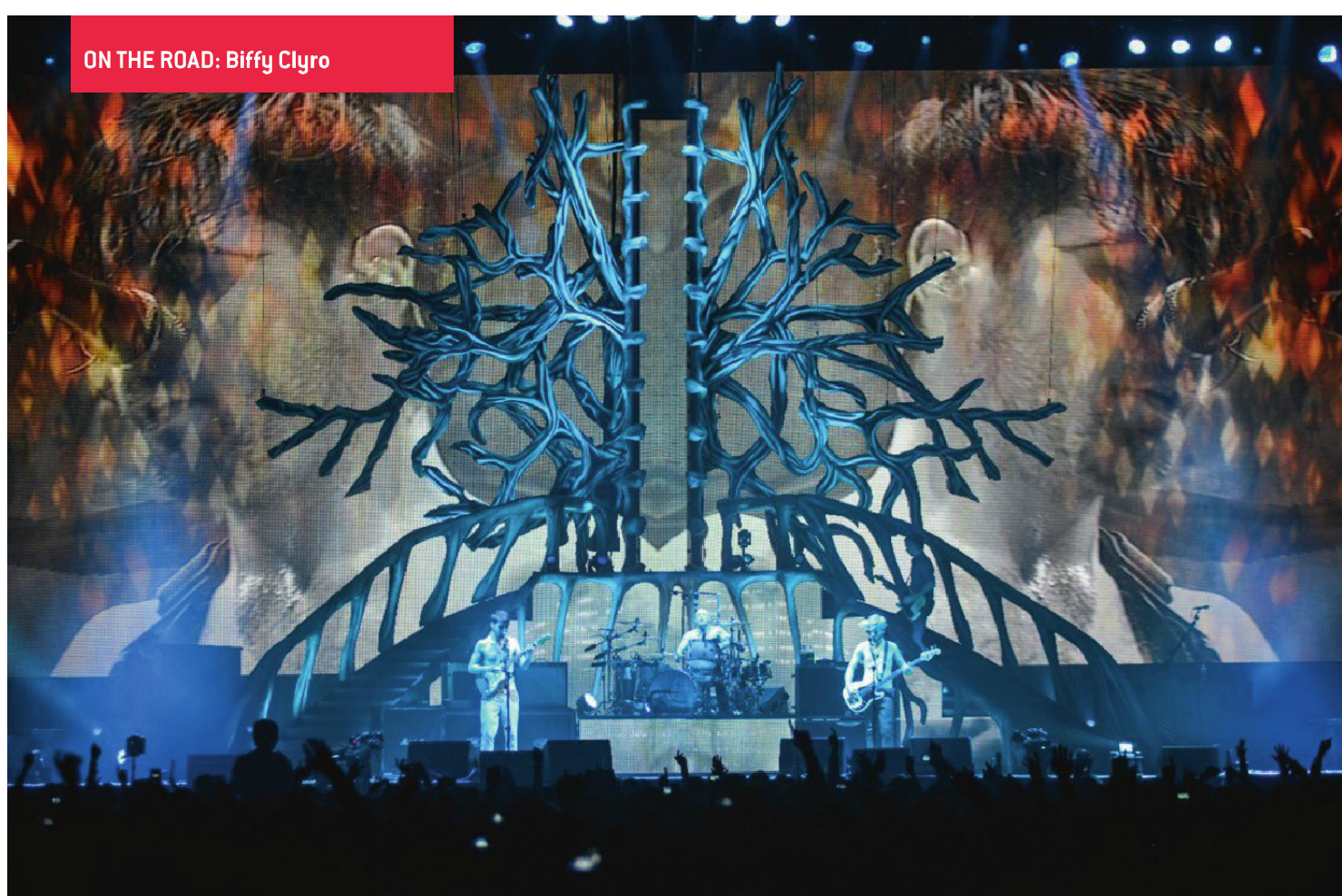
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BIFFY CLYRO

*OPPOSITES: THE SOLD OUT
UK ARENA TOUR*

LED LIGHTING FEATURE • PROLIGHT + SOUND • LE MAITRE IN THE SPOTLIGHT • SIMPLE MINDS
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BIFFY CLYRO'S *OPPOSITES*

BIFFY CLYRO'S SIXTH STUDIO ALBUM, *OPPOSITES*, HAS BEEN THEIR FIRST TO TAKE THE NUMBER ONE SLOT IN THE BAND'S 17-YEAR HISTORY. A SOLD-OUT UK ARENA TOUR FOLLOWED -THEIR SECOND TO DATE - WITH PRODUCTION MANAGER, TPO'S PADDY HOCKEN AT THE HELM.

The Production Office has been working with Scottish riff merchants Biffy Clyro since 2010, on the band's first arena tour and prior to that, some major festival headline shows. Their Production Manager, TPO's Paddy Hocken has helped to handpick a crew to lead the band into a successful string of arena productions. Working closely alongside Stage Manager, Mark Berryman, and Production Assistant, Cally Harris, Biffy Clyro's second arena tour is turning out to be a well-oiled machine.

Entitled *Opposites*, Hocken explained how the concept for the tour came about. "The show is very organic, changing to LED lighting and laser mapping this time rather than projection has lead to a different look again. Misty Buckley, the Set Designer, really 'gets' them. Initially, some key words were thrown around like growing, tree, bones and life. Then Misty drew up some sketches based on that imagery."

Pre-production took place on 15-19 March

at London's LH2 studios and then four back-to-back shows ensued. Hocken continued: "In terms of suppliers, Biffy used Skan before I was involved and they used them on the last tour too. I worked for Skan when the superb packaging they use today was being designed, so it's nice to get the benefits from the production side. Neg Earth were used on the last tour along with XL Video and were chosen again because they both did a great job. Stage Truck (eight) led by Gary Workman on the road and Phoenix Bussing (who supplied four vehicles) are regular suppliers of the band too. The laser mapping is incredible, ER Productions has done a brilliant job. The tree structure works great with the 21W."

"Steel Monkey have been incredible, they're really good at what they do (set piece building) and they have a great place in Bristol. In terms of the artistic finish to their work, I think they are the best option in the UK. People tend to think because it is made out of steel it will be

really difficult to handle, but it never is, and the set pieces go together so fast and pack away really easily," added Berryman.

Steel Monkey's Annie French worked closely with Set & Show Designer, Misty Buckley, to create ideas for the band's physical set. "It was a wonderful set to produce, we built all the 3D elements, including the staircase, ribs and handrails," highlighted French. "All the elements were made from steel, covered with sculptured polystyrene and sprayed then scenically painted to create the illusion of bones and trees."

On the venue floor, Mojo Barriers provided 90m of powder coated black aluminium barriers, which a selection of corners, gates, snake runners and snake gates to allow for different barrier end configurations in different venues. "The shape of the thrusts and the subsequent barrier design has been one of the more challenging aspect of the tour", stated Hocken. The design was checked by Jake Piper, Tour Health and Safety.

Opposite: The set design by Misty Buckley represented a tree of life. Below: Production Manager, Paddy Hocken of TPO and Stage Manager Mark Berryman; ER Production's Ryan Hagan; Monitor Engineer Pasi Hara with his Midas Pro 9.



Mojo Barriers UK manager Kevin Thorborn said: "We worked closely with Biffy Clyro's production team and were happy to support them with this new configuration, and it illustrated the range of shapes achievable using standard Mojo Barriers, combined with our wide range specials sections."

Travel was provided by The Tour Company's, Shannon Ward (Crew Flight & Hotels) and Louise Smith (Band Flights & Hotels). Matt Wright from Rock-It Cargo air freighted the band's backline and audio control to Toronto after the O2 Arena show in London and GLD Productions provided a touring gym and dressing room AV systems for those extra modern home comforts. The band's Tour Manager is Neil Anderson.

AUDIO

Audio supplier Skan PA has been working with Biffy Clyro for a couple of years. Skan PA's Scott Essen, Audio Crew Chief, met the band 12 years ago when they were an up and coming supporting act and years later became their system tech thanks to the band's long time FOH Engineer, Jonny Lucas, getting Skan on board. He told TPI: "I'd been working with the band for a while and wanted to get Skan in because of the quality they provide."

For this three-week arena stint in the UK, Essen worked with d&b audiotechnik. He highlighted: "I love the quality engineering you get with d&b. Skan has invested in them

for a long time and it's all working really well, and the band are happy with it. In fact, Skan only stock d&b now, we got rid of all the other brands because our clients loved it. It's not an inexpensive box by any means, but you get what you pay for with d&b."

Using an exclusive mixture of d&b products, the PA was made up of the J and V Series. The PA comprised 72 d&b J8's and J12's for the main and side-hangs, four d&b V8's and V12's for the centre-hang and 12 flown J-Subs. In the pit arc, eight J-Subs and seven J-Infras were used for reinforcement. A further eight d&b Q-10's were used for front fill and amplification was secured with 66 d&b D12's.

Back at FOH, Lucas is also very clear on his favourite equipment; Midas for control and Sennheiser for microphones. He elaborated: "The reason I use Midas is because I know they'll always work. I've used the smaller Pro 2 during festivals because it's much smaller, so logistically that translates to the environment better, but for touring, the Pro 9 has everything I need. I can transfer the show file from the Pro 2 to the Pro 9 and basically run the same show, so I'm really happy with my Midas desk."

Microphone models for the tour were made in large quantities by the manufacturer's E Series. The e901, e902, e904, e905, e906, e614, e945, e421 and MK4 were chosen. "I use Sennheiser primarily because they stand up to everyday life on the road. They're rugged that







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Below: Steffy Head with the Popcorn catering staff; The Video crew: Dean Huff, Roger Nelson, Richard Shipman; Pete English with the carpentry team.



way; they can handle what gets thrown at them on stage and off, they sound second to none and that's important to a band like Biffy Clyro."

Over in Monitor world, the sentiments about Midas, Sennheiser and dBb are echoed. Monitor Engineer, Pasi Hara, joined the tour late and took over with the kit already in place. "Coming into the tour late wasn't an issue because everyone made me feel very welcome and I was well taken care of by the crew. I would have chosen the same desk anyway. It's also a Midas Pro 9. It's a Midas and it sounds like a Midas. I prefer the analogue sound but obviously in the last few years everything has gone digital and in my opinion, this desk is the best-sounding digital desk out there. Sound should come first and nothing else has come along on the market that sounds this good."

A total of eight dBb M2 wedges are also placed on stage in pairs, but, Hara explained, are just there for back up. "The in-ears are used by the whole band and the two back up musicians (extra guitar and pianist) and are Sennheiser G3's, because they're the best we can get. The wedges are really just there for a back up / safety blanket to the in-ears, but the G3's never fail!"

LIGHTING

The lighting design for *Opposites* was created by renowned LD, Oli Metcalfe. Although the LD would be out with Muse during Biffy's tour, he still played a major part in the show's look. Metcalfe brought Designer / Operator, Richard Larkum, in during the iTunes Festival last year and then in January for this tour's pre-production. Said Larkum: "Oli did the main design, I added to it and when the band got a feel for what I was doing, Oli went off to do another project and I took over the lighting operation."

"After a few conversations, we had this theme of a tree of life, leaning towards the album cover art. As we have a lot of laser mapping in the visual design too, it's a case of taking it in turns to create the interchanging depth," he added. Using a combination of strobes and washes, Metcalfe and Larkum have maintained a design that can just as quickly subtly light the stage with standard people lighting as it can create a high-intensity full-

blown rock show.

The lighting rig was brimming with power and the latest technologies. A total of 22 Philips Vari-Lite VL3500 Wash FX were deployed, 34 Martin Professional MAC Vipers, 76 Martin MAC Auras, 22 Martin Atomic Strobes, 22 Martin Atomic Colors, two Reel FX DF50 diffusion hazers, two Jem high-mass ZR33 smoke machines and two Robert Juliat Flo 1800W followspots were in use.

For control, the lighting desk chosen by Metcalfe and used by Larkum was a High End Systems Full Boar. Larkum highlighted: "I always use Hogs, they definitely suit my way of thinking. Hopefully this summer I'll get to use a Hog 4, which I'm very, very excited about! Everything about the Hog has always suited me, the software, the programming, the design, the whole package. With the Hog 4, ever since it was being touted around as a concept I've been excited. It's great that everyone is saying High End have really got it right this time."

LASER MAPPING

Laser Programmer, Ryan Hagan, an ER Productions employee, worked on the tour's much-anticipated laser mapping components. He said: "ER does a lot of work with TPO, recently The Laureus Awards in Rio de Janeiro and the Sunseeker Distributor Conference in Phuket. For this tour we're doing laser mapping on the arteries (or tree branches) following the final set design from Misty Buckley. She liked the idea of lasers because the band wanted a different way of lighting the set. Oli Metcalfe, the LD, worked on Muse's laser mapping, so he mentioned the possibility to Misty in the first place, then she came to see us with some designs and this is what we've created."

This was the first time Biffy Clyro has had lasers incorporated into their show design. Hagan continued: "This is completely different to traditional laser effects. The main lasers are facing the stage instead of them being positioned in an aerial way. The main use of the lasers is to map the arteries then either side of that we have some relatively low-powered batons, they don't do anything else but create laser beams to frame the arteries." The lasers used included two 21W RGBB OPS

with X/Y scanning and integrated effects. OPS meaning the best quality of technology in laser world at the present time. The lasers were upgraded due to the power of the lighting rig and were controlled by the pangolin.net network system, an industry standard and an ER favourite.

"We've spec'd everything and it's the first time the batons - 14 one metre red laser batons - have been used by us on a tour. They're a very new product, so that's quite nice, to have a new piece of kit with us. Lighting will always overpower lasers, so Richard and I work at alternate times. He keeps it nice and dark for me when it's the laser's turn! We spent four days in LH2 studios putting the design into practice and it's working out really well."

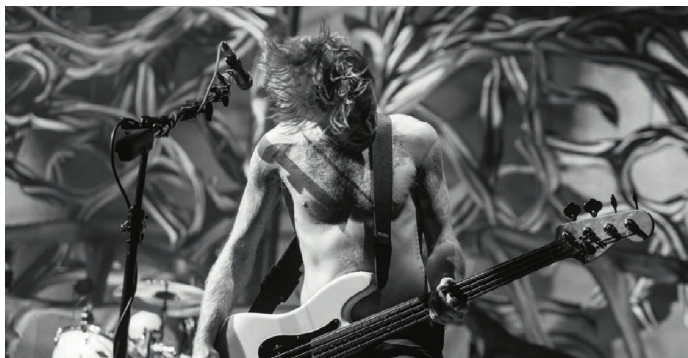
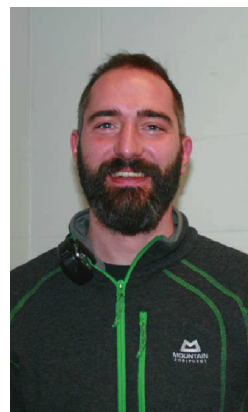
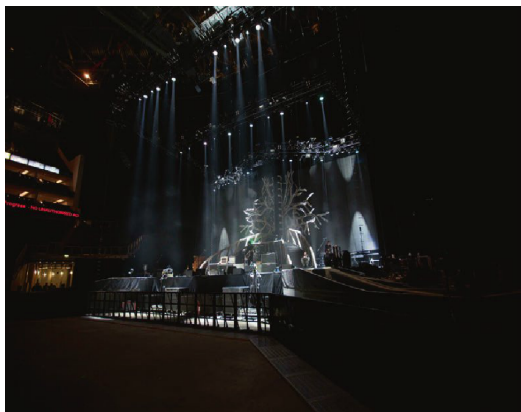
Finishing off ER Productions input were four Viper deLuxe units, a 2600W fog generator and fan in a wheeled flightcase. Hagan concluded: "This is a really good show, they're trying to do something different with the lasers, which makes it interesting and the band are great live. The band are involved with the designs and it's really nice to have good feedback from the artists."

Other special effects included 12 Co2 jets supplied by Quantum Special Effects. For the O2 Arena and Glasgow SECC the Co2 were augmented with 12 stadium shot confetti cannons (located in the pit and FOH as well 20 smaller cannons (rigged on the front truss), four smoke filled bubble machines and four spitfire flames heads also from Quantum.

VIDEO

XL Video supplied full video production - including 457 tiles of Pixled F12 LED, PPU / cameras, Catalyst media servers and crew for the UK arena leg of the world tour. The visuals were beautifully combined with a lighting design by Oli Metcalfe and live camera direction by Richard Shipman to form a colourful and interesting visual aesthetic and backdrop to the band's incendiary performances which earned rave reviews. XL's Project Manager Phil Mercer commented, "It was great to be working with The Production Office on this tour and with Production Manager, Paddy Hocken, who brought many fresh and invigorating ideas to the mix. The band have grown steadily, and

Below: The stage pieces were built by Bristol-based Steel Monkey whilst the stage thrusts were an LS-Live design; Production Assistant, Cally Harris; Rigger, Johannis Soelter; System Tech, Scott Esson; Bassist, James Johnston; The tour had five days of full production rehearsals in London's LH2 Studios before the sold-out arena shows took place.



with the success of *Opposites*, the tour really took on a life of its own!"

XL has supplied several Biffy Clyro tours in the past, but this is by far the largest and most comprehensive in terms of production. The large upstage LED screen measured 18.5 metres wide by 7.8 metres high and displayed both playback footage and the IMAG mix. In addition to this, ensconced in the set – built by Steel Monkey – was a central column of 10 F12 tiles in the spine of the tree which also featured two sweeping staircases for entrances / exits to the platform. A riser surround and staircase forming the base of the tree was also fitted with internal F12 tiles. XL supplied four Sony HXC-100 HD camera channels which were fed into the PPU built around a Panasonic HS450 mixer / switcher. Two cameras were stationed at FOH long throw lenses, and the other two were in the pit with HJ22 wide angle lenses.

Shipman also used a Thundering Jacks' Video Dust system for additional effects. In addition to these, four Bradley CamBall2 robo-cams were dotted around the stage, (operated by Paul Maddock-Jones) plus four Bradley HD10 mini-cams, all of which were fed into Shipman's mix. For the playback footage – produced by Lydia Baker at Screen Light Design – XL supplied two Catalyst media servers which were triggered by Lighting Director Richard Larkum's Road Hog Full Boar lighting console.

Completing XL's crew were engineer, Dean Ruffy, Crew Chief Roger Nelson and LED / Camera Technician, Iain Rendell. Jack Banks and Robin Haddow were brought in to assist with

the Catalyst programming during production rehearsals at LH2 in London ahead of the tour starting.

VIDEO GRAPHICS

The video graphics were created by Lydia Baker of Screen Light Design. She told TPI: "I haven't created artwork for Biffy before, but they approached me after I submitted mood boards last spring for their festival dates - they later went on not to have visuals and re-approached me for their first arena tour. I had previously done the Paul van Dyk world tour, working with The Production Office and Paddy Hocken - so I was recommended through him.

"The band initially came up with their vision for the video - the tree of life idea was specifically their key visual and after that - ideas around Cambodian temples and tree roots and mainly getting the organic feel of tree branches and skeletal structures merging and evolving to create the backdrop."

Baker had a lot of freedom once the ideas were signed off to stay true to the original design. "Once we got onsite for the final week of live rehearsals there were tweaks and changes - the type that always pop up when you see the video artwork on the screen in the set for the first time. So things like the final scaling of the set and the brightness of the screen influence changes in the video - along with the lighting designer – I normally create a new set of animations onsite to complement the lighting design. So simulated light chases and effects stuff like that," she concluded.

RIGGING

"What really makes this show so interesting though is its design. It's interesting to work on and to look at. We start early in the morning and the first thing I do is mark out the floor. Then I supervise the local riggers, eight in the air and four on the floor who come in daily," explained Johannis Soelter, the tour's Head Rigger who was also hand-picked by PM Paddy Hocken.

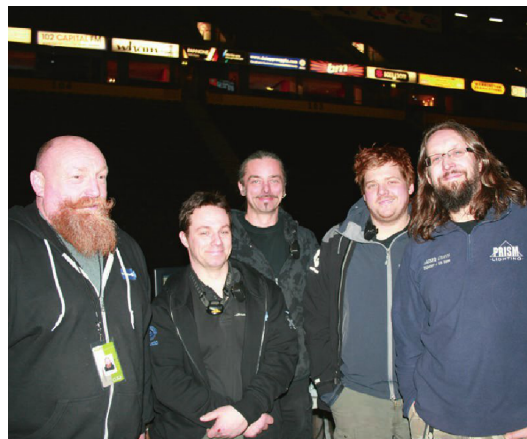
"Today we were finished by 10am because it all went very smoothly. One thing I will say about this tour is that Paddy has put a really great team together and my local guys always know their health and safety procedures, it's been very smooth.

"In fact, after the first night it was like we'd already done it loads of times. And we're working with really good gear," said Soelter. The hoists chosen for the tour comprise 12 Lodestar model RR 2T hoists, 36 Lodestar model L 1T hoists, 16 Lodestar model F 0.5T hoists and 18 sub hung Lodestar model B 0.125T hoists.

STAGING AND CARPENTRY

For the touring / moving element of the stage, West Yorkshire based LS-Live created two rolling downstage thrusts, forming a ramped side wing on either side of the main stage in each venue. The thrusts enabled the musicians to get closer to their audience. The thrusts, the rolling tech wings and stage risers were made using LS-Live's own stock of industry standard LiteDeck, the rental product

Below: Frontman Simon Neil used Sennheiser G3 in-ear monitors and microphones alongside the rest of the band; FOH Engineer, Jonny Lucas; Richard Larkum and the lighting crew.



is manufactured by trussing titans, Prolyte. The carpentry tasks of the stage set were mastered by Pete English, the tour's Head Carpenter who often works on TPO productions, and was once again asked to go on the road by PM Paddy Hocken. For English and his crew – completed by crew Scott Turnbull, Glenn Bingley and Aico Boshoven – the department worked closely with scenic builders Steel Monkey. English noted: "We had some experiments with the kit when we first went to the Steel Monkey facility, and marked it up until we had it just right. The

challenges of this project involved the scenic elements of the set actually being flown. When I first saw the set pieces, I didn't know what it was going to be. Then I started to see the design take shape and was really impressed. It's very unique, I've never seen a set piece quite like it, so they've done a really original job with it.

"I have to say though, apart from this being a nice tour to work on because of the people and the interesting look the show has, one thing I really look forward to every day is the catering. It's so good, that it really is a highlight on this

tour. I'm a vegetarian and I feel very well taken care of!"

CATERING

TPI Award winners Popcorn Catering won the Biffy Clyro contract through good relationships with TPO and a reputation for delivering the best sustenance for the touring environment. Steffy Head told TPI: "We purchase our food daily from a local supermarket first thing in the morning and at every venue we have a local runner with a van, someone who has a good

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knowledge of the area and the shopping facilities. After our initial shop we may have filled five large supermarket trollies in just 40 minutes! We consequently get quite a lot of comments from other customers at the checkouts like 'Ooh are you having a party?'

Then we send the runner to fishmongers, butchers, cash and carry and to source any speciality ingredients that we may need for the day. By the end of the day we have used most of the shopping that we bought that morning."

Some of the treats created by the Popcorn crew included roasted beetroot and butternut squash soup with toasted seeds and goats cheese dressing, beef and ale pie with crushed new potatoes, steamed green beans and tenderstem broccoli, marinaded Tofu and vegetable miso and ginger broth with udon noodles, baked Sea bass with fennel, lemon and capers served with steamed green vegetables and Oreo and baileys cheesecake. Needless to say with the quality of fresh, homecooked food, creative dishes and friendly service, the atmosphere in the catering area was full of satisfied roadies, designers and engineers.

Head continued: "After clearing the

dressing rooms after the band have left, it's off to the bus and bed, and then up early the next morning to do it all over again, but in a different supermarket, in a different town!

"We were feeding 40 for breakfast, 65 for lunch and 65 for dinner, as well as looking after the dressing rooms and stocking the buses with aftershow food and drinks. This Biffy Clyro tour was an absolutely lovely tour to work on. The band, crew and support band City and Color were a pleasure to work with and cater for."

TPI

Photos: Andy Willsher, Zoe Mutter
& Kelly Murray

www.tpo-online.com

www.olimetcalfe.com

www.mistybuckley.co.uk

www.screenlightdesign.com

www.negearth.co.uk

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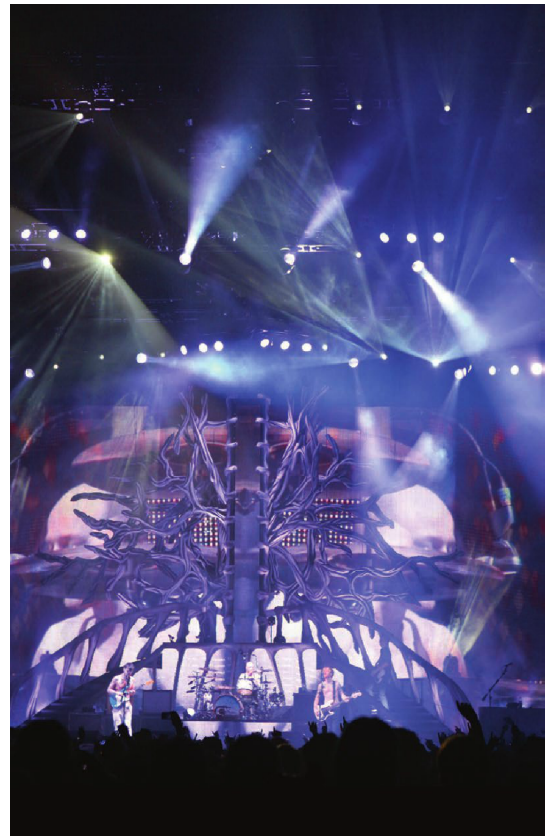
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