





# PARTY TIME

In the *Here and Now* with Nickelback

By: Sharon Stancavage

**W**hen asked to describe the arena production he designed for Nickelback's *Here & Now 2012 Tour*, Butch Allen explains, "It's a bunch of people getting together to have a big party with great rock songs and a big show. It's a bigger-than-life look for a really awesome band, and the show is a big party."

Key to the Nickelback party feel is intimacy. "It's important to them that they get very close and personal with their audience," explains Allen. "The stage is a critical issue—they want lots of places to get audience members

in and around near them, as well as a way of getting them out past the normal downstage edge." In addition, the show is selling in configurations ranging from 240° to 270°, depending on the venue. "Our goal is always to open up as many sight lines as possible," Allen adds; he has many strategies to fulfill this goal. "There are two interior audience seating areas, there are two thrusts with 20' conveyor belts, and there is a flying B stage," he says.

Why conveyor belts? "Because they're cool, and it's fun to see a guy rocking out with a guitar moving without moving his feet," says Allen. "And remember, this whole

## CONCERTS

show is about whatever is fun." The stage is circular; the thrusts contain the conveyor belts, which end at circular islands. This concept was directly inspired by the band's new album, *Here and Now*. "There are two levels to the stage," says Christopher Maeder, the lighting director. "The higher level looks like the face of a clock, with Roman numerals around it and 12 being dead center upstage; the lower part is almost like the internals of the clock. It's a constant theme throughout all the set pieces—the B stage, even the lighting pods hanging above." Allen says the 20' diameter flying saucer-like B stage, "flies up, moves, spins in circles, and lands. It lives in the air over the front-of-house mix position, and it lands, like a giant spaceship, in the traditional B stage spot." Fabrication, which included a custom-painted clockwork floor, was by Tait Towers of Lititz, Pennsylvania. "You can take your dreams to Tait, and they can guide you through the process to bring those dreams to life," says Allen.

Typically, to reach the maximum number of fans, band members must move around a compact B stage. Allen had a solution for that: rotation. "The band can stand in one spot, and the stage spins them around as they're playing and singing," he says. "If they choose to wander around, they can, but, once again, this also improves the audience experience." The B stage is part of the arena show; logistically, it's not possible to do the gag in sheds, where the show moved during the summer. "A shed roof won't typically take the weight, so that element had to be put in storage," says Allen. (The show also has a variety of soft goods including a "black sharktooth scrim and white muslin cyc, both items lovingly custom-built by Sew What?," the designer says.)

### Lighting and video

For the lighting rig, provided by PRG Los Angeles, Allen relied on eight rapid-deployment convex pre-rigged pods. "Each one has eight [Philips Vari\*Lite VL3000] Profiles and a couple of [Martin Professional] Atomic Strobes in custom Tait Towers pods," he says. "It's a big ceiling of lights." There are 48 VL3000s in the rig, which also includes eight Philips Color Kinetics ColorBlaze 72s, 48 Philips Vari-Lite VL3000 Spots, six VL2500 Washes, 18 VL3500 Washes, and 18 GLP Volkslichts, the latter located beneath the B stage. (See photo, page 66.) "The Volkslichts are lightweight, and they're really bright and zoomable," says Maeder. "Once we reveal the B stage, I use them as audience light, and they do a pretty good job of lighting up the lower bowl of the arena." The pods can tilt upstage or downstage, each driven by two motors.

There are a total of six Saco V28 twenty-eight millimeter LED columns [6' wide x 22' high], provided by PRG Nocturne, of DeKalb, Illinois, which move on a 80' track controlled by a Fisher Technical Services Navigator system.

Allen says: "Sometimes the video walls are all one side, sometimes they're the other. They work in blocks of two; they work in blocks of three. It's a veritable ballet of video walls." Located upstage are two tiers of risers; both have Saco V28 fascias.

Behind the video walls are 55 Clay Paky Sharpys; there are an additional 41 of the fixtures on the floor. (The units have become so ubiquitous during this concert touring season that the terms "Sharpageddon" and "Sharpocalypse" have been bandied about.) "Surrounding the perimeter of the video walls are Sharpys, so, when we separate the video, the entire back wall of them are revealed," Allen reports. The Sharpys are mounted onto the video walls via Tait custom brackets; all automation was handled by Tait.

**"You have to have lights, you have to have sound, and video is an enhancement for everyone to see the band better in the modern world, but, in the end, you don't need pyro to do a tour. It's an element that the band uses to give back to the fans."**—Joseph

The IMAG package also includes two Barco FLM 20K projectors for the left and right screens, a Grass Valley SD camera system, three POV robo-cameras, and two PRG Mbox media servers. The video programming, which includes content from a variety of sources, was done by Maeder. "We're actually running time code for show control to synchronize all lighting, video, motion, and pyro," notes Maeder.

Maeder is Allen's man on the ground. "I've been with the band for ten years, and I know what they want," he says. "If anything comes up, Butch trusts my opinion to make the right decision. If anything major happens, he's the first guy I call."

Lighting was programed by Benny Kirkham on an MA Lighting grandMA2 console. Allen says, "Benny is the associate designer on this show, as well the programmer. I think that's a role that most programmers are filling now; they have as much say in the final show as the designer." Allen adds that the show is "ridiculously heavily cued. The guys in the band love the light show."

### Effects extravaganza

The band also enjoys their effects, and there are plenty of them. "The guys at Stage&Effects [Engineering, of Albuquerque] put on the most wicked pyro show ever,"



Above: The production's six Saco V28 LED columns come together to make a big-screen effect. Also visible are the two upstage risers with V28 fascias. Below: Allen has eight convex pods, each with eight VL3000 Profiles and a pair of Martin Professional Atomic strobes.





A set of 41 Clay Paky Sharpys on the floor create some dramatic uplighting looks.

asserts Allen. There are propane effects, too. According to special effects designer Steve Joseph, “You have to have lights, you have to have sound, and video is an enhancement for everyone to see the band better in the modern world, but, in the end, you don’t need pyro to do a tour. It’s an element that the band uses to give back to the fans.”

And Nickelback certainly gives back to the fans on this tour. The production uses a prodigious amount of propane—24 heads, to be exact. “Right now, we’re running 12 propane flame cubes, which are custom-made by [Stage&Effects Engineering’s] Smart Cube system. It has adjustability in height, from a 1’ to a 2’ to a 25’ flame that can be operated manually or on time code,” says Joseph. The effects are run on time code. The other 12 propane heads are on a Chameleon flame System from Le Maitre. “They shoot a 12’ flame, but they’re more decorative,” notes Joseph. The propane is, predictably, a fan favorite. “As soon as you hit it, everyone is yelling and screaming and you can’t go

wrong,” he adds. The flames can be found during “This Means War,” “Burn it to the Ground,” “Animals,” occasionally in “Bottoms Up,” and during the finale. Le Maitre’s super gunshot effect is also used.

Concussion booms, also from Le Maitre, can also be found during the production. Joseph says: “Nickelback got to be famous for the audience standing around, waiting for the house lights to go out, and then I pop off three concussions and scare the living shit out of everybody.” That confusion leads into the show proper. “I saw an article in *USA Today*, and they thought it was a pyro miscue. You either get it or you don’t,” he says with a chuckle. Concussions can also be heard during “Bottoms Up.” “Instead of the traditional one-two-three-four bang, or the song-end bang, the song comes to a pause, and Chad [Kroeger, lead vocals and guitar] says ‘Hey,’ and we hit one there, [as if to say], ‘Hey, wake up.’ Again, it’s a little something different, something to catch them off guard a little bit, and it works.”

Nickelback isn’t just about fire and venue-shaking



It wouldn't be Nickelback without plenty of pyro. Among the effects are 12 propane flame cubes, custom-made by Stage&Effects Engineering's Smart Cube system and a Chameleon flame system from Le Maitre.

**“Behind the video walls are 55 Clay Paky Sharpys; there are an additional 41 of the fixtures on the floor. (The units have become so ubiquitous during this concert touring season that the terms ‘Sharpageddon’ and ‘the Sharpocalypse’ have been bandied about.)”**

booms. Allen says: “There’s a falling stars effect in ‘Lullaby’ that’s the most beautiful thing.” According to Joseph, “We’re using a product developed by Ultratec; it’s basically like a comet, or a Roman candle ball. You put ten on a little bar, and it’s a time delay fuse, so you light one end, then one falls every second, so ten take about take 10 - 12 seconds to drop.” As the technology progressed, so has the number of falling stars during the song. Joseph says, “Now they’re using 20 falling-star plates that have ten shots each, so that’s two hundred falling stars falling in a 20- second period of a song during the breakdown of ‘Lullaby,’ when it’s just Chad and the piano. It really works for the vibe of the song.”

The finale is, as one would expect a special effects extravaganza. “At the end of the show, during ‘Figure You Out,’ you’re going to have 300 pieces going hog wild, with about 200 pieces in 30 seconds—mines, gerbs, comets, and mortar heads, you name it; we throw it in there as part of the finale. Then Chad screams, ‘We are Nickelback,’ we fire off the concussions on auto-fire, machine-gun-style, and that ends the show. The band walks out, pyro smoke settling down and dust falling from the ceiling,” Joseph concludes.

The *Here & Now Tour*, which was reconfigured for the summer shed season, concludes at Wembley arena at the beginning of October. 📶