

The circus comes to Tokyo

HOLZMUELLER PRODUCTIONS HELPS THE INTERNATIONAL MUSICAL CIRCUS PITCH ITS TENT



Led by the international popularity of the Cirque du Soleil, the circus has become a newly resurgent entertainment form. One of the latest and most intriguing developments in the circus world is Musical Circus, a Tokyo-based company that sports an international creative team. Led by producer Bunichiro Matsumoto, who runs the Tokyo Clown College, the production's circus acts were directed by Valentin Gneouchév of the Old Moscow Circus. The artistic director is Tandy Beal, who has directed the American-based New Pickle Circus. Many of the performers are from the Moscow Circus. The designers—Michael Cotten on scenery, Beaver Bauer on costumes, and Kurt Landisman on lights—are all American, and the show was supplied by a mixture of American and Japanese companies. Overall, the show features a cast and crew of 175; it premiered in a 2,500-seat tent built on reclaimed land in Tokyo Bay, and has recently relocated in Tokyo itself.

With such diverse personnel, communication was a primary issue. "The production meetings were like being at the UN," says production manager Peggy Snider. "There were about 15 directors, designers, and production people at the

MUSICAL CIRCUS

PRODUCER

Bunichiro Matsumoto

ASSISTANT PRODUCER

Toshikazu Mogi

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Tandy Beal

CIRCUS DIRECTOR

Valentin Gneouchév

COMPOSER

Jeffrey Gaeto

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Peggy Snider

SCENERY

Michael Cotten

COSTUMES

Beaver Bauer

LIGHTING

Kurt Landisman
Tom Kline, assistant

SCANCOMMANDER PROGRAMMER

Chris Varrin

EXPRESSION PROGRAMMER

David Welle

LIGHTING DEPARTMENT TRANSLATOR

Chie Ogata

EQUIPMENT

Holzmueller Productions, San Francisco; TSJ, Tokyo; Nihon Stage Co., Osaka

JAPAN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING AND OPERATION

Mat Company, Osaka

TENT

Ogawa Tent Company

EQUIPMENT

(1) ETC Expression 2X
(4) ETC Sensor 48x2.4 kW racks
(1) MA Scanc Commander
(8) Clay Paky Golden Scan 3s
(4) Clay Paky Super Scan Zooms
(252) Altman PAR-64s
(80) Altman 360-Q ellipsoidals
(18) ETC Source Four ellipsoidals
(24) Wybron Colorams
(12) Great American Market
TwinSpins
(2) 2kW RDS projectors
(8) Diversitronics Strobe Cannons
(4) Lycian 400W HTI followspots
(2) DF-50 Hazers
(2) SFX Designs Nitrogen Foggers
1,785m TMB 8-circuit multi cable
387m TMB pin cable
932m TMB Proplex DMX cable

meetings—and six translators. There were Americans, Japanese, Russians, and the French tent guys. Whenever

Working with an international creative team, including a Japanese crew and mainly Russian performers, American LD Kurt Landisman's lighting for Tokyo-based Musical Circus helps narrate the story of two children's journey through the universe.

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anyone would start talking, this crazy babble would start. It was the most amazing, cacophonous thing I've ever heard." LD Landisman notes that he had one translator for speaking with the Russian performers and another translator for communicating with the Japanese lighting technicians.

The cultural differences took in technical issues, too. Tokyo's electrical system operates at 100V/50 cycles, so Landisman originally planned to specify Japanese equipment. However, he soon realized that many fixtures are not available in Japan at 100V; among the missing are ACLs, wide-flood PARs, and raylights. Finally, the producers agreed to supply generators (at 117V) to allow for a more flexible lighting system. For the recent move to Tokyo, transformers have been used to allow the show to use regular city power, eliminating generator noise.

Landisman put together his equipment list through San Francisco-based Holzmüller Productions. Among his choices were Clay Paky Golden Scan 3s

and Super Scan Zooms, because they are known products in Japan and could be serviced. He chose the MA Scancommander for moving light control; this was slaved, through its MIDI port, to the ETC Expression 2X, which controlled the conventional lighting. This allowed one operator to run the entire show in performance.

Among the other products supplied by Holzmüller were ETC Sensor dimmers, Wybron color changers, Great American Market TwinSpin pattern rotators, RDS scenic projectors, and conventional fixtures from Altman and ETC (Landisman notes, "[ETC] Source Fours are very big in Japan right now."). Landisman's assistant, Tom Kline, created a carefully color-coded plot to illustrate how to circuit the rig; he worked with the staff at Holzmüller to figure the pathways for the miles of multi-cable (from TMB Associates of Burbank, CA) 120V power, 240V power, and DMX control cable for the dimmers, color changers, strobe cannons, and moving lights.

Like many of its contemporaries, the Musical Circus has an overall thematic concept, involving a journey made by two children through the universe to

illustrate a lesson about ecology. Of course, the circus features the usual complement of acrobats, aerialists, contortionists, jugglers, and clowns. Landisman, who has worked with director Beal at the New Pickle Circus, notes that part of his design was dictated by the show's concept. "Basically," he says, "Act I takes place in a jungle world, then it progresses into a lightning storm, so I had to come up with a huge storm effect. Then Act I ends with the storm breaking and we end up in a rainbow world. Act II takes place out in the universe, and basically a lot of that fell to me to create."

For the jungle effect, the LD used lots of gobos—"a whole slew of patterns over the floor: palm fronds and jungle leaves in various fantastical colors—lots of pinks and yellows, and greens on top of a blue base on the floor." For the lightning storm, he adds, "I put lightning gobos in all the moving lights, so I could create this flash of lightning all over the tent." For the rainbow, "we have diffusion mist in the air and there's a PAR can wash that comes from one of the trusses that shoots down, so you can see the rainbow in the air as well as on the floor."