

# GUITAR HEROES

A top team gets together to support Eric Clapton's CROSSROADS CENTRE

By: Sharon Stancavage

"It's the best show on the planet," says associate production designer and programmer Eric Wade. With a lineup that includes Eric Clapton, Steve Winwood, Jeff Beck, John Mayer, B.B. King, ZZ Top, the Allman Brothers, Buddy Guy, and

more, it's hard to argue his point. The event is the Crossroads Guitar Festival, which took place at Chicago's Toyota Park in late June. The event, which was produced by Upstaging Inc., of Sycamore, Illinois, featured production design by Dave Maxwell (also known for his work on

Clapton's tours), with technical direction by Upstaging's John Huddleston. The event was created by Eric Clapton to support his Crossroads Centre for the treatment of addictions in Antigua. The event's main stage featured more than two dozen performers; the Guitar Center



Above and right: The main stage by day. For this year's event, Dave Maxwell was responsible for the graphics as well as the production design.



All photos: Upstaging/Paul Nielson



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Village (see sidebar) included a variety of vendors who let patrons literally play with their gear, and take part in guitar clinics; this area also featured another stage, sponsored by Ernie Ball, the maker of guitar strings and accessories. The event was also filmed, and had limited cinema release in July; a DVD is expected

out soon.

“We got together a great team,” says Huddleston. Key to the team was Tim Rozner, the site and stage manager. “Tim handled the show with military precision—backstage, it was like the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. The sold-out show achieved something that few shows,

especially live festivals, manage to achieve: Everything went ahead of schedule on every level that day,” Maxwell reports.

### Lighting

The design was based on what Maxwell and Wade were doing with Clapton before the event. “We more or less doubled the touring system, then added a bunch of video elements, side lighting, and audience light,” notes Wade. The audience lights—Martin Professional MAC 2000 Washes—were hung in the stadium on two 100' trusses. In addition, there were “three curved trusses stacked on top of one another,” explains Maxwell.

A variety of lighting gear was found on the stage. According to Maxwell, the rig “consisted of a quantity of [Philips Vari\*Lite] VL3000 profiles and washes, VL3500 FX Washes, and a large number of [Martin Professional] MAC 2Ks dotted throughout the audience and the stage, as well as low-to-medium-resolution Martin LC panels.” The sizable equipment list also included Altman single-cell cyc lights, ETC Source Four PARs, and a bevy of Molefay fixtures. As for the rest of the gear, Maxwell and Wade relied on the vast inventory at Upstaging, creating a winning combination of hard-edge and wash fixtures to fill in the stage and audience.

One new unit that Wade discovered during Crossroads was the Robe 2500 AT Spot. “It’s a really nice hard-edge light; I was very impressed with it,” he says. The Robe units, working along with some units from Philips Vari-Lite, were an integral part of the camera lighting. “The Robes and [Vari-Lite] VL3000 Profiles were on the side towers and the PA towers downstage—we used them as camera key lighting in CTO,” Maxwell says.

The design team also had BB4 LED fixtures, made by the UK-based company i-Pix. “It was the first time I

used them,” notes Wade. “It’s a very cool light, which we used for stage and audience washes. It was one of the units that Upstaging recommended to Dave.”

The spotlights were the final major element of the lighting package. “We used 14 Lycian spotlights—eight in truss, or six upstage and two downstage—and some Gladiators out front,” notes Maxwell.

From a lighting standpoint, the show had three phases tied to different times of day—daylight, twilight, and night. “During the day, we used pastels and light colors, things that would read on camera; basically, we just painted a picture for daylight on TV,” says Wade. As the weather changed throughout the day, so did the lighting: “When we had shadows, we could go with nicer, richer colors.” Twilight was a transition time where “we did a few more looks with the automated lights to give it a bit more depth, and did a little more on the video screens,” Maxwell says. The nighttime acts featured full-on lighting and video with all the bells and whistles.

During the almost 13-hour show, Maxwell and Wade divided up their duties. “Dave basically handled all the key lights and the audience, and I did all the main stage and video,” explains Wade.

Maxwell and Wade ran the show on two High End Systems Road Hog Full Boars, the console that was used originally to program Clapton’s tour. “A lot of the stuff I do is on the Hog,” says Maxwell, “Eric likes to use a [Martin] Maxxyz a lot, but he’s very good on other consoles as well.” It was, in fact, Wade’s first time on a Road Hog. “It did great,” he says. “I have no complaints about it. I’ve run the Hog III a couple of times and it’s the same as programming that.”

### Sound

The sound rig, provided by Clair Global, of Lititz, Pennsylvania, was also based on Clapton’s current tour.

“Compared to the Clapton tours that I’ve been doing both in the US this year and in Europe—which were arena tours—the side array was significantly bigger: 12 boxes high, as opposed to eight per side,” says Bob Weibel, a Clair system engineer. “Amplifier-wise and speaker-wise, it’s pretty much a standard arrangement,” he adds. Each side of the main PA contained 12 Clair I5 cabinets, 12 I5bs, and 12 BT-218 subs. Eight I3 cabinets were used as front fills.

In addition, says Weibel, “We arranged for Mountain Productions to provide two delay towers, which we used to make the back of the venue work a bit better. We had six of our R4 four cabinets on each tower.” The key to making the delay towers happen was management, he notes: “Production was not only willing but committed to doing whatever it took to get the best sound possible.”

For the show, Clair Global provided two DiGiCo D5 consoles for the front of house and two for monitors. In addition, says Weibel, “We used a Midas XL88 at the front of house as the master summing console, and there was a smaller Midas Venice, which served as a production console.” The XL88 accepts only line level inputs, and is commonly used in festivals like Crossroads. “It is a four-rack-space console,” adds Weibel. “We could combine it into a rack with some CD players and CD recorders; we had the Venice console on top, basically for walk-in music.”

Despite the available gear, Weibel says, “Quite a few of the bands were on tour and brought their own console and/or monitor system.” Just how many artists did so? “It looked rather like a console showroom,” he adds. The models brought in by various artists included a DiGiCo SD8, three Avid Profiles, and an Avid Venue.

Because Weibel knew how many artists were bringing their own

consoles, they adjusted the front-of-house and monitor footprints accordingly. And when the 13-hour show began, the space was necessary. “We had up to three consoles at a time, so they just rotated through—you were always at least two bands ahead in terms of what was actually patched in.”

To make sure that everything went smoothly, Weibel took part in extensive pre-production planning. “I made it a point to be in touch with everyone in well in advance of the show, and collected all the input lists for all these bands,” he says. “I also had a checklist to work down in regards to inquiring about microphones, wireless, monitors, in-ear monitors, and so on.”

With so many artists on stage, the list of microphones was long and varied, and not all of them were supplied by Clair Global. “Vince Gill brought in his stuff complete, from top to bottom; John Mayer was on tour, so he brought his complete package, and Robert Randolph had his own stuff,” says Weibel. “The Allman Brothers were not on tour, but they managed to bring in some mics that were unique to their setup.” The microphones used for Clapton were, of course, the tour microphones. Overall, the workhorse of the microphone stable was a product from Shure. “You can’t go wrong with a Shure SM58,” he says.

The length of the show was a bit of an issue for Weibel and his crew. “It probably represented the single biggest challenge of the day—dealing with a 12-hour sound check day and then a 13-hour show day,” he concludes.

### Graphics and video

Maxwell, a veteran of several Crossroads Guitar Festivals, had an expanded role in the production this time around. “For this one, I was responsible for all video content for show and the sponsors,” he explains. He also was responsible for 100% of



The stage by night, as seen from the front-of-house position.



This preliminary drawing shows the highly graphic approach by Maxwell, who ultimately retained 22 banners featuring guitars.

the graphic content.

One of Maxwell's first acts was to change the overall look of the stage. "In previous years, we used a lot of banners on the stage; this year, we kept them to a minimum and broke up the video panels on stage," he says. The video, which consisted of 32 Martin LC panels, extended into the wings; there were also two Barco D7 14mm 15' x 27' side screens for IMAG, provided by Nocturne Productions Inc. of DeKalb, Illinois. The video content was managed via a Catalyst PM V4 media server.

Although the show day was sunny and warm, there were storms the night before, and, unfortunately, the weather did affect some of the video gear. "The weather hit so bad, the LC panels that were exposed to the weather out in the wings were dying—so, in the middle of show on Saturday, the crew started dropping these panels, fixing them and replacing them; once we hit the evening hours, we had every panel up," says Wade. "I have to say, without the hard efforts of our Upstaging crew, we would not have

had the success we did. They were fantastic in every aspect."

Graphics could also be found in some unexpected places as well. "We used banners on the walls of the turntables, which were mirrored on both sides," Maxwell notes. The 50' turntable, provided by Accurate Staging, of Los Angeles, "took four minutes to turn completely," reports Huddleston.

If Maxwell cut down the number of banners, he did not eliminate them; there were 22 on the main stage. "When we were creating the banners for the event, we started with guitars—our big sponsors for the event—manipulated them, and came up with some nice branding," he notes.

For Maxwell, this aspect of the festival was in some ways more arduous than the production design. "Getting the graphics approved was quite challenging," he admits. And sponsors weren't solely concerned about the live event. "There were many sponsors generous enough to spend their time on the show, so they should be in the loop and they should

have a say about what's going to show up on the DVD," he adds.

In the end, the event went off perfectly; Wade and Maxwell have nothing but good things to say about Upstaging and its staff. "They are an incredibly good firm, I just can't say enough nice things about them," Wade comments. "We don't have to ask for anything. It's all just there, so you don't have to worry, and it takes a whole level of stress away from you. When you get on site, all you really have to think about is the show." Maxwell adds, "John Huddleston and the staff at Upstaging—it was an absolute pleasure working with all of them."

Another key element to the success of the project was the group of people behind Eric Clapton. "Peter Jackson, Mick Double, Hannah Charlesworth, and the rest are the iron behind the scenes; without them, the event wouldn't happen," says Wade.

Crossroads Centre can be found online at [www.crossroadsantigua.org](http://www.crossroadsantigua.org). From the US, it can be reached at 1-888-452-0091.

## VILLAGE LIFE

The artists on stage weren't the only attraction at the Crossroads Guitar Festival. The Guitar Center Village—a retail main street featuring vendors like Dunlop, Marshall, Ibanez, Roland, Gibson, Fender, and more—was a big part of the Upstaging Crossroads experience. "It is very similar to a trade show with a couple of major anchors," explains Village project manager Jerry Swatek. In other words, there was merchandise for sale, and gear was available for patrons to demo.

There was also, of course, entertainment, courtesy of the Ernie Ball stage. The Stageline SSL100 mobile stage is "where they did musical clinics, which had various artists from the main stage as well as those who didn't perform there," Swatek notes.

Another anchor in the village was the Guitar Center Legends Tent, which contained two vintage guitars from Clapton—the Blackie and the Martin 335—as well The Stratocaster on which Stevie Ray Vaughn wrote the song "Lenny." "We did use some PAR 56s to light up the three guitars and to create some ambience to create a museum-like atmosphere," says Swatek.



Maxwell's graphic-design brief extended to the street signs in the Guitar Center Village.



Crowds gather around the Ernie Ball Stage.

## CONCERTS

The sound requirements for the tents were essentially non-existent. “Most of them had their own sound because of amplifiers,” explains Swatek. And although there were musicians picking up guitars and playing in most of the tents, the amp levels didn’t cause any issues. “In our pre-advance show book, we addressed the issue of being respectful of the people next to you with your sound,” he reports, noting that everyone heeded the warning.

Event sponsors Guitar Center and T-Mobile had their own branded tents; the rest of the vendors had three-sided 10' x 10', 10' x 20', or 10' x 30' white tents as part of the Crossroads vendor package. “Even though they were promised a back wall and two side walls, we made sure that the tent company brought front walls for everyone—so, on Friday, the day before the show, the vendors could set up, and they could close their front walls. That way, if it did rain, which it did, it would provide some level of protection,” says Swatek.

The key to the project was, of course, pre-production: Swatek paid an advance call on each vendor, to confirm everything that was needed. “We also provided pre-warehouse shipping, as well,” he says. Upstaging has an extensive warehouse that can accommodate plenty of space for freight storage, and often provides pre- and post-event storage for its clients. “Because we were at Toyota Park, and some of these displays needed to come in early, it would be difficult for Toyota Park to start receiving all these trucks,” he says. Instead of worrying that expensive freight was unsecured at the venue, or having to hunt for it at the venue Saturday morning, Upstaging handled it all. “They could ship their product

and their display at any time, and have it arrive at a warehouse and then get loaded it into our truck. It was sitting at the vendor’s tent waiting for them to arrive on Friday morning to set up,” explains Swatek. He even sent confirmation notices to the vendors when their gear arrived. “Because the Village closed at 6:30, they all tore down very quickly, and got all of their product and display back into a secured truck, which went back to our warehouse until Monday when a common carrier could pick it up.”

The village was located on Toyota Park’s north concourse, which meant Upstaging had to arrange power; the company called on Peter Mitchell, at Moveable Power of Chicago. “Peter Mitchell is one of the best power guys in the entertainment business; whenever we had a power issue come up, he took care of it whether it was part of his scope of work or not,” Swatek says.

Branding was also part of the experience provided by Dave Maxwell, who handled all graphic designs for the event, including street signs for each vendor in the village. “The signs kept everything nice and clean; you didn’t have ten million vendors providing their own banners and flags,” Swatek notes.

While Maxwell cut down the number of banners in the stadium, “We took abstract banners from 2004 that were 40' and 50' long, and cut them down to 30', and took 20' down to 10',” explains Swatek, who adds that the idea was to distract viewers’ attention from a large sign for the Chicago Fire, the soccer team that plays at Toyota Park. Upstaging’s seamstress then re-hemmed the banners and added grommets; Swatek and his team put them on poles and hung them like pipe and drapes.

The biggest challenge for the village team was, in fact, Mother Nature. “You know that you’re going to have bad weather when the seagulls on the railroad tracks on the other side of the venue decide it’s time to leave,” Swatek says with a chuckle. The week before the show there were tornado warnings; the night before, there were torrential rains that bought Swatek to the venue at 4am. “For the most part, there was only one issue, and that was a couple of graphics that had blown down—that was the worst of it. Thankfully, all the tents stayed in their upright position.” In the end though, “We wanted to make sure that everybody could see the show, so we closed the Guitar Center Village at 6:30,” concludes Swatek. — **Sharon Stancavage**



The above graphic was placed to block out a sign for the soccer team, the Chicago Fire.