



Opposite: Damon Albarn performs with Little Simz.

GORILLAZ: HUMANZ

The world's most famous virtual band, comprised of musician Damon Albarn and artist Jamie Hewlett, plus the digital ensemble of vocalist / keyboardist 2-D, bassist Murdoc Niccals, and American drummer Russel Hobbs, fronted by Japanese singer / guitarist, Noodle, took to the stage after a 7-year break with their new Humanz World Tour. Their return? A glorious amalgamation of cartoon enigmas, ethereal lighting, and a touring sound system first. Featuring an ever-changing cast of special guests including De La Soul and Noel Gallagher, and featuring support from British rapper Little Simz, Humanz is quite the spectacular. Meanwhile its crew prove to be a collective of technical and creative friends...

"I've never done anything else really," stated Gorillaz Tour Director, Craig Duffy upon explaining how he landed at the helm of one of the most talked-about productions of 2017. "I had a 'proper' job for about 2 years in the early 80s at EMI's radar division, but funnily enough, nobody wanted to employ a blue haired punk rocker. I used to watch bands play 4 or 5 times a week, and back then you'd just offer to help until you got a job," he shrugged, comically. Cementing his career in live music, Duffy has never looked back, and has worked with Damon Albarn for a mighty 20 years. "Strangely enough, I started touring with Blur in 1997 in San Francisco, and played the same city again 20 years later with Gorillaz; it's been quite a journey!"

"Damon is all about making music - he's always writing and creating, usually with 5 or 6 projects on the go at once and when he started this one, he began by telling us how great it would be if he didn't have to tour a project, if cartoon characters could be the band, essentially. That was his initial idea. The reality is, that if you're Damon Albarn, people will eventually want to see your face."

The band didn't come out in front of a live audience until Glastonbury 2010, 6 years after their conception and, in the interim, they had become a globally talked about act. The 2017 incarnation of Gorillaz live is an exceptionally well-executed production, and with lots of people to look at on stage, it's a far cry from being incognito. From discreet lighting, to a video world that draws you into a virtual reality, to a mighty powerful gospel-inspired choir, the band are a sight to behold. In short, Gorillaz have become something of an iconic amalgamation of 2 worlds, which tastefully collide and blossom into an almost spiritual, musical project. Duffy continued: "The lighting design on this show is stunning, it's honestly an amazing-looking show. We're really pushing what can be done on stage,

and as a design team they've done an incredible job. Taking those designs and delivering it on a daily basis, is something Joel [Stanley, Production Manager] has pulled off on a massive scale. *Humanz* is run by a brilliant bunch of people and the artists give us an amazing show each night, I feel as though everything we do really pushes and challenges each department, and because we're working together, the whole ensemble looks, sounds and flows the way it does."

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

Production Manager Joel Stanley is also a long-serving member of the Albarn creative machine, and, as he explains, his own journey has had him wearing many different hats: "I initially met Damon when I was brought in as one of the drummers on *Monkey: Journey to the West*."

For those unfamiliar, *Monkey* was Albarn's Chinese Opera & stage adaptation of the novel *Journey to the West* by Wu Cheng'en, created by Actor / Director Chen Shi-Zheng along with Albarn & artist Jamie Hewlett, co-creator of Gorillaz. He was just 20 years old. "That's also when I first met Craig. I was always hanging around, trying to do things in the production office that was nothing to do with being a drummer! Then the Musical Director asked me to help him with some spreadsheets & it all sort of happened from there; they knew I wasn't going to just turn up, play drums and go home... turns out I'm a bit of a geek! From there, Craig & I formed a friendship and I ended up doing the whole show and then went on tour."

The concept of *Humanz* began when the visual creators were hired by Albarn's management team, elevenmgmt. Block9's Gideon Berger and Stephen Gallagher were tasked with animating the digital content for the touring visuals. The meeting of minds came after Block9 worked on a Banksy exhibition. The connection between Banksy and Albarn is



quite strong, with the elusive artist having created artwork for blur's *Think Tank*. "They hired Block9 to help envisage Jamie's vision," said Stanley. "Jamie has his own company, but this time he's sat down with Block9 and went through all the back catalogue in order to bring the freshest ideas to light. Almost acting like his art directors with Jamie being the artist & the creative, and Damon being the musician. They were a nice creative go-to from the beginning.

"The first thing I did was hire Matt Pitman, our Lighting Designer. We put the working content onto Matt's WYSIWYG for pre-visualisation and turned it into a movie, and then Damon and Jamie could sit down and watch it as if they were in production rehearsals; with Gorillaz being an animated band, the visual content is obviously vital to the look of the show. Matt's lighting design is also integral to the overall look; the lighting show very much complements the video. What I love about the design of this show is that everything has a purpose, every single cue is there for a reason, and it looks spectacular."

So, what does the audience see? "You're going into the world of Gorillaz. The album concept is a soundtrack to the end of the world, now that Donald Trump is president. [Sigh - Editor's note]. That's the concept for the album - a rave for the end of the world, but as a participant, you'll probably have your own interpretation too," he commented.

In total, there are 45 crewmembers, 16 drivers, 13 band members, 10 in the artist entourage camp plus a variety of featured artists and support bands. For Stanley, this job is particularly close to his heart. "I used to play for the artist, and now I'm on the other side of the fence, so we have a very, very close working relationship. I'm so proud of it!" he smiled.

As for the personal touch needed on a show of this size? "On every tour I do, I try to make a conscious effort to get to know everyone. I have an open-door policy if anyone needs to have a chat or if I notice anything I think might be worrisome; I'll chat to them first. I know there's a whole support network out there which is becoming more vocal & available at the moment, but I also feel like roadies will chat to people they actually know, so it's important to make yourself approachable for that."

Holly Sandeman, Production Coordinator and Stanley's right hand woman, took up the story: "The day-to-day can be quite hectic, looking after all the crew. Luckily, they're all lovely!" she confirmed. "Logistically, looking after them with hotels, transport and various needs means I deal

with a lot of different personalities, so that's a really interesting part of my job. There's well over 40 crew with our drivers, so it's always busy, probably one of the busiest tours I've done."

When I first met Sandeman, she was touring with the late George Michael in 2011. I remember it because, it being my first year at this magazine, she was one of the very first women I met who toured. She was also all smiles and went out of her way to accommodate this ex music journalist during my first technical journalism trip to Amsterdam's Ziggo Dome. How has the industry changed during those 6.5 years? "I think there's a new generation of young people coming through the doors, and I'm definitely seeing more ladies on tour these days. I personally started out in rigging; I helped my brother at a rave and discovered I could do staging for a job. I applied at Unusual Rigging and was accepted, I worked there for a few years & I became the middle person between the riggers and our clients. I just love touring though, especially on this tour, we're surrounded by our friends."

The tour vendors include Neg Earth Lights, Block9 for visuals, Entec Sound & Light and Brown Note Productions for audio, Fly By Nite for trucking, tour busses from Jumbo Cruiser, Mojo Barriers, The Pantry Maid for catering duties, Video Design and Universal Pixels for video rental, Rima Travel, Global Motion for freighting, All Access Staging & Productions for band Risers and TAIT for scenic elements & set construction.

VISUAL DESIGN

"The tour started off with some warm ups," confirmed Stanley. "At the start, we carried a small production that eventually grew as we added flown scenic elements of video, more lights and so on; by the time we'd done 3 months in the US the production was fully developed for its UK & Euro run." Venturing back home also prompted some changes, including a complete change in video, courtesy of Video Design. "Coming to Europe with a different video supplier, somehow all felt very familiar," said Stanley. Lighting Designer Matt Pitman had a background in concert video before finding his way into lighting design, and so has an innate understanding of how the 2 mediums can best complement one another.

Stanley said: "For Gorillaz we just have a large upstage wall of hi-def LED and an IMAG screen each side of stage fed by a nice little camera package and PPU from Video Design. There are 13 performers in the band plus



guests; for that reason, the rig looks very straightforward, 4 trusses across stage, a bit of side and back light, back video wall, some risers. That's the only way so many performers and their stuff can be accommodated and give them the room to work. Dylan and I had some conversations about IMAG and he is extremely competent, relieving me of that burden. The original Jamie Hewlett produced content material we use can present large areas of solid colour at intense levels, or even white so we needed to temper the lumen output from the back wall, something we now do live in the show with Glen Jenkins, our touring media server operator, riding a fader."

Stanley expressed his satisfaction with the video rental house: "Alex Leinster from Video Design came out to our production build and first show in Luxembourg to make sure everything was OK, which was great. The crew are great too, it all feels very familiar which is just what you want to happen."

Dylan Etherington, Camera Director, explained that he "knew little about this show and kind of went in blind". His first gig running video for the band was in Dubai for an outdoor Halloween concert. He told TPI: "I hadn't seen the show or any rehearsals, and went straight into the UAE to shoot my first show. I had a video to watch of the show beforehand and I decided to change a couple of things around. The way the camera plan-up was structured was 2 long lenses at FOH and 2 in the pit. I personally don't really like long lenses as I feel it's always a flat, 2D image. All the cameras were forward facing, so everything that was going to the side screen was coming from the floor perspective of the show. I decided to take 1 long lens away from FOH and put it on a hand-held camera on stage, shooting both the band and audience, and it worked really well. We've now got 8 cameras in total; 4 are operated and 4 are mini cams, which I have set up over 2 multi-viewers. I always have it set up as if I'm reading a book; I always go from stage right to FOH, then to stage left."

After mastering his camera angles to perfection, Etherington opted to use a Ross Carbonite 2ME video switcher for control. "We're using it for it's most simple purposes; sending the live IMAG cut straight to side screens. It can do far more than what we need it for on this occasion but it is a comfortable and reliable piece of kit to use."

The video set up is a standard IMAG on either side of the stage, with video content playing from the upstage wall. "In terms of how we're shooting the show, I had the privilege of being able to watch it in Zurich, and it's

amazingly lit. From the POV of the audience being in the audience, it looks phenomenal. It's not lit for video though, it's very dark. When shooting, we try and avoid the dark areas. However, we've been told to really make a feature of the dark areas on his show and it's working out really well. The content is clearly a big part of Gorillaz, Jamie Hewlett as an artist is half of the band, so we're trying to feature that in the IMAG as much as we can. A lot of the musicians on stage are in silhouette throughout, and we're trying to consciously use that - with the screen in the background - when shooting the show. There's a lot to shoot on stage, which makes it interesting, and it keeps the camera guys busy! One thing that I believe can let a gig down is its video content, but this is spot on. On the song *Stylo*, for example, we use a music video with Bruce Willis and that's been mixed with the animation, and it's just so unique to watch.

The video control package was supplied by Phil Mercer's Universal Pixels. The MD of the new video rental company - which has made the shortlist of the 2018 TPI Awards in its first year! - told TPI: "We're supplying the video elements for the global touring package including custom LED screens for the Oracle structure and disguise media server control surfaces. I'm very pleased to be continuing a relationship with Gorillaz, which began over a decade, and several previous touring campaigns ago."

Automation Engineer, Blane Dracup, utilised a Kinesys Elevation system running Vector software, with 3 500K motors. He took up the story: "This show doesn't need to move very fast; the Oracle itself doesn't weigh as much as you might think so it's quite an easy structure to move. I time it from the timecode information and I receive from the backline; it's quite a detailed set of timings, so I have a timecode feed to myself."

He worked closely with Production Rigger, Jerry Hough, who added: "It's a simple rig, and quite a modest size show from a rigging point of view, with around 50 points. There's 4 lighting trusses and the video screen, the Oracle; a T truss with some Kinesys motors on it and a round video screen that moves around during the show. I take care of the package of reeling and lifting equipment, and then everywhere we go I have a team of local riggers that actually do the rigging, 10 up & 5 down. The locals generally know their city's buildings, so I just come in, mark out the positions of all my points and liaise with them on load in. We're using Litec EXE hoists, which have really made an impact, Litec seem to be a very popular choice for a lot of riggers now." Weighing in at just under 20 tonnes, Hough produces the rigging plot which identifies the magnitude of calculations



to provide accurate information for the venues, risk assessment files and method statements to cover the day-to-day check lists, from unloading trucks to rigging assemblies, planning, working at height and generally making sure all the equipment is safely maintained with up to date inspections and risk assessments. We constantly keep an eye on the condition of our equipment; we really look after it meticulously."

The moving scenic element is a flying gag comprising a rounded, automated set piece affectionately named the Oracle due to it representing an 'all seeing eye', as if Big Brother has turned up to the party. The circular video panel - manned by LED Tech Mattie Jobson - comprises both rectangular and triangular Glux 9mm tiles supplied by Universal Pixels, and enclosed in a banded frame created by TAIT Towers during a 2-month pre-production phase at its Pennsylvania HQ.

STROBELITE

Pitman's lighting design is a sight to behold. He began: "Joel called me in December 2016 when the album was allowed to be played to people who weren't studio staff. He brought it to my house and we sat down, listening, getting really excited about the project ahead; I'm a massive Gorillaz fan! Joel and I had wanted to work together on a project for some time, so the fact that it happened to then be with one of my favourite bands was perfect for me - what a privilege."

Having worked with Gorillaz for a year now, Pitman is experienced in delivering a show sensitive to the band's large video element. His lighting design frames the upstage video screen effortlessly, keeping the band in relative silhouette for almost the entire show, with artist lighting solely via 2 downstage Robe BMFL truss spots. Designing lighting to keep up with the dynamic stories and messages of the on-stage animation was a key focus for Pitman. "For the Humanz tour, I was tasked with making a lighting show that felt relevant to the landscape and style of the Gorillaz artwork," he said.

"The animation and content for this tour is heavily influenced with grids, tiles and heptagrams, so this formed the basis for the placement of the fixtures."

Pitman continued: "Everything was expertly slotted into cunning length arrangements of HUD pre-rigged truss by Nic Burlace my Lighting Crew Chief. I needed everything in exact positions to be able to achieve the shapes which

couldn't really be compromised by truss joins or rigging problems, so getting the correct layout of various lengths was a mean feat achieved by Nic. The main design was realised for the first time in the US by Bob Looney at 4Wall lighting and then for the European leg, expertly fabricated by Dave Ridgeway and Nathan White at Neg Earth Lights.

"I had to ensure that the entire rig contained fixtures that gave me as much flexibility and colour range as possible. Specifying the lighting rig became more about fixtures that provided multiple tools than eye candy effects or special tricks. I needed workhorse lighting fixtures that not only delivered on power output but also provided good colour rendering and various beam looks to complement the on-screen animation. 36 Mythos2 were the first fixtures to be drawn on the lighting plan," said Pitman.

"I've always been a fan of its colour temperature, it has a lovely luminance and sparkle to it. We use an extremely wide colour gamut for the Humanz show and the Mythos2's keep up brilliantly. As well as colour, they have really good output that provides me with not only strong beam looks against the huge video surface, but also wide gobo looks. We needed this versatility as the show lighting is quite unconventional at times, extremely theatrical at others and then all out rave cave for the rest!

"I also needed a second hard edge fixture with huge output for some of the more theatrical ideas I had, I immediately chose Robe BMFL spots, there are 16 flown and a further 8 on the upstage edge for backlight. They're such great lights, power, beam and speed. It's the upstage row of BMFL's that give the stage such a lovely backlight all the time."

The video wall is framed by 32 GLP impression X4 Bar 20's and 16 pairs of Solaris Flare Strobes on 1.5m drop arms create a 'suspended strobe ceiling' specifically designed for one song. Pitman added: "I've also got another 8 onstage; as they're so popular, there was a shortage of Flares last year - they were a little challenging to find!"

All wash lights are from Martin by Harman. "We used 33 Quantum Washes and 10 Aura XB's because I need the colour speed of an LED wash light to keep up with video!"

For control, it's an MA Lighting grandMA2 Light with a backup, and 2 MA Lighting VPU Lite (for pixel mapping all RGB fixtures). This is the second project I've used a VPU on, there is a fair amount of pixelmapping going on during the show. There's a song called Strobelite where the upstage video content



is being played back through the Solaris Flares, and if I had to program the strobe hits into cues to do what happens in the video, it would've taken me about a fortnight, but using a VPU means that we can speed up the creation of the show with amazing results."

Pitman is a huge MA advocate: "Some of this show is programmed like a theatre show, at times what happens on screen literally happens in the lighting rig. The frames within the animation change so quickly that some songs feature hundreds of lighting cues - cues that change, theatrically speaking, the look of the stage, as though the scene on-screen has fallen off of the video wall and covered the musicians. I need a desk which gives me the ability to drive a show of this complexity, there are thousands of sequences in the showfile, the rig is 36 universes, there are multiple protocols being sent and received, huge amounts of timecoded information, pixelmapping and live control."

The show was programmed at Pitman's Pixelmappers Studio himself and Dan Crowther using WYSIWYG R39. He continued: "As always, the clients wanted to see the progress of the lighting programming, so we worked on the songs in WYSIWYG with screen grabbed content playing in the render, then we could record an entirely finished song and email it to production and management."

The look of the show is centred around the content on the upstage video wall, with the lighting elements often going almost unnoticed because it's so cleverly done. It's as relevant as it is unimposing. "I'd like to think of it as an extension of the content as opposed to a separate entity all together; it's supposed to be entirely complimentary. That's the real challenge. The video drives a colour palette towards my design, in creating songs, I'd always watch the content 3 or 4 times before even assembling any

looks. Jamie's artwork makes it really easy to immediately put forward and an idea about how to respond lighting-wise. We've been sound-checking every show day for the last 3 or 4 months, and every day we rehearse a new song we haven't done before. There are now 71 songs in my showfile, which is amusing because I used to hear tales of other bands who didn't want to commit to a song list for a tour, meaning that friends in the industry would have like 45 songs in their desk - I've got 71 and we've still got another year of touring to go!" he laughed, clearly relishing the challenge of it all.

SOUNDCHECK

Since Gorillaz first began touring in 2010, Entec Light & Sound has been its UK audio vendor. Deploying a hat trick of mighty titans, namely DiGiCo, d&b audiotechnik and Shure, as well as the emergence of a promising transatlantic partnership with Colorado-based Brown Note Productions, Entec is once again proud to support the cartoon wonders. In the second half of 2017, Entec - a long-time d&b rental house - entered into an agreement with Colorado-based Brown Note Productions to give d&b's next generation. The rental house has recently invested in d&b's new loudspeaker series, the SL. This tour features its large-format touring system, the GSL, which made its first touring appearance with Gorillaz at Luxembourg's 6,500-capacity Rockhal in November. "We were very keen to start using it as soon as possible and it was immediately evident that it's a really clever design," stated FOH Engineer Matt Butcher, a mainstay within the Albarn camp since just prior to blur's 1994 *Parklife* tour, who worked alongside System Tech & Audio Crew Chief [and 2018 TPI Awards-shortlister!] Perttu Korteniemi.

Butcher continued: "My first impression was that it is very quick to rig,

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Tour Director, Craig Duffy; Road Manager, Orla Clarke with Production Coordinator, Holly Sandeman & The Pantry Maid's Lucy Bell; Backline Tech, Andrew Hamwee; Lighting Designer, Matt Pitman; System Tech & Audio Crew Chief, Perttu Korteniemi with FOH Engineer, Matt Butcher.

using the compression mode for flying, and I was bowled over as soon as we turned it on because the amount of punch you get from the low end is startling.

"When we first started using it we were playing bottom heavy program without the subs on and putting a little 60Hz bump in the PA just to see how much low end we could get out of it, and it was pretty staggering. We then fired up the new SL-SUB, which is just on another level. I believe it's almost a hybrid of the J-SUB and J-INFRA, but the new model goes lower and is incredibly powerful whilst retaining so much clarity.

"Generally speaking, with sub arrays you can lose that power alley effect down the middle, making it a little bumpy at FOH while it tails off when you move away, but I'm not finding this to be the case with GSL. I'm getting a remarkably smooth, fat and even cardioid dispersion of sub bass across the entire arena.

"Right from the start of our pre-production, we made the firm decision to do everything absolutely right and not compromise the audio quality, and the results speak for themselves. A few of us have known Damon for so long that we feel able to make a lot of suggestions for improvement and he respects our opinions. For instance, we were very meticulous about assembling the kick drum samples from the various Gorillaz records so that they can be triggered live and they are reproduced so well through this new d&b system. We're achieving a very tight bottom end and great articulation on bass guitar and bass synths."

The UK arena touring system, which was supplied by Brown Note Productions' Ryan Knutson comprised 18 boxes of GSL per side, 18 SL-SUBs configured as a sub array. Side hangs were 20 V-Series per side, and side fills were 4 d&b V10P's. The system was amplified by 40 d&b D80's and signal distribution is via 4 d&b DS10's.

"Our first few days with the system were remarkable," Butcher said. "I walked around the back and the sound just disappeared. We ended

up taking the level down by 2-3dB because we no longer had to rise above the 'disinformation' that we had become accustomed to. We suddenly appreciated how much level usually comes out of the back of a box. Because there's no extraneous low end floating around on stage, everything sounds so much cleaner all the way down the line, so from my perspective at FOH it's a perfect situation.

"It's a complicated show with so much going on at any one time. Our core line-up consists of drums, electronic percussion, guitar, bass, 2 keyboard players, 6 backing vocalists and Damon who plays piano, guitars and keytar. We have pretty much reached the limits of what is possible with an SD7 but, for me, it's the best control surface for a job of this scale."

A DiGiCo user since mixing on his first D5 in 2009, Butcher said: "The symmetry of the SD7's layout - with left and right fader bays, and a master VCA bay in the middle - allows me to do 3 things simultaneously, and that is what makes it so practical. On the left, I have 2 layers of band instruments with vocals and guests on the right. Dave's fader layout is fairly similar for the same practical reasons; we double up 8 radio mics into individual artist channels."

Butcher admitted to being a "big fan" of the SD7's internal dynamics. The plug-ins he uses include aural exciters on snares, ADT, compressors and 4 delays with 1 assigned to replicate a CB radio effect. "Alongside those, I'm also running a Waves SoundGrid package on a laptop for things like live hard autotune effects on vocals for a De La Soul number and Saturnz Barz, the Popcaan track from *Humanz*. Waves also comes in handy for de-essers, multi-band effects and a gated fuzz box for snares. We've always tried to make things a little more interesting by integrating dub flavours."

Due to the nature of the show and its ever-changing roll call of special guests, the input count can differ from one night to the next, however, Butcher reported that "as a guide, I can just about record the show at 48kHz on 128 inputs on a Waves MGB interface via 2 MADI streams".



A NEW KIND OF AUDIO

The GSL is designed for large outdoor events; it's bigger than the previous flagship, the J-Series, with 14in drivers on the front, a couple 10's on the outside, a 10 in the mid and then 3 2inchers in the top in an amazingly small compact package. The GSL sub, which has 3 21-inchers has a tremendous output from it. I think its 9db more than the low end J-Series."

The GSL's rigging needs are described as "very easy". It can rig in 2 modes; intention mode (typically seen on the J-Series) or compression mode, where "you bring it in flat and then ratchet it up to make the arc angle with the pins in position".

Ben Shapiro, Head RF Technician and part of the Brown Note family, told TPI: "We support Joel in the all of his projects. We had previously worked with Gorillaz in the US supplying the d&b J-Series prior to the new GSL system coming out. When we heard the new system & we decided to purchase it - before any tours or shows were booked with it - I knew it would be appropriate to put it in the hands of Matt; he's an exceptional engineer. That's how the whole thing came about, the new d&b system, collaborating with Entec who support us over here and us in the US, so it's worked pretty well."

Both control surfaces specified are DiGiCo SD7's, provided by Entec's Jonny Clark. The powerful machines were the only console deemed suitable for a mix heavy, complicated production. The overall control package was specified by Monitor Engineer, Dave Guerin. The audio system relies on 3 DiGiCo SD-Racks while a Lenovo Thinkpad drives a DiGiCo Orange Box audio format converter for keyboards and tracks. In total, there are 28 channels of Ableton playback, 8 tracks of click for various band members, and 8 channels of digital keyboards with other keyboards such as piano, Moog and vocoder running off analogue outputs. His 133-channel

count within monitor world further require the use of a DiGiCo SD11i for the 20-channel crew talk back system.

MONITOR WORLD

Guerin generates an average of 20 mono monitor mixes with 30 in stereo for in-ear feeds, sidefills and Albarn's piano wedges. Backing vocals are mixed left and right, with Albarn's vocal centred. 12 d&b M4 wedges are distributed across the stage as well as a V-SUB that is added to the drum fill. Jerry Harvey JH16V2 Pro in-ear monitors are used for the majority of the performers in conjunction with Shure PSM 1000 hardware.

"It's a surprisingly quiet stage despite the extensive amount of activity," noted Guerin, "and that especially helps when you add the string section because you're not battling against the inevitable background sound pouring down the string mics. You can get them in the sidefill mix without generating feedback."

The RF side of the operation is wholly dependent on Entec's recent major commitment to Shure's new high-tier Axient Digital system, which handles around 50 channels of IEM and AD Series radio mics for vocals and backline, all of which are monitored from a Waves eMotion LV1 desk via a patch on the SD11i. "I was taken aback by how clean the Axient sound is," commented Butcher, whose opinion was shared by Guerin. "Yes, it's a real step up in quality," he said.

"As we have so many people on in-ears, it wasn't a problem to stretch to another seven packs for the BVs who, after previously being tethered to their mic stands, are now on radio mics and have the freedom to dance around. We were concerned that we wouldn't have enough spectrum available for everything, but we went to Axient for the radio mic systems and for the guitars and bass, the latter having a much narrower bandwidth



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Production Rigger Jerry Hough; Camera Director Dylan Etherington; Monitor Engineer Dave Guerin; RF Tech Ben Shapiro of Brown Note Productions.

per channel and therefore freeing up more air space for the IEM systems. I've been extremely happy with the results."

The *Humanz* tour has been yet another exciting chapter in Entec's long history with Gorillaz' band leader and the company's support is valued highly by crew and production management alike. "It's great having [head of sound] Jonny Clark at Entec; we're clearly all on the same side... he's one of us," Guerin pointed out. "I had a problem a couple of days ago and texted Jonny. He was immediately on the case and had someone here with me this morning to solve the issue without the slightest fuss."

Guerin stated: "Damon is still on wedges. It was mostly to clean the sound up on stage. The more wedges you have on stage, the more sound sources there are on stage. Some of the band had done it before the ones who hadn't got used to it in rehearsals. The only one not on click, again, is Damon, who is actually singing."

"We're using Shure transmitters as we found them to be the best, so we use Shure radio mics too. We had about 47 channels and it was easier to go to the newer, digital radio mics because they have narrower bandwidths and you get more within the same frequency range."

Shapiro added: "The whole band is running on IEMs apart from Damon. There's 26 channels of our stereo, we also have 20 channels of the Shure Axient wireless system. We adopted that for the UK tour because we had a large increase in channel count so it made sense to use a new system. You can fit more frequencies into a small space, so it was a no-brainer. We're running 20 channels on mics and guitars and the whole thing is tied together with Waves LV1's."

PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM!

Andrew Hamwee, Playback Tech, is the man looking after all the backing tracks, which in Gorillaz world, is a mighty task done via the SD11i. "I deal with the programming and compiling of new songs, mainly. There's a lot of new songs on the road and a lot of the time, we rework an old ones too. All of Gorillaz songs are quite complex; there's a number of sounds and samples

that come along with their unique sound. We've spent a lot of time with Damon, and a lot of the time with the studio engineers who have recorded it and mixed the album. Chopping up sounds, sampling keyboards, getting sounds off the album, recreating them live, so the whole production and live repertoire sounds as like the album as possible, and even better, that extra 10% in the flesh," he smiled.

Hamwee is monitoring over 60 channels. To keep the audio quality true, a digital signal path runs through all the samples, tracks and keyboard sounds, as well as the triggered drum sounds. Analogue back-ups are switched in via a Macro, the main inputs being MADI via an Orange Box to the Optocore. While Andy has direct control of the SD11i, I control it via an iPad app. Andy also has a FOH mix into the SD11i and he's able to check that everything on the tracks is audible in the FOH mix and advise on any levels that may need to be adjusted.

"By moving all the shout inputs and outputs to the SD11i, it means I'm not quite fully maxed out on the SD7, which is why I'm able to fit some additional performers on there like the Hypnotic Brass Ensemble. Having spare resources on the SD11i means we can split the shout system so that Andy and another tech can line check all the keys and their MIDI, while at the same time I can line check everything else with [Entec's] James 'Kedge' Kerridge, our stage tech, without talking over each other."

"In fact, Kedge has been a great ally in all of this. As well as mixing monitors for the support act, Little Simz [who collaborated on the song Garage Palace], he is on a headset throughout the show and looks after the cables. He will often relay stage instructions back to me for mix adjustments." Entec's package also included DiGiCo SD12's for the support's FOH and monitor mixes. The audio team was completed by James Kerridge, Head of Stage; Chris Speirs RF2, Monitor Tech; Colin Woodward, Stage Left PA Tech, Kev Smith and Stage Right PA Tech.

Production Manager, Joel Stanley, joined the conversation: "Working with Entec has been really good and it's a pleasure to be dealing with Jonny. No request has ever been too big. Whenever we have identified a



Stage Manager Ethan Merfy with PM Joel Stanley; Automation Engineer Blaine Dracup.

piece of equipment that we desperately need, Entec has ensured that if they don't have it in stock, they will purchase it without hesitation. They've been solid and I feel like we consistently have their complete attention." The sentiment was echoed by Monitor Engineer Dave Guerin: "Entec are great, I wouldn't go anywhere without them!"

STAGE HANDS

"I was an economics major and took a semester off to build these stages in Asia... here I am 26 years later!" laughed Stage Manager, Ethan Merfy. "I guess I'm not a behind-the-desk sort of person and I feel very fortunate to do what I do." Merfy was drafted into the Gorillaz camp when the ill-fated Linkin Park *One More Light* tour was cut short due to the tragic passing of singer Chester Bennington. He continued: "I enjoy this camp, it's made up of a bunch of really good people. I knew the rigger so I reached out to him and he told me how welcoming everyone was, so it was a no-brainer. I'm the only American on this tour, but he was right, everyone was very welcoming. Joel had wanted to work with me for some time, and vice versa, and for one reason or another, this time it worked - and it's been a great experience."

Merfy's day-to-day duties include being in control of the floor from when the first truck door is opened. A lot of the stuff I deal with on a show of this size actually has nothing to do with being on the stage, but rather facilitating the end of goal of making the stage come together correctly. Managing the gear from the trucks, to making sure everyone has a safe space to work in, to making sure we have storage readily available should we need it. There's a lot of equipment and a lot of people involved in this production, and I believe a lot of my time is spent ensuring that I stay one step ahead of any problems before they potentially arise."

HOME COMFORTS AND FAMILY VIBES

Orla Clarke, Tour Director Assistant, has been with the band since their *Return To Plastic Beach* tour 7 years ago, and describes it having been like Wacky Races in the years that have followed. "We went around the world with Gorillaz, then we did the blur reunion tour before this production, so we're sort of like family at this point," Clark told TPI. She first entered into the lifestyle via the kitchen, and is now clearly a mainstay for a lot of her touring family, who rightly told me Orla would make me laugh throughout our interview. ["It's Orla, don't let spell checker change my name to Oral; that happens too often!"].

Her love for home comforts while not in fact being at home has led here... "I love baking and travelling, and I was trying to figure out how to bake my around the world. I ended up helping my friend's mum cater one year at Glastonbury, and the rest is history. I actually think catering is one of the hardest jobs on the road; the hours are so long, but it's also the job where you get to know everybody and you hear everything. You're literally at the heart of it all, like any good kitchen," she smiled.

"My first ever tour was with Michael Bublé, it was so much fun; I just used to feed the Canadians cake and they loved me for it!" she laughed.

"I met Craig Duffy during a Russell Watson tour, and he then asked me to come and work for him." These days, although Clark enjoys the culinary delights of tour caterers' The Pantry Maid, she'll typically be found looking after hotel accommodation for the band. "I love hotels, I'm probably a hotel nerd... I just get so into it. I like finding like cool places for them to stay, and it becomes a real challenge when the numbers are this big, but I definitely seek out the little gems."

Clarke was a gem in her own right when, upon finishing a Duran Duran tour as a Production Coordinator, she moved to New York after accepting a job with the band's management firm. "I missed the road. I just love being in different cities and meeting new people all the time. I don't like being behind a desk, unless the desk is in a different city every day, and then I can cope with it!" she noted. "Holly Sandeman, our Production Assistant and I have basically been in each other's shadows for 3 years now; we spend most of our time together. I love working with her, she's the best. I think most people will tell you that they have solid pal on every tour... I have just happened to have toured the world for 3 years with mine."

Home for the bands on the tarmac came courtesy of Richard PriceDeer, of tour bus supplier Jumbo Cruiser. He stated: "It was a great tour for us to be involved in, with 6 of our newest vehicles on the road with them. Gorillaz tour & production management are a great team, and Craig and Joel have been a pleasure to work with. Logistically there were some long and hard drives for our drivers, so a lot of planning was involved on our side to ensure our busses ran to precision; at one stage there were 18 drivers working on this one tour for us! It all went smoothly, the band and crew reached every destination ahead of scheduled arrival times, and we were immensely proud to be a part of such a well-executed tour." It seems the sentiment is felt unanimously...

The *Humanz* tour heads to Mexico for the first stop on its South American run until the end of March, before beginning the festival circuit with Rock Am Ring & Rock Im Park.

TPI

Photos: Andrew Bengé, Tony Woolliscroft & TPI

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