



All photos: Jim Trocchio



Above: The show's video screen consists of ROE Visual Carbon CB5 panels. The elaborate video component—indeed, the entire production—came together in a remarkably short time.

# THE MEN OF SUMMER

The Doobie Brothers take their history on the road

By: David Barbour

The Doobie Brothers love two things: summertime and their fans. Having passed the half-century mark, the band, which has gone through many iterations, continues to hit the road when the warm weather arrives, offering an all-hits-all-the-time program that thrills the crowds. For *The 2024 Tour*, all the major players—Tom Johnston, Michael McDonald, Patrick Simmons, and John McFee—are present for a show that, aided by its production design, acts as a kind of official Doobie Brothers history.

“It’s a journey through all the eras,” says production/tour manager Bryan “Froggy” Cross. “They have a documentary coming out next year and, because of that, about two terabytes of film was digitized,” much of which is featured onstage. “The show is a kind of throw-back to the old PAR-can designs and the archival footage fits with that. From the audience standpoint, it’s a journey; you see some of that footage and think, my God, I remember that concert. It triggers positive memories.”



Above and opposite: The wide range of video styles “works with the songs,” Cross says. “You get different feels for different eras. With the older stuff, you get that grainy film footage; the new stuff has a twist,” often integrating vintage film with modern treatments.

The elaborate video component—indeed the entire production—came together in a remarkably short time. “The production build was done remotely while the Doobies were in Europe, opening for the Eagles,” Cross notes. To get *The 2024 Tour* prepared while the band was abroad, he adds, “I had Seth [Jackson, the lighting designer], my rigger, and my stage manager at Gateway Production Services in St. Louis, hanging the rig. They FaceTimed me pictures, but the first time I physically saw the gear was when we opened the truck doors at the Kia Forum in Los Angeles.” This was the site of the tour’s first performance.

Content creative director Simón Anaya worked with a variety of content creators to complete the task in a short time. The range of creators explains the eclectic nature of the production’s video. “It works with the songs,” Cross says. “You get different feels for different eras. With the older stuff, you get that grainy film footage; the new stuff has a twist,” often integrating vintage footage with modern treatments. The result is filled with visual surprises: stampeding horses and footage of *American Bandstand* in the opener; gold guitars superimposed on vintage band

footage in “Depending on You;” the New Orleans skyline, viewed through bars, in “World Gone Crazy;” a clockface and turning gears in “Minute by Minute;” highly dimensional red rectangles in “Without You;” stained-glass windows for “Jesus is Just Alright;” and the band’s logo on an audio meter in “Listen to the Music.” The show’s video screen consists of ROE Visual Carbon CB5 panels, a standard top-of-the-line choice.

Staging elements were provided by La Mirada, California-based Gallagher Staging & Productions. The production loads in and out easily, which, Cross notes was important. “We’re doing arenas one night, amphitheatres the next. It’s got to be an up-and-down show. We trimmed a truck off it before we left rehearsal. We have four trucks and four buses. It’s fast, it’s efficient, and it looks great to the audience. We’re going from the amphitheatre in Camden, New Jersey, to Madison Square Garden the next day, but we’re not worrying if this is our A show or B show or C show. You design it so it’s the same show every night, no matter where the fans see it.”

Cross also notes the band’s role in developing the pro-

duction design. “It’s the eye doctor method: I had Seth come in with vastly different designs. There was a kind of throwback PAR-can look. Others were more video-heavy, with lasers and a more modern feel. We printed them out in large format, and I laid them out for the guys, asking them, ‘What do you like? Number one? Number two?’ When we got them down to a consensus on the PAR-can idea, we’d ask, ‘What do you like about it? Is there anything else you like in the other designs that you might want to see?’ It’s a little more rendering legwork upfront but you usually get a product you can hit the ground running with, without major changes once you get into production rehearsals, when it’s more costly to make changes.”

### Lighting

Talking about the renders he presented to the band, Jackson recalls, “Everybody gravitated toward the ‘70s PAR-can, arena rock show; they also wanted their video to have a lot of retrospective stuff. Their thought was: ‘We know our audience; let’s give them a place to relive all this. They want to hear the old songs.’ The questions were: How do we make this interesting? How to give it a modern tinge? I went through product websites, asking, ‘What’s Elation got? What’s Claypaky got?’ Then I saw the Midi-B FX.”

The Claypaky Midi-B FX, which debuted last year at PLASA and LDI, has a novel design. An RGBW moving head wash unit, it features a long top hat with five parallel

rings of LEDs that can be controlled separately. It offered Jackson a clever twist on the PAR-can idea, providing his classic design with the desired contemporary twist.

Jackson contacted George Masek, strategic marketing manager at Claypaky US. (“We’re old friends,” the designer notes. “We started at Vari-Lite 100 years ago.”) Masek assured the designer that the unit was more than the sum of its flashier parts. He decided to take a closer look: “I live in St. Louis near Gateway Production Services. So, I called them for a demo. We did a shootout, and it was amazing. Everybody was geeking out about the rings and how bright they were.” He was also impressed with the unit’s output. (“Gateway is thrilled to be part of the Doobie Brothers’ 2024 Tour, especially with Seth Jackson’s design,” says David Haskell, president of business development. “This collaboration highlights our commitment to delivering exceptional production support for such legendary artists.”)

Relying on the Midi-Bs, Jackson says, “I did a traditional late-‘70s band rig, stacked three and three to make a six-bar look.” He also uses 17 additional units as truss spots. As the photos on these pages show, the LED rings give the units a festive, party-lantern vibe. “They have their own weird organic quality that makes the rig exist on its own,” the designer says. “It’s great because we’re very limited on haze,” at the band’s request.

Everywhere you look, the Midi-Bs are on display. “I have some layering going on,” Jackson says. “Researching the



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Doobie Brothers' past shows, I saw they always have this heavy low sidelight. I put that position back in, which is great; it sculpts them." The placement of the units creates a kind of frame of light around the band. The side positions, Jackson notes, "help with the fact that there's not a lot of hardware in the air." The economy is important, he adds: "This is a four-truck tour playing venues where, the night before, a 19-truck tour played."

The other major component is a set of Robe iFortes. "Each band member has a high side key light and a back-light; the iFortes take care of that," Jackson says. "The three principals on the downstage also get followspots because of the steep angles and my not wanting to do a traditional front-of-house truss—I always find them clunky and ugly—while Michael McDonald is keyboard-bound and covered with the iFortes all night. Also, Mark Russo, the sax player, gets a followspot because he rarely stays in one place or even on the stage. We also have a few iFortes on the floor that occasionally provide backfill." Filling out the rig is a set of Elation DTW Blinder 700 IPs. "It's as simple a concept as it can get. But the Midi-Bs' effects add this whole other crazy layer to it."

Mikey Cummings, project manager at Gateway, says of the Midi-Bs, "Seth was looking for a PAR can look but with a modern flair. The rings on the Midi-Bs put out so much light that you can just run those, and they will light the

stage. It's quite amazing. There are times when we use only the outer rings and times when we only use the inner light."

Jackson also went with an unusual control package, pairing an Avolites D9 console with the same company's Ai media server. "I was learning the Avolites system from scratch and we were using the Synergy thing to drive the Mini-Bs," he says. Synergy is a proprietary Avolites connection between its lighting consoles and media server.

"Mikey Cummings is a big-time fan of Avo, and he kept saying, 'You've got to look at [the D9]. You're going to love it'," Jackson says. I was finally forced into it last year when I did an Erika Jayne residency at the House of Blues in Vegas. I didn't have a chance to do anything ahead of time, so I had to previz on an Avo console. Gateway set me up with a quick training, and it was really intuitive. It works the way my brain works. It's really simple. There's not a lot of configuring, changing windows, or building everything yourself.

"I never found a home with a console," he adds. "I came from [Vari-Lite's] Artisan to [High End Systems] Hog II and then was in a no man's land between the grandMA and anything else out there, before going back to the Hog IV for a little bit. I had no MA habits, so it was easy to dive into Avo; it's so friendly, intuitive, versatile, and quick." With it, certain things that, he says, "would take forever to





Left: Relying on the Midi-Bs, Jackson says, "I did a traditional late-'70s band rig, stacked three and three to make a six-bar look." He also uses 17 additional units as truss spots. Above: "Probably 80% of the mics we have onstage are from Earthworks," Black says. These include SR117 vocal mics and ETHOS mics on the guitar cabinets.

build as an effect, you just do it and there it is."

In the Synergy philosophy, Jackson says, "Everything is a light, even a media source, so your brain never has to readjust when working with different sources. You can take a clip and map it across all those fixtures; you have full manipulation of speed, size, and color range. You can create those outrageously complicated-to-the-human-eye effects, which look like chases you spent 100 hours building and took two-and-a-half minutes."

Thanks to Synergy, Cummings says, "I can put any video clip on the server over any group of lights. Say I like what's happening in the upper left corner of the video; I just zoom in on that part." Effects, he notes, can be created for both lighting and video. "I can take a video clip and run a pan effect (or circles or rainbows) between layers. Or say I have water running down my video wall; I can assign the animation wheel attribute on the lighting units to the motion of the video; the attribute will follow the video, and it'll look like the water's running down the wall. You have to see it to understand it."

Talking about colors, Jackson says, "I kept the lighting in that '70s color palette. It's a lot of primaries plus whites and off-whites. When I do go saturated, I go all the way. If

it's blue-green, it's the old Lee 181 [Congo Blue]. I didn't have subtle shades of pink like you could do today. I had only about 20 colors in the palette, and I forced myself to make them work well together."

Because the tour covers every era of the Doobie Brothers' history, bridging several musical styles, Jackson notes that it was fun to cue. "There are some very different approaches. The early stuff, with Tom Johnston, is full-on rock and roll, blues rock. In the Michael McDonald period, you get the keyboard and the soul element with early-'80s tempos. After Michael, you've got a kind of highways-and-wheatfields vibe going on. And when 95% of the setlist are number-one songs, it makes it easy."

It's unusual to rely so heavily on a single type of unit but, Jackson says, the Midi-Bs "are the eye candy, the accents, the energy. The first time we saw them, they created their own interest. You turn them on and they're kind of mesmerizing."

### Sound

Front-of-house engineer Andrew Black has a history with the band, beginning as a monitor tech and later serving as a systems engineer. In those positions, he worked for

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engineers John Cooper and Greg Nelson before moving to the console himself. The band members, he says, “are fantastic people to work with. Right from the beginning, they just trusted me to do my thing. For me, the challenge was on myself, following in the footsteps of people like John and making sure the mix was up to par.”

Being a Clair Global engineer, Black has chosen the company’s Cohesion Series loudspeakers. “We’ve got 16 Cohesion 12s on the main hang and 12 more in the sides,”



The highly dimensional rectangles seen in “Without You.”

he says. “We also have 12 CP-218 subs across the front; we’re doing a delay arc configuration on this. It’s a kind of hybrid tour, going between A-market arenas and A-market amphitheatres; the system has to be very flexible, which is something the Cohesion Series really excels at.”

Indeed, the configuration of the speakers can change from night to night. For example, Black says, “For most arenas, we’ll put up every single cabinet we have. But it comes down to the logistics of the venue. We’re about 32’ off-center with the main hang, so, in a lot of amphitheatres, with 120° boxes, we can do just one hang and sufficiently cover the room, which is a great advantage. With Cohesion, you can put up fewer boxes and still have a great amount of horsepower.”

Black and the band’s monitor engineer, Mike Klowas, use DiGiCo consoles: a Quantum 338 at the front of house and a Quantum 5 at monitors. Sharing the same console brand has its advantages, Black notes: “We fit our entire RF system into one double-wide tall case; it rolls off the truck right into monitor world. We tag it in place, power it up, and there’s our show. If I was carrying another flavor of console versus monitors, that’d be another set of stage

racks in the analog split. But we’re both DiGiCo fans and that’s where my heart lies. I know DiGiCo very well, coming from a technical background. When choosing a console, it was the only decision for me.”

Interestingly, Black’s setup is light on processing. “I have some [Universal Audio] UAD plug-ins posted to the UAD Live Rack. But mostly I’m using some SSL [Solid State Logic] channels on my guitar and drum groups; some of that is for time alignment, for making sure that everything leaves my desk at the same point. But in terms of needing processing, the only external tools I have are the Rupert Neve 5045 Primary Source Enhancer, an API 2500+, and a Neve Master Buss Processor on the master.”

Just as Jackson must keep tabs on the saxophonist Mark Russo, Black must follow him, too. “Very frequently, he likes to go into the wings or up on the sides of the stage. He trades solos back and forth with the guitars. It’s a kind of three-part solo; he walks across the arena, sometimes going down into the pit or the first rows, walking around. Of course, I have to consider feedback in those situations. But it’s great; it feels like a live show bringing that energy; he keeps me on my toes in a good way.”

Interestingly, the band is mostly miked using gear from Earthworks. “The SR117 is a new condenser mic they came out with this year; we’re using it on all the vocals. I have a close relationship with the team there; probably 80% of the mics we have onstage are from Earthworks. I did a shootout with [Klowas] at the beginning of the year, looking at a few different microphones, and the SR117 really shined. Our production manager turned us onto Earthworks and once we got our ears on them, they were the only choice.” The band, he adds, likes the SR117, too: “When we got into rehearsals, everybody noticed the difference right away. It has that big, warm studio sound but



The view from the front of house.



The stained-glass window look in “Jesus is Just Alright.”

behaves like a live dynamic microphone.”

The challenge, he adds, involves capturing the distinct sounds of each Doobie Brothers era. “The concern initially was, can we choose one microphone for all six vocalists and be happy in every position? With a couple of other microphones, we felt, okay, this is great for Michael but maybe not for Tommy or Pat. Once we found [the SR117], we saw it could work for everybody.” For monitoring, the tour uses a combination of JH Audio and Ultimate Ears in-ears augmented with a set of d&b audiotechnik M2 wedges for McDonald.

Black adds that the band members “just want to play their music and give the fans a great show,” he says. “They are just the nicest people. They care a lot about how things come together but they also trust their crew immensely. They hire us to do our jobs, and they want us to do them. It’s a great experience getting to work with guys who are absolute legends.” *The 2024 Tour* concludes on October 15 in St. John, New Brunswick. 📶

### **The Doobie Brothers: *The 2024 Tour***

Production/Lighting Designer: Seth Jackson  
Production Manager: Bryan “Froggy” Cross  
Video Content Creative Director: Simón Anaya  
Front-of-House Engineer: Andrew Black  
Monitor Engineer: Michael Klowas  
Lighting Directors: Ryan Garner  
Prod Coordinator: Chris Cruz  
Guitar Techs: Joe Vallee, Andy Mennen  
Playback/Key Tech: Wes Carmichael  
Drum Tech: Jeremy Denton  
Monitor Engineer: Mike Klowas  
Stage Manager: William “Ted” Whitacre  
Rigger: Dave Schnitker  
Sound Techs: Colin Harty, Casey Harriman  
Lighting Techs: Gary Curtis, Sam Turner  
Video Tech: Vassioin Ingram