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**DEFTONES**

The band returns to the touring circuit backed by a team of sector specialists

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**GORILLAZ**

The animated artists and their dedicated crew present a love letter to India

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**VIDEO ROUNDTABLE**

Meet the industry pioneers transforming IMAG into IMAX on the road

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# DAVE

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*A shapeshifting production that puts the fan experience first*

# DAVE: THE BOY WHO PLAYED THE HARP TOUR

*Laser-firing instruments, pyrotechnics, hidden subwoofers, shapeshifting video, and a revolving door of guest performers – all set beneath a four-curtain kabuki drop. This is the story of The Boy Who Played the Harp Tour, a spectacle masterminded by a road-tested production crew for one of Britain's most exciting contemporary musical auteurs...*



Words: Jacob Waite  
Photos: Timmsy





*The Boy Who Played the Harp Tour* features several striking production design elements and cameos which not only do their job in eliciting a reaction but deliver fleeting, blink-and-you'll-miss-it moments that require months of planning, collaboration and rehearsals to realise. Yet, as has become a hallmark of DAVE's output, nothing is predictable. Setlists, guest artists and backstage cues change. This not only keeps the crew – an award-winning team whose stories TPI have charted over several years – on their toes, but in an era of artifice, provides an organic experience.

Production Manager, Paddy Hocken, was enlisted to orchestrate the tour. With global touring on the agenda, a fresh set of creatives – Creative and Video Director, Matt Askem; Production Designer, Tim Routledge; and Lighting Director and Programmer, Morgan Evans of Tim Routledge Design – alongside Stufish's Ray Winkler and Faz Barber, delivered the production design in collaboration with DAVE and his support team.

To meet the brief, Hocken brought in experts in their field, including Beat The Street (crew travel), Skan PA Hire – a Clair Global company (audio), Dutch Barrier Services (barriers), ER Productions and FABER Engineering (lasers and special effects), Freight Minds (freighting), HZ Audio (audio control), Lovely Things (furniture), Luke Halls Studio (visual content), Neg Earth Lights (automation, lighting and rigging), Popcorn Catering, Production Park (production rehearsals), Stage Miracles (local crew), Stufish Entertainment Architects (co-production design), TAG (travel agents), TAIT (staging and lifts), Tim Routledge Design

(co-production design), Transam Trucking (logistics), Universal Pixels (video), and others.

"On paper it's quite a light schedule, with no back-to-backs across 16 shows. However, there are rarely any days we are not at venues, be it for a mark out, pre-rig or unloading trucks," Hocken explained, speaking to TPI ahead of the final show of the European tour at Manchester's Co-op Live. "Equally, we have delivered it all within a single day several times."

The video tracking element of the show was the most significant challenge the production faced during the build. Hocken elaborated: "We are installing nearly 100m of track, circa 50m a side, which is quite a big 'gig blocker' first thing in the day, and it's a time-consuming element to assemble. It's not just the track for the screen – there are several tracks that run parallel to the main tracks with all the cable management, so getting all those elements in place is challenging."

Between those elements sits an automated moving lighting grid, a drone grid, and 'sniffers', which vacuum up drapes following a kabuki drop during the intro. The whole centre of the room is effectively a mass of machinery in two tiers: the grid and track, with another set of trusses suspended below. "Managing all of that has been challenging; however, the first time you notice the tracking screens moving towards you is a special experience," he said. "It's a show that can take on a life of its own, with a revolving door of guest artists, and a journey through his musical career."

Hocken was supported in the production office by Advance Production, Amanda Davies; Production Coordinator, Kai Roberts; Backstage Coordinator, Amber Cox; and

others. "We keep an 'open door' policy and do what we can to look after the crew. Usually that means good food and quality hotels with early check-ins," he added. "Bringing young talent through the industry is something close to my heart. I was given the opportunity by others to get on a tour at a very young age. We have had several interns and warehouse staff from Clair Global and Neg Earth Lights, who come to load-ins and load-outs so they can become more familiar with the industry."

Head Caterer Stu Jackson and Caterers Jake Ireland, Andrew Webster, Liz Boyle, Kimmy Moody and Sam Tomblin of TPI Award-winning Popcorn Catering fed the 120-strong touring party. "We have years of experience, which pays off when touring Europe, where logistics can be tricky," Popcorn Catering's James Maggiore said. "There were busy and long days, but that's where experience comes in handy."

To transport the production crew across Europe, Beat The Street provided four double-deck Setra 16-berth buses, with Lead Bus Driver, Scott Pickering, and Bus Drivers Julian Bergmüller, Markis Heitzinger and Per Baumgartner ensuring the crew were transported from A to B safely and seamlessly. "We have worked with Paddy on several tours over the years, and it's always a pleasure to work with him and his team," Beat The Street's Garry Lewis stated.

#### PRODUCTION DESIGN

Given DAVE's penchant for experimentation, Matt Askem fulfilled the unique role of touring Creative Director – a trusted sounding board for the artist to bounce ideas off and evolve the show. "One of the specific requests was



the ability to make each show different, along with MIDI control of the lights and lasers," Askem explained. "DAVE knew which tracks he wanted to perform, but it was important for there to be a narrative arc. He's had a 10-year career, so he wanted to present his albums in blocks. The other insight I gathered was that he wants people in the bleachers to have a great experience, and that motivated the moving screens concept by Tim Routledge."

Co-Production Designer, Tim Routledge, added: "What I wanted to do was take a screen that simply sits there – we've used transparent screens on numerous tours in different ways – but I've always wanted to layer them and do more than just place someone behind them and light them. I knew Neg Earth Lights had a version of this tracking and rotational system that we'd used in a much simpler way on another project."

The idea was to take four screens, layer them, and have them travel down the room in formation, chasing content between them to create depth, while rotating to alter the architecture of the arena and deliver IMAG views regardless of where audiences were seated. "DAVE is more into IMAG looks than graphical content, so IMAG was always going to be a major part of the show, transporting viewpoints around the room," Routledge noted.

In collaboration with the wider creative team, Routledge designed the diamond-shaped B-stage and riser, with a flown truss directly above, populated with a variety of lighting fixtures, alongside a diamond-shaped truss concealed in the roof to house the 'drone balls', which cascade in varying configurations.

In keeping with the diamond geometry, every lighting fixture in the rig – aside from

the balls – was square. "I wanted to create something that would change the architecture of the stage, particularly for the track, *The Boy Who Played the Harp*, which has a monochrome palette. The balls could change colour, but we kept them in white or warm white. The shapes were something DAVE could effectively conduct with his hands, eventually settling on 3D angel wings inspired by the album artwork. It gave him a playful stage to interact with and became one of the most 'Instagrammable' moments," Routledge said.

Guitarist Joseph Caleb, Drummer Dexter Hercules, Bassist Lawrence Insula and Keyboardist David Davis were introduced during *Screwface Capital*. "Given DAVE's musicality, we wanted to make the band more of a feature and allow him to communicate with them during the performance," Askem noted. "While the band appears on roughly half the set – with 10 tracks to playback and the rest live – the challenge of where to position them led to the addition of a thrust and B-stage, effectively hiding the band in plain sight."

Alongside the tracking system, left and right IMAG screens ensured full coverage. Askem, Routledge and Stufish worked closely to ensure a cohesive visual language that translated both in the room and on camera. "What I tend to bring is an understanding of how to make someone look good on camera, and how that translates to iPhone footage as well," Askem explained. "Working with Tim and Richard, we graded the screens, so they functioned for both broadcast cameras and audience phones, avoiding overexposure and maintaining balance for a cohesive look."

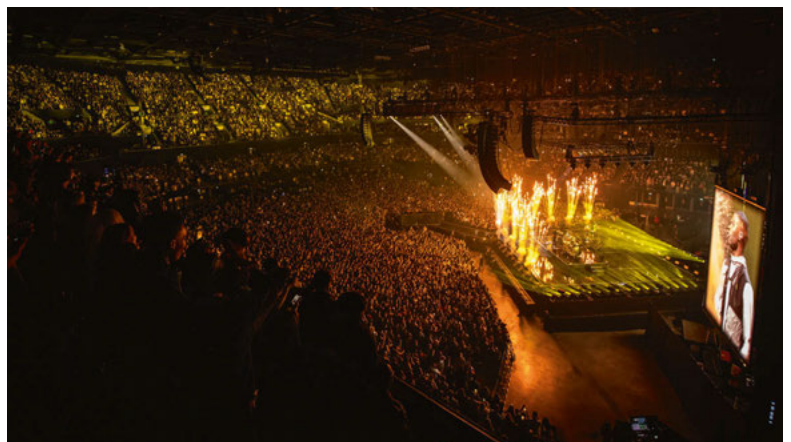
Askem booked studio time to capture additional content, lifting vocals from the likes

of James Blake, Stormzy and Jim Legxacy, and others. Where artists were unavailable due to schedules, bespoke promo content filled the gaps. *Screwface Capital* saw the blow-through screens layered to create towering structures. "I particularly liked the running figure in that track; it moved up and down the screens in layers, creating depth. That was a success and an idea from Luke Halls Studio," Askem said.

*Clash* marked the first moment all screens tracked forward, layering content featuring Stormzy. "We used a lot of interference, which allowed different camera feeds across stacked screens. Using black within the screens is a useful tool when things become visually busy, particularly with transparency. When you rotate the screens, that issue disappears, so using them as one large surface was effective," Askem continued. "A key consideration was that we could only track the screens when the band weren't playing, as they obscured the stage. With setlist changes, we sometimes had to adjust the automation accordingly, so everything was built with flexibility in mind."

For the *Victory Lap* section, a MIDI DJ kit rose on a lift. In each city, DAVE and his producer incorporated local influences and sampled beats. Earlier in the show, interval VTs featuring location-specific monologues were filmed and broadcast. "Those monologues were late additions. He's a unique artist – playing piano and guitar, rapping and DJing – so having a live element to showcase that range is essential. The content for *UK Rap* features visuals from every city on the tour," Askem said, noting how TAIT delivered the drum machine podium in just two days during rehearsals.

"We wanted the show to feel ethereal and transformative, so modularity became central



to the process,” explained Stufish’s Ray Winkler. “Everything fits within a defined module size for efficient trucking and assembly. But modularity is only as interesting as how you use it – that’s where creativity transforms a technical solution into something more esoteric and ephemeral, suited to DAVE’s performances and his connection with the audience. The aim was always for the technology to recede, allowing the storytelling to come forward. It was the skill of the entire team, weaving those elements together, that truly brought the design to life.”

#### RIGGING

Head Rigger, Steve Walsh, began work on the design in October, assessing plots and determining what could be accommodated within each venue. The result was 135 points, a total flown weight of 56 tonnes, and a substantial number of two-tonne motors to facilitate the automated tracking system.

All the rigging was fitted with load cells connected to Kinesys LibraCell, allowing the team to track weight distribution across motors and monitor dynamic movement in real time. “This allows us to identify issues and troubleshoot quickly. With something as heavy and dynamic as moving video walls, load monitoring is essential. It’s very easy to overload without that level of oversight.”

Walsh was supported by Riggers Barnsley Grain and Tam Shrijver. “We make a strong team. It’s important to understand each other’s workflows, and we all share the same mindset when it comes to load-ins and -outs, managing empties and maintaining equipment,” Walsh

commented. “Everyone is aligned. It’s been a good tour. I won’t miss the early alarm calls, but we’ve got a great team on the road, which makes it all worthwhile.”

#### STAGING AND TRUCKING

In the lead-up to the tour, Production Park supported the production within its arena-sized facilities in Wakefield. “The team was fantastic to host. This was their first time using Studio 005, a large-scale space, so we placed extra focus on advance planning ahead of the load-in and that preparation paid off,” said Production Park Studios Manager, Scott Matthews. “With full-space rigging, a 500-tonne load capacity and impressive acoustic treatment, Studio 005 provided the team creative freedom.”

Production Stage Manager, Phil ‘Tico’ Ryder, and Head Carpenter and Show Stage Manager, Jason Slaney-Welch, oversaw deployment of the diamond-shaped main stage, thrust and B-stage, all built using TAIT’s Mag Deck system. The decks were finished with high-shine Marley, with integrated shelves for lighting.

“It’s a big tour with a complex design, but I enjoy the challenge,” said Tico. “The ‘big monster’ in the room is the pair of giant automation trusses. They’re the longest and most time-consuming elements of the build, so we prioritise them at the start of the load-in to ensure enough time for assembly.”

The main stage featured three band risers, alongside a fourth mounted on a scissor lift. The lift is used to raise and lower the piano for key moments, as well as a MIDI drum machine that appears during the performance. “A unique

aspect of the lift, and how it integrates with the stage, is that we effectively built in a ‘parking garage,’” explained TAIT’s Jordan Whittemore. “You have the arena floor, then a middle-level deck where the piano and drum machine are stored when not in use. The lift drops down, the carpenters roll the equipment on, and it can then be raised to stage height – or higher – depending on the effect required.”

Tico described the TAIT stage system as “relatively straightforward to assemble” once the automation trusses are flown, though the process requires careful coordination. “There’s a logistical dance to make it work. I do a lot of pre-planning in CAD, mapping out exactly where everything lands during load-in. If you approach it the wrong way, you can quickly run into problems, so preparation is invaluable.”

With a clean aesthetic high on the creative agenda, subwoofers were concealed beneath the stage to eliminate visible clutter. “The Mag Deck system is modular, so we can swap full decks for half decks and adjust the structure underneath,” Whittemore explained. “We adapted the under-stage space to better accommodate the subs and improve access.”

Hocken worked with the team to integrate subs and atmospheric machines under the stage. Routledge added: “We wanted a clean, floating, diamond-shaped stage in the middle of the room. Straight lines help reduce visual clutter. There will always be instruments on stage, but I’m a strong advocate for hiding monitors and backline wherever possible.” An 8ft walkway was constructed beneath the stage for artist access, with additional space



allocated for engineers. “You get a lot of value out of this system,” he noted.

Tico and Slaney-Welch were supported on site by Head Electrician Jack Willis; Lead Carpenters Mark Fitchen and Carpenters; Ray Bogle, Jack Redman, Scott Turnbull and Aico Boschoven. “This is a team effort,” Tico said. Jason helps with unloading trucks, positioning equipment, managing storage, and reloading.”

He praised the tour’s transport partner: “Transam Trucking are excellent. Their black trucks look the part, and Lead Truck Driver Scott Cooper is both a friend and colleague who can second-guess what I’m thinking.”

Transam Trucking supplied a fleet of 22 EU-registered DAF XG and Scania trucks, along with drivers and a dedicated merchandise truck, ensuring consistency across the European and UK run.

“The trailers are key for the crew – they’re all new, specifically designed and fully equipped 2024/25 registrations, well-lit to keep loading and unloading as safe as possible while as quick as possible with a production of this size,” commented Transam Trucking’s Natasha Highcroft. “We also used this tour to trial and train younger drivers in a live environment, which proved to be a valuable opportunity.”

Lead Truck Driver Scott Cooper – praised by Hocken for “going above and beyond” during load-ins and -outs, effectively becoming part of the stage management team – was supported by a large team of drivers across the tour.

Around the perimeter of the stage and across the band risers, RGBW tape battens – a new TAIT product – delivered seamless LED runs. To achieve this 3D printed clips were bolted to batten allowing the tape and

diffusers to be push-fitted and connected cleanly. TAIT also supplied the ‘sniffers’ used in the show’s opening sequence. Four printed drapes fabricated by Blackout, rigged on kabuki solenoids by Neg Earth Lights, were released and then vacuumed away by the system. Around 40 TAIT UK staff contributed to the package, spanning several departments.

Reflecting on the collaboration, Whittemore said: “It felt like a true partnership from the outset. It’s rare to have in-person vendor-production meetings, but Paddy pushed for it, and it made a difference.”

Stage Miracles, which supported rehearsals at Production Park, provided additional crew on select dates. “Continuity of crew on the road makes a huge difference,” Tico said. “There have been some long and challenging days, but it’s the team that’s held everything together and made it such an enjoyable tour.”

#### AUTOMATION

“The setlist changes frequently, so we’ve ended up with eight distinct automation moments that have continued to evolve over the course of the tour. Ideally, you want everything fully dialled in, but the fluidity of the automation is part of what makes these 16 shows so exciting,” explained Automation Operator, Jody Diaz-Francis.

Following the opening songs, the screens tracked forward in unison, maintaining their orientation to create layered depth and bring the action closer to the audience, before returning to their default position. Later in the set, the screens rotated 90° to form a box configuration, each facing stage left and right, before dispersing and tilting back to their

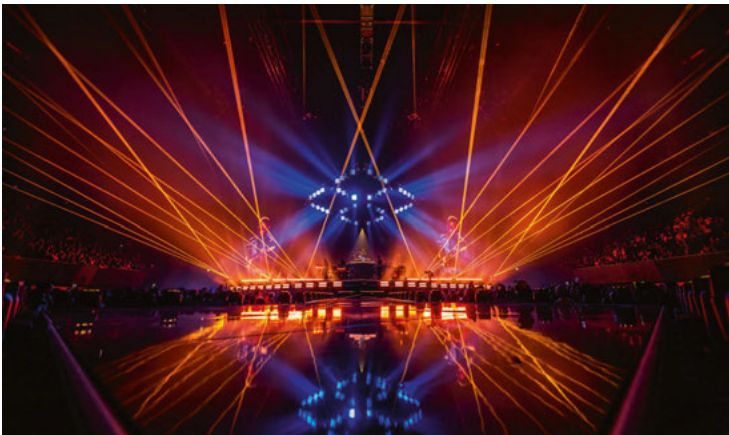
original format for a final pass into the room. “The challenge isn’t achieving these looks, but getting the timing right,” Diaz-Francis noted. “The screens can travel up to 40m, so we must ensure they don’t interfere with lighting or special effects. Equally, if the screens are forward-facing and the flown diamond lighting structure is lowered, they can’t move at all, so it becomes a delicate choreography between all of the automation elements.”

The TAIT systems were controlled via a TAIT Compass console running Navigator software. Screen movement was driven by a Kinesys Elevation system, supplied by Neg Earth Lights, with APEX 1250 hoists used to raise and lower the diamond lighting truss. The ‘drones’ truss meanwhile was fitted with FOS Technologies DMX winches.

Safety was paramount throughout, with spotters positioned stage left and right and software limits programmed into each automation element.

The APEX hoists feature safety PLC networks, dual encoders and braking systems, continuously monitoring operational data, in addition to Kinesys LibraCell.

The automation department was led by Crew Chief, Ben Hammett, alongside Operator Jody Diaz-Francis and Technicians, Richard Kent, Remi Buchanan, Andrea Cammisa, Dan Wiseman, Klins Ganger, Jamie Catt and Blaine Dracup. “It’s incredible how we can transform an arena into something that feels more like a club environment using automation,” concluded Diaz-Francis. “This is a show that is built by people. Every single department brought the right attitude and a shared drive to make it a success.”



LIGHTING

"We've been heavily involved not just in lighting, but in the set and automation as well. With a show this technical, everything must be fully integrated, so our role extended into more of a scenic overview," explained Lighting Programmer and Director, Morgan Evans. "A lot of the key moments – like the laser piano and the drone balls – are rooted in lighting. I don't think we've done two shows the same."

The aim was to create something that initially felt like a traditional concert presentation, before the tracking screens transformed the space into something far more immersive than a standard end-on stage.

For control, Evans utilised MA Lighting grandMA3 software, working entirely within a Recipe-based structure to deliver more than 53,000 timecode events across the set, built from approximately 6,000 Recipe lines. "There are so many snare hits and repeating patterns, so it was intricate to programme," Evans explained. "We're doing some interesting things with MIDI triggers – when DAVE plays piano, drum machine or guitar, certain inputs trigger lighting responses."

Overhead, Ayrton MagicPanel fixtures formed the 'hero' element of the flown diamond truss, with Perseo units providing backlight. The MagicPanels – which Routledge hadn't used in a decade, and Evans had never previously encountered – proved a standout.

"We really enjoy using them; they're incredibly punchy and a reminder that you don't always need the newest fixture," Routledge commented. "Neg Earth Lights always maintain them impeccably. We had them in mind from the outset of the project as they could deliver

the tracking and rotational systems for the screens, as well as custom metalwork to make the drones tourable."

Neg Earth Lights' Sam Ridgway added: "It's a highly ambitious technical production, and we were proud to supply the full lighting, rigging and automation package. This included a tracking truss system supporting eight rotating video screens either side of the thrust, along with custom-engineered pod structures that are automated throughout the show."

All fixtures were integrated into a Follow-Me system, allowing flexible control across the rig. ACME Lighting PIXEL LINE IP fixtures were installed beneath the screens, creating a continuous horizon line of light. As the screens tracked into the room, these fixtures strobed into the audience, washing the crowd in light. Along the downstage edge, Robe's WTF fixtures delivered infinite pan and tilt. "We're doing some really dynamic work with the WTFs," Evans explained. "They can zoom in and out, produce tight beams and strobe effects, giving us a huge range of looks on the downstage edge. Ayrton Bora fixtures punch through from the rear, adding depth, while the Perseos create a powerful wall of light."

Routledge elaborated: "We wanted volume – lots of light and plenty of haze – which drove the inclusion of the WTF fixtures. By stripping back the central video element at times, the show takes on a more rock 'n' roll aesthetic. Behind the floating diamond stage, we installed large runs of moving lights on wheel trusses, forklifted onto a secondary deck, which allowed us to create depth beneath the screens and reinforce the illusion of a floating environment. Pixel mapping was essential, but always used

tastefully, ensuring the band remained the focus rather than being overwhelmed by video."

The Follow-Me system enabled Evans to repurpose fixtures throughout the show. "We can have every light in the rig doing something bold in one moment, then switch to more traditional followspot use in the next. It tracks movement across lifts and pods, so wherever the performer goes, the system adapts."

The colour palette leaned heavily into reds, steels and contrasting warm and cool tones. "We're using coloured key light extensively," Evans noted, highlighting *Professor X* as a standout. "The opening to *No Words* is a stripped-back, two-tone warm and cool look with just haze and DAVE, which works beautifully. The show covers a wide range – from high-energy strobe moments to intimate piano sections – and the lighting reflects that."

He continued: "Neg Earth Lights enabled this concept. The system is packaged cleanly; everything is organised meticulously – from the way the back wall is rigged to the consistency of fixtures on the B-stage. It all contributes to a show that builds efficiently and looks polished."

The lighting team comprised Crew Chief Keith Johnson, alongside Technicians Steve Percy, Peter Horne, Craig Ralph, Chantelle Young, Jason Hyne and Joao Magalhaes.

Ridgway added: "We assembled a diverse and highly skilled crew capable of meeting the demands of such a technical production. Throughout the planning process, many staff contributed at various stages. It is a dedicated team with a shared commitment to delivering the highest standards."

Routledge concluded: "The reveal of DAVE is particularly special – four kabuki drops and



four sniffers, very much 'seat-of-your-pants', but it worked flawlessly every night.

"Morgan's programming on *Professor X*, bringing in the diamond truss, is another highlight," he continued. "The addition of PIXEL LINE IP fixtures beneath the screens means there's always a lighting layer moving in sync with the automation. The large Ayrton Bora looks from the rear trusses are striking. It's all about elements appearing from nowhere. Certain moments – like the laser piano and guitar – must be timed precisely, but much of the show remains freeform, which keeps it exciting. It's rare to work on a project where both the artist and the team are this special."

#### VIDEO

Cameras were positioned across all four sides of the diamond-shaped B-stage, with additional coverage on the main stage. Oblique cameras were placed further down the B-stage on both sides, while a FOH camera tracked DAVE's movement along the thrust. A handheld camera at the end of the thrust delivered dynamic, hero-style shots. Two further remote cameras operated on tracks to cover the main stage, complemented by mini cameras and a PTZ unit mounted on the truss to provide a bird's-eye view of the piano moments and *Victory Lap* drum machine sequences.

Universal Pixels Project Manager, Ben Annibal, oversaw the video deployment, working with the company's technical team and crew coordinators to assemble the right personnel for rehearsals and the tour. ROE Visual V8T LED panels were driven by Brompton Technology SX40 processors. Content was captured using Panasonic UC4000 cameras, paired with Fujinon UA107 lenses. Two custom-built barges housed the camera PPU system alongside Disguise GX

3 media servers and processing, allowing for efficient deployment and strike.

Media Server Programmer and Operator, Richard Turner – whose career in video predates the wider adoption of video projection for touring in the early '90s – operated two Disguise GX 3 servers (one active, one backup) from FOH, supplied by Universal Pixels. "They understand the realities of touring – they're a people-first company, and the packaging is excellent; you can't lose the orange boxes," Turner remarked, further praising the support of Disguise.

Luke Halls Studio delivered the bulk of the content. "Even though the screens are large, they're 8mm resolution, so we can fit everything across two HD canvases, meaning the workload isn't overly heavy. I handle multiple video inputs and use Disguise to map and manipulate them across the screens, adding colour effects where needed," Turner explained. "Matt and I probably double the average age of the bus, but it's great to see such a young, enthusiastic crew coming through. Paddy leads it all brilliantly."

The wider video team included Crew Chief, Al Bolland; Video Engineer, Brony Margotts; Camera Supervisor, Patrick Hall; Lead LED Technician, Al Wright and LED Technician/ Camera Operators, Paul Borthwick, Jules Blagg and Oscar Winter.

Highlighting the collaborative nature of the project, Annibal noted: "We carried out test builds in Neg Earth Lights' warehouse while the custom metalwork was being fabricated and cable runs planned. This was far from an off-the-shelf solution. The result is a striking show that feels genuinely different."

Reflecting on the process, Askem concluded: "It's been challenging but I'm proud of what we've achieved. The entire team has

been fantastic. DAVE is a true artist – a gifted performer with something important to say."

Luke Halls Studio oversaw the conceptual and visual development of all screen-based content for the tour, shaping the overarching narrative and ensuring integration with lighting, stage design and live camera elements. The result was a cohesive creative vision, carried through from initial concept to on-site delivery. "There was a shared ambition to push the creative as far as possible while remaining purposeful," explained Luke Halls. "Everything needed to serve the artist and the narrative, so decisions were always grounded in intent rather than spectacle."

The studio operated with a core team of 10 – Luke Halls, Mark Todd, Rae Shepherd, Elettra McConnell, Barbora Giliute, Uzo Uzoigwe, Tom Scott, Jason Moss, Daisy Finetto and Gary West – working across creative direction, 2D and 3D design, Notch effects, editing and content production. A combination of tools, including After Effects and real-time engines such as Notch, were employed throughout.

"While there are familiar pipelines we return to, each show demands its own approach depending on the creative and technical requirements," Halls noted.

Among the standout moments, Halls cited the "high-energy impact" of *Sprinter*, with bold, graphic compositions tightly synchronised to the pace and attitude of the track. "It's one of those moments where everything aligns – the familiarity of the song, the audience reaction and the visual language all reinforce each other," he stated.

*Raindance* provided a contrasting highlight, leaning into the more emotional side of the show. "It allowed for a more immersive, almost hypnotic visual language that draws the audience in," Halls concluded. "What makes



it effective is the synergy with lighting and staging – it’s less about watching content and more about feeling the world of the track.”

**SPECIAL EFFECTS AND LASERS**

One of the tour’s defining visual moments came in the form of the laser piano. Stufish’s Ray Winkler reflected: “The way it integrated into the wider show was special. The audience could directly connect DAVE sitting at the piano with the lasers responding to each keystroke, firing out over the crowd. There’s a tangible cause-and-effect that everyone in the room can feel.”

Laser Programmer and Operator Cam Dominy – a Rose Bruford College graduate, alongside Lighting Programmer and Director Morgan Evans – walked TPI through the system. “The brief was for DAVE to effectively ‘play’ the lasers from the keyboard. Every note sends a MIDI trigger to me, which fires a cue stack and activates the lasers. We have 12 lasers, matching the octave of the piano, so whatever he plays, the lasers follow – it’s a nice detail.”

The piano lasers were ER Productions Beam ER units – 5.5W RGB fixtures – integrated into a scenic set piece, requiring close collaboration with the carpentry team.

Another standout moment came during *Thiago Silva*. “I drew a lot of inspiration from dance music. It’s a fun track to programme,” Evans commented. Laser choreography had to be tightly aligned with the tracking screens to avoid any clashes or reflections. “At the end of

the track, there’s a half-second window before the screens pass over the laser paths, so timing is critical.”

More laser moments featured in *Selfish*, where notes trigger high-powered AT60X ER lasers, and *Starlight*, the closing number. “The brief was to create a starfield effect,” Dominy stated. “Slow, ambient looks in blues and whites, with occasional ‘shooting stars’ triggered on drum hits with trailing effects.”

The system extended beyond the stage, with 12 lasers positioned above FOH, mirroring those embedded in the piano.

“They terminate on a truss above FOH, each matched one-to-one and triggered by the same cues,” Dominy explained. “We used wireless DMX and battery power on the truss to avoid sightline issues. From behind, it almost resembles a harp – as if he’s playing it out into the room. Power and data were a challenge; we’re running a 5kW battery system and wireless solutions to make it work.”

Atmospheric effects included six Look Solutions cryo fog machines and MDG ‘pocket’ units, delivering low-lying smoke across both the main stage and B-stage. “It keeps the stage looking clean – you don’t notice it until the space fills with haze,” Dominy noted.

Pyrotechnics and flame effects further elevated the show’s impact. A total of 24 Magic FX FLAMEBER units were positioned around the perimeter of the main stage, with additional pyro positions along the downstage edges, including Magic FX Stadium Shot Mk3 confetti

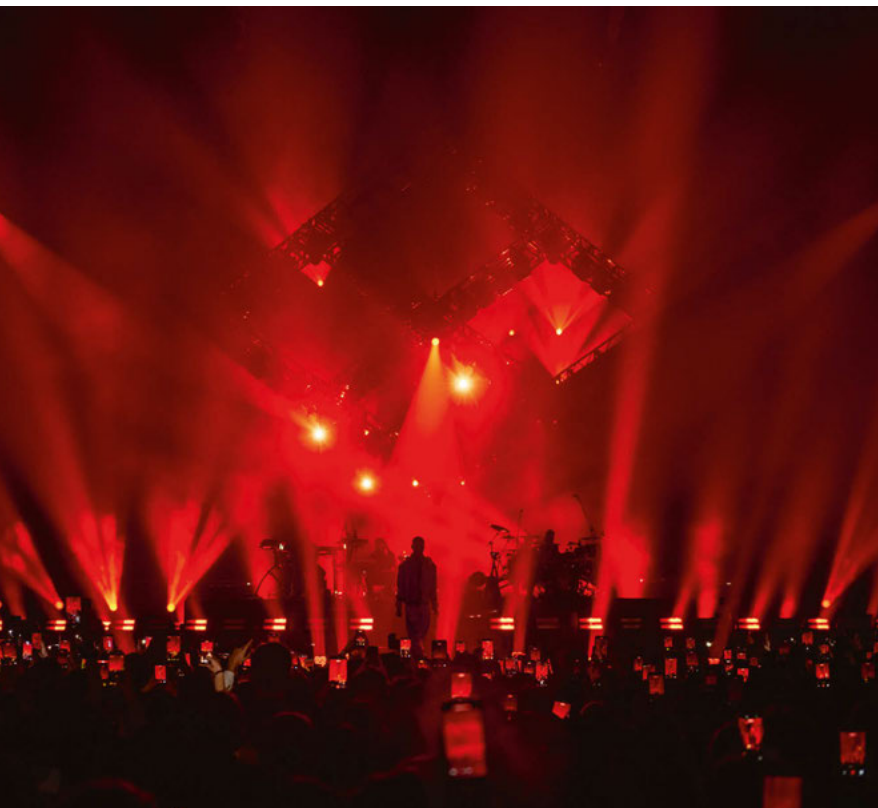
launchers. A large confetti moment during *Raindance* marked the show’s finale.

Control systems included Pangolin software for high-powered upstage lasers, while MA Lighting grandMA3 handled DMX-based fixtures. Galaxis software was used for pyro control, with grandMA3 triggering flames, cryo fog and confetti, all operated by SFX and Pyro Lead, Eleanor Waller. “DAVE was my first tour four years ago, so this feels like a full-circle moment,” she reflected. “I have stayed within the rap and grime scene since, so when this came around again, I jumped at the chance.”

A total of 24 FLAMEBER units fire around the stage in *Verdansk* with a fierce two-second burn on the lyric ‘airlifted’ as Waller explained: “After the first show, we added 10 pyro positions and six confetti shots to enhance the impact. *Verdansk* is a personal highlight for flames. It was challenging to programme, but incredibly rewarding. *Raindance*, with pyro and confetti, is a perfect closing song.”

All confetti on the tour was biodegradable, with CO<sub>2</sub> supplied locally at each venue. “Collaboration has been key,” Waller added. “Touring this across Europe, including four sold-out shows at The O2, has been special. It’s been my first time working closely with a laser team, which has been a great learning experience. SFX Technician Andrew Rowland has also stepped up on his first tour.”

Dominy concluded: “It’s been great to see the laser piano gain traction on social media. It’s always a bit nerve-racking because I can’t



fully check it until it happens live, but there's a real sense of relief when he hits that first note and everything lands perfectly."

**AUDIO**

One of the longest-serving members of the camp, alongside Keyboardist David Davis, FOH Engineer Charles Bidwell of HZ Audio – whose company supplied the audio control package – has been mixing DAVE for nine years.

"A lot of attention goes into recreating the studio patches for live use – particularly on piano, with samples being triggered via MIDI. Everything arrives sounding like the record, so my job is to translate that into an arena environment and make it feel even bigger than the record," he said.

The aim was for the live show to faithfully represent DAVE's catalogue while maintaining consistency across a multitude of production styles, leaning into the full body of work. "We spent a lot of time in band rehearsals before arriving at what we have now."

During rehearsals, the audio team ingested stems from every project, building a full multitrack Ableton session. "It meant we could break everything out appropriately. For example, on days we have Kano, we use his live microphone; on days we don't, we still have a dedicated Kano playback channel in the mix. We're always mixing around him rather than him being baked into a playback stem," he explained. "We've had features from Stormzy, Tems, James Blake, MoStack, Kano, and Jim Legxacy. When guests are present, we can soundcheck them quickly and integrate them without reprogramming our showfiles."

As an Allen & Heath shop, dLive consoles are used at FOH and for Monitor Engineer Megan Collier. Everything on stage runs

digitally via DX protocol, with DX168 units in backline racks, and another at drum. A DX32 fitted with AES cards handles Shure Axient Digital, AD-PSM and AD4Q systems.

"Ideally, we keep everything digital right up to the last moment," Bidwell said. "Megan ingests all the stage information and sends it over FibreACE to FOH. Playback comes in via MAD1 with analogue backups; the dLive handles all formats seamlessly. At FOH I'm running a DM32 MixRack, S7000 surface and a C1500 sidecar. I've got three I/O cards – FibreACE from stage, AES into the SKAN Drive Rack (feeding the PA), and a Dante 128 card for multitracks/UAD inserts."

Bidwell's outboard rack features SSL Bus+ and Fusion for Masterbus processing and an Avalon 737 on vocals. "The Fusion adds tape-style saturation and warms the low mids, while the Bus+ is running in G-bus mode with a Pultec-style EQ. That's really solidifying the mix at the final stage," he explained. "We're using dLive DEEP processing throughout, which is flexible and offers the characteristics of studio dynamic processing in the live environment."

His standout moments in the set include *History* segued into *No Weapons*. "I love the build and energy from the crowd – straight away they get two tracks from the new album. Hard-hitting *History* into *No Weapons*, which has a strong message however equally fun and becomes a huge crowd singalong... With his catalogue the set could be three hours long."

The PA featured 16 d&b audiotechnik GSL loudspeakers per side on the main hangs, 16 KSL on the side hangs, 12 XSL on the rear hang, and 12 KSL delays positioned to account for the tracking screen system. "Matt Vickers did the pre-design and mechanical planning before handing it over to us on the road," Systems

Engineer, Finlay Watt said. "The challenge is managing spill from the PA onto the thrust, but we've been able to control that well. The delay hangs are powered from the same amp carts, so there's a fair amount of cable routing."

Audio Crew Chief, Joachim Dewulf, added: "The moving screens require additional delay hangs to fill gaps. They're closer to the stage than typical delays, effectively filling shading created by the screens. The early starts help massively – by the time we hang PA, all the motors are already up, so load-ins are efficient." A sub array of 20 SL subs in a semi-circle configuration was positioned beneath the stage. "It looks counterintuitive on paper, but because of the depth and spacing, it works perfectly in practice," Watt noted.

DAVE wore UE 11 Pro in-ear monitors, while the band used a mix of Ultimate Ears and JH Audio. "DAVE's mix changes from song to song," Collier explained. "Some tracks are playback-heavy, while others have live instrumentation. He plays guitar on *Selfish*, so those moments are simpler and more functional to keep him locked in, especially with such a sub-heavy stage. He spends a lot of time on the B-stage: when he moves into the crowd the reaction is incredible – it's a chorus of excitement." A Shure Nexadyne Supercardioid microphone was used for vocals. "He has a lower register, and it really suits his voice – it's a big step up in clarity," Collier said.

Of the dLive's 128 channels, 110 are used, including a switchboard of talkbacks. "I enjoy Kano on *Chapter 16*. Feeding the crowd's reaction into their mixes makes it a fun and interactive part of the show," she added. "*The Boy Who Played the Harp* is always a standout."

Although mixing under the stage is not common practice, Collier explained: "It took



a couple of rehearsals to fully understand how a mix from below stage translates. The musicians all have wired talkbacks and DAVE's AD2 features a 'talk switch', so he can easily communicate any adjustments."

The team included PA Technicians, Brooke Paterson and Tobia Piatti and Communications Technician, Eiran Simpson. Monitor Technician, Harry Dilloway supported HZ Audio with RF management, guest integrations, microphone changes, lift cues and stage patching.

Reflecting on the 16-date tour, Collier concluded: "It's a big production with a lot of moving parts. It's constantly evolving, but with the right gear, the right people, and big spreadsheets, anything is possible."

Playback and Backline Technician, Chris Purcell liaised with Charles Bidwell during the design process to create a system with multiple layers of redundancy. "At some shows, I would be stripping timecode for new interstitials or arrangements when the doors to the gig are open, and the crowd is in the venue. Clearly communicating these changes and liaising with each department has been critical," he said.

"Before day one, I had a project with 64 songs in chronological order, with each of the 20-plus featured artists individually separated so I could eyeball the Ableton session and be ready for anything should a guest appear on the night. This expanded during rehearsals with multiple versions and arrangement edits being added," Purcell recalled. He harnessed two RME Digiface Dante interfaces which fed a DirectOut Technologies EXBOX.MD, which handled conversion to MADI at 96kHz.

An SFP MADI transceiver further provided three simultaneous streams: two via coaxial linked to the redundant main and spare inputs of the dLive SuperMADI card, and a third optical

feed to a Ferrofish A32 Pro, which converted the signal to analogue.

"We have an extensive MIDI network, thanks to iConnectivity MioXM/XL interfaces. The drum triggers are converted to MIDI and return to me to play samples. This MIDI data is forwarded to Morgan's console so that Dex's triggers can fire lighting cues if we're not running to LTC. Likewise, DAVE's piano outputs MIDI to me which triggers Kontakt for the audio. This signal is simultaneously forwarded to Cam at FOH, allowing DAVE to 'play' the bank of 12 lasers installed in the piano shell in real time."

DAVE's four AKAI MPD setup is all MIDI, triggering samples in Ableton which are updated daily. Every keyboard on stage switched between playing sounds in Ableton or playing sounds from the boards themselves with bi-directional MIDI. DAW-wise, Purcell ran Ableton Live 12. "Jonny Leslie, DAVE's Studio Producer, also works in Live, so it's the most natural choice. For show control and setlist management, I've written my own Max4Live device called Conductor and custom scripted iPad control template in TouchOSC – I've used the process of touring with DAVE to beta test and develop additions to a new release of Conductor: version handling and featured artist metadata have made my life much easier!" Purcell enthused.

The wider team involved in staging *The Boy Who Played the Harp Tour* included Co-Managers, Jack Foster and Benny Scars; Management, Justin Scott, James Walsh and Killian Farrell; Tour Manager, Justine Ellis, Artist Chef, Tom Taylor; Road Manager, Helena King; Merchandiser, Tom Lee; Live Nation's Adam Maughan, WFB Live's; William Bowman, Ace Bowman, Charles Monneraud, James Trood and Katie Dyer. "I spend most of my time down

in the underworld with the backline team, Dan Norris and James Sharpe, who are both at the very top of their game," Purcell concluded. "The team is the best in the business. Everybody is so staggeringly good at their job that it makes you strive to not be the weak link!"

In one of the VTs, DAVE notes that his first Manchester show took place at the Deaf Institute for just 100 people. Fast-forward nine years, and with a touring party larger than that crowd in 2017, and Bidwell's earlier sentiments are even more poignant: "Mixing multiple sold-out nights at The O2 and Co-op Live is incredible," he commented.

"Every night is great, even if things don't quite go to plan. The O2 felt like a homecoming, however, Co-op Live is the best-sounding arena in the world. DAVE is such a special artist to work with; the crew are the best." ●

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