

# TERHAL by Dragone

A purpose-built venue in Diriyah hosts a dazzling theatrical performance that celebrates the rich history and culture of Saudi Arabia.







Known globally for its innovative reinvention of theatrical live entertainment, Dragone's imaginative creations play to sold-out venues the world over, receiving standing ovations night after night. For its latest ground-breaking project, the international cultural creation and experience design company debuted a world first in collaboration with the Saudi Ministry of Culture, *TERHAL*. The first production of its kind in the Kingdom, *TERHAL* is an original, live theatrical spectacular that celebrates the rich culture of Saudi Arabia, featuring acrobatics, stunts, aerial performance and dazzling special effects, and starring a combined cast of local Saudi artists and international collaborators from over 20 different countries.

The first Dragone creation to open since the passing of the company's Founder and Artistic Director, Franco Dragone, *TERHAL* is a particularly special show for the organisation, with every team member striving to honour the Founder's legacy in every aspect of the production. "Dragone's work is rooted in the foundation of creating shows with social impact," said Anna Robb, Dragone's Chief Operating Officer. "It was Franco's direction and wish for us to collaborate with Saudi artists. Seeing international artists perform side by side with

local artists and watching them learn from and inspire each other demonstrates to me that this is more than just a show; it's an evolution."

The production ran from 2-19 March in a purpose-built venue in Diriyah. Speaking to TPiMEA after doors closed, Robb reflected on the importance of the project, which faced rigorous scrutiny from both an internal and external standpoint. "It was only natural for everybody to ask; 'Do we have the right people around the table to deliver a Dragone show without Franco Dragone?' There was also pressure from the Ministry of Culture perspective," she added.

"We had a direct brief to represent Saudi culture authentically. If there's one thing you don't want to do when you come into a country, it's appropriate the culture and be too cliché. Every country has its nuances and it's vital to understand them if you're going to build an effective cultural show. Luckily for us, the Ministry of Culture was extremely supportive in guiding us towards what was appropriate and what would resonate with a Saudi audience."

Despite the massive pressure, Robb was delighted with what her team produced. "Having seen and been involved in many Dragone shows over the years, I can say confidently that this measures up. The essence of a Dragone show

was there," she beamed. "What a wonderful thing to do after Franco's passing, to prove that we could continue his legacy."

Dragone engaged with a Saudi event company, Hwadi, to help bring the project to fruition. "We gave the specifications to Hwadi for the type of venue we needed in terms of dimensions and weight-loading capacity, and, after an extensive search, together we realised that no venue in the country met the brief," Robb recalled, adding that the client eventually offered a solution that they would never have imagined possible. "We explored various temporary structures that we could import, but in the end the best solution turned out to be building a brand-new semi-permanent venue!"

While this audacious solution promised to have the venue completed in time for the start of the run on 2 March, it meant that there would be little to no time to rehearse in situ, which is at odds with the Dragone ethos. "There's a unique process that goes into any Dragone show," Robb explained. "We like to spend a lot of time in the venue creating, and we need to preserve that time because we believe the show benefits from being given that time and space for creativity."

Since the new venue wouldn't be ready in time to offer this essential creative rehearsal

## PRODUCTION PROFILE



period, the production instead set up shop in a rehearsal space in Dubai Studio City, building the main production elements and operating from there for a few weeks, before eventually packing up and moving into their home in Saudi Arabia.

"There's a delicate balance of how much you deviate from the ideal schedule and still deliver the ideal show," Robb said of the unusual lead up to the production. "We had good Technical Directors, a good Creative Director and a good Production Director, and with this team we could navigate the challenges while ensuring the desired result."

### 'Up there with the best'

Describing the production process as "hard and fast", Robb stressed the need for speed when it came to their chosen suppliers. "Creative approvals always take a lot of time, so by the time everything was approved, it was crucial that all our vendors were lined up and ready to spring into action," she said.

Dragone appointed A Loud Minority (ALM) to oversee technical consultancy on the project. Headed-up by Karl Jenkins, Ben Rodgers, Gent Wahlström, and Bengan Hovgard, the Dubai-based technical and creative company already has several large-scale projects under its belt after just a year in operation. "We were all working independently across projects in the region but saw that combining our specialist skills under one company could offer an exceptional resource to our clients," explained Jenkins.

"We take a holistic approach to every project based on client requirements, but typically we offer an end-to-end consultancy, technical direction, and project management across all technical fields. We seek equilibrium and balance between all contributors to a project and work to find a solution to every question or impossible challenge posed. In a way, we see ourselves as the glue or the connective current in a circuit."

Jenkins described *TERHAL* as "an incredibly ambitious project, which posed complex construction parameters combined with difficult timelines". He added: "We provided overall technical consultancy and scoping services that turned the technical designs into reality for the client. Using our extensive knowledge of both mega shows and the key players in the region, we were able to service the project from a holistic procurement standpoint and choose the best technical delivery vendors for the job."

The vendors in question included: BeWunder, Clair Global, Loud and Clear, Luminous, Pitchblack, ShowTex Middle East, Stage One Creative Services, and Wahlberg. ALM also supplied key production staff to the project, including a Technical Director, Associate Technical Director, and Operations Director. "These key positions worked closely to lead key specialists to define the scope of the project and deliver with the vendors," Jenkins stated.

ALM established clear parameters from the outset when it came to selecting suppliers. "We recognise that service, support, and inventory are what equips a supplier to be able to resource a project, so we reviewed all submissions on this basis to judge the value that a supplier can bring," Jenkins commented. "With our understanding of the inherent challenges of the project, we were able to make carefully considered selections on partnerships that would service it best, with all its quirks and complexities understood completely."

Unsurprisingly, the short turnaround was ALM's biggest challenge of the project. "Most of us are getting very agile in working with tight timelines, but this one was certainly up there with the best," Jenkins reminisced. "We owe it to the professionalism of the vendors and specialists that we worked with to be able to deliver this show to such a high level."

He added: "We're proud to have supported the development of a show of this scale, in a new venue and for a sustained season working directly with local partners at all levels. We all come from a theatrical show production background, so the sense of achievement and joy that an enthused audience's appreciation of a production brings is never underestimated. To have delivered a show with this level of artistic and technical ambition within the given timeframe and parameters is something we'll take pride in for a long time to come."

Pitchblack's Mark Hammond was bought on as the Rigging Consultant for the show. He spoke of the challenge in designing a rigging plot with the show's creative content, and venue under development. "The plot was constantly evolving, with new versions issued to meet the needs of both the show and venue engineers," he recalled.

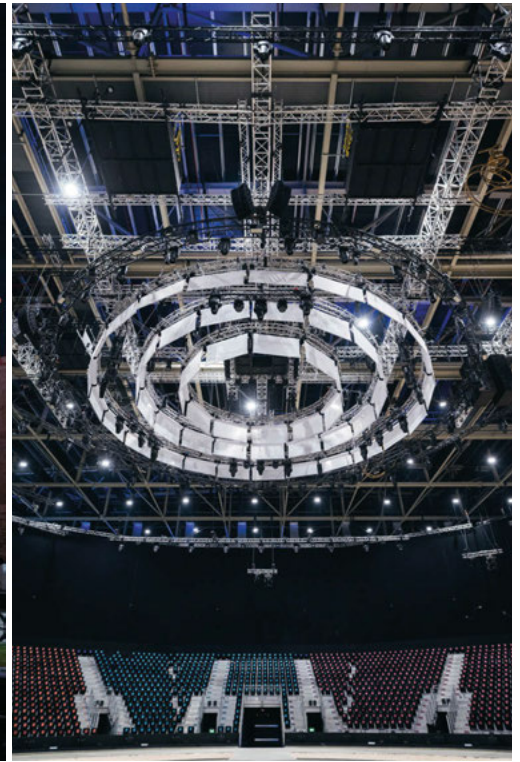
With the majority of the load concentrated in the central stage area, Hammond had to find



## ELEVATE YOUR PERFORMANCE WITH VIVID PROJECTION ON TEXTILE



**AMAZING STAGE FABRICS IN MOTION**  
T: +971 (0)6 567 9800 // [INFO.ME@SHOWTEX.COM](mailto:INFO.ME@SHOWTEX.COM) // [WWW.SHOWTEX.COM](http://WWW.SHOWTEX.COM)



ways to spread this, working within the venue engineers' strict parameters surrounding loading the roof structure. "The combination of the complexity of the task, unknown elements, and compressed timeframe meant that we brought onboard Rasti Bartek from Cundall to review and oversee the production's structural engineering requirements," Hammond described.

"It was essential that both ourselves and the construction company felt comfortable going into this, especially as it was the first show to be hung in that venue."

#### 'Finger on the pulse'

*TERHAL* follows the journey of Saad, a young Saudi studying in Riyadh, as he travels across time and place to encounter friends, danger, and the intensity of nature, all to discover that the key to the future lies in the country's heritage. Lighting Designer Josh Selander, along with his Associate LD Tim Reed, came up with a creative concept that helped lead the audience on the weird and wonderful journey, utilising colour palettes

ranging from serene amber and light blues to vivid magenta, cyan, and green.

Lighting and video were provided by BeWunder. The company's Head of Lighting, Paul Coopes reflected on the process. "Josh was very clear on the types of fixtures he wanted," Coopes recalled, discussing the brief. "He was also flexible and listed suitable substitutions alongside his desired fixtures, which was very helpful."

The main workhorse on the rig was the Martin Professional MAC Ultra Performance, with 149 of the fixtures deployed. Robe also featured heavily, with 56 MegaPointes providing aerial beam work and 84 Spiiders offering wash light. Ten Martin Atomic 3000 LED and 37 GLP JDC1 fixtures added floor effects and audience blinders, while 38 GLP Impression X4 Bar 20s were used for cyc and stage lighting. The floor package was rounded-up with 31 Ayrton Perseo and 28 Robe BMFL Blades.

With Selander a devoted ETC user, Coopes recalled the challenge of sourcing the primary and backup Eos Ti consoles that the Lighting

Designer used for programming the show. "We ended up sourcing the consoles from ETC in the US," he revealed.

Follow-Me was an integral part of the system, with four operators controlling multiple targets. "Because of the venue's size, the camera positions, and the fact that we had a Z axis, the use of Follow-Me came with its own set of complexities," Coopes recalled. "However, the service and support from Follow-Me was great. Gary Yates helped us design a slightly more complicated system to satisfy the requirements and one of the Follow-Me team spent five days with us to help with the calibration."

With the company awarded the project just a week ahead of installation into the Dubai rehearsal space, Coopes was pleased with the speed at which the team operated. "We have some great technical planners, and the benefit is we can turn around some good technical drawings that we're really proud of in a short space of time," he commented. He was also delighted with the relationship with A Loud



Minority. "Karl had his finger on the pulse and was in constant contact to ensure that all the suppliers came together," Coopes praised.

"The communication between us and Karl was flawless. He kept us in the loop, which allowed us to think outside the box and see where we could save time and create efficiencies not just for us but also for other departments."

BeWunder's Head of Video, Matt Holmes, talked TPiMEA through the impressive video setup, which included 19 Panasonic PT-RQ35K, two PT-RQ50K projectors and three AW-UE100 PTZ cameras, which captured the on-stage action from multiple angles.

"We proposed the PT-RQ35K due to it possessing the optimal brightness for the project," he began. "There was some unique positioning required for these projectors to hit their targets. We had to avoid a lot of rigging not only for lighting but also the aerial artists. Using a laser-based projector gives more freedom on your angles and how they are tilted. There is a significant amount of weight in the 50K projectors, which were used to cover the rear scrim, but the crew managed fantastically."

VYV supplied four Photon media servers, a Vmix server and two Albion controllers, as well as 15 OptiTrack Slim cameras, which fed back to the servers and mapped the space, allowing the projectors to be aligned correctly.

Despite the quick turnaround, Holmes was delighted with the application of his team. "It was a jigsaw puzzle that came together quickly and neatly in the end," he described. "The guys were unbelievable. I was so proud of them for what they achieved. It wasn't just speed – they went through everything with a fine-toothed comb."

Audio and comms were provided by Clair Global Middle East, with Dragone's Sebastian Hammond creating the sound design, and Andy Tsang operating a DiGiCo SD7 with dual Waves Extreme SoundGrid servers from FOH.

Clair's George Forsyth, who filled the double duty of PM and Monitor Engineer, described the system. "This was our first show as Clair Global Middle East using the L-Acoustics L-ISA system," he revealed.

The system comprised mains of K2 with KS28 flown subs; 10 arrays of six Kiva II above the stage in-the-round, with 20 Syvas in a surround

system at the back of the bleachers and 20 KS28s positioned underneath the bleachers for a surround low-end effect. A further four hangs of six Kara were deployed as high image arrays and used to create the effect of something rising high into the ceiling and leaving the building.

Clair provided 24 channels of Shure Axient Digital Wireless for performers including local and international vocalists and musicians, as well as Shure PSM 1000 IEMs. L-Acoustics X12s run off an LA4 amplified controller served as monitors for the B-Stage, while Forsyth operated a DiGiCo SD7 with redundant Waves Extreme SoundGrid servers in 'monitor world'.

The comms system was made up of two Riedel Artist-1024 nodes accompanied by 14 Bolero antennas, 50 Bolero Wireless beltpacks, and 17 RSP-2318 SmartPanels. A FerroFish A32 Dante converter was used for audio transport and conversion, all run off Clair's newly acquired Luminex GigaCore 30i switches.

"Radio communications came via 75 of our new Motorola R7 premiums," explained Forsyth. "We have recently acquired a further 500 R7s and 500 XPR 3500E. This increases our radio

Inventory up to 3,000 of the latest generation of Motorola units."

The rest of the Clair team on the project comprised: L-ISA System Tech, Adriaan Van Der Walt; Playback Operator, Martyn Ward; Communications and Back End Systems Tech, James Landen; RF Tech, Beth O'Leary; PA Build Techs, Saleem Shinda and Saqib Ramzan; Deputy System Tech, Nawazish Ali; and Communications Operator, Harry Langner.

Reflecting on the project, Forsyth was pleased with how his team acquitted themselves. "I was really happy with the crew – we all knew what we needed to do, and we got it done with no issues," he recalled. "Sebastian was a great person to work with – he trusts that you're doing it right and doesn't try to micromanage."

**'Benchmark for rapid-activation theatre'**

Stage One Creative Services provided both the production rigging and aerial package, as well as an automation crew for the entire four-month duration of the project.

The supply included a hexagonal mother grid, which was carried on 45 chain hoists and provided a mounting point for the winch diverts that formed part of the flying system for aerialists and scenery. The company also supplied seven

winches and associated drives, which were used to fly carefully choreographed aerialists and also to move large scenic components including a giant sun that rose above the horizon to create a dazzling piece of the performance.

Describing the show as "a benchmark for rapid activation theatre" Stage One's Managing Director, Tim Leigh, reflected on the unique challenges of operating in a custom-built theatre in the desert. "The venue was absolutely box-fresh and there were a lot of other trades in the mix while we were installing," he commented. "The transformation that was achieved in the space of just a few weeks was remarkable. It was an ambitious gig, a just-in-time delivery and it was great to be working in a bespoke venue built purely for this performance."

With multiple acts being performed on the same wire, Stage One's Qmotion software proved to be a valuable tool for show control. "What was interesting for us was the pace of the show," said Leigh. "It was quick to transition from aerialists to lifting pieces of scenery, and for performers to get on and off our system and into the grid. The show caller had quite a job on their hands to keep up with the pace of the show."

Following the production, the derigged equipment was returned to Stage One's



**STAGE FX**  
THE MIDDLE EAST SPECIALISTS  
IN SPECIAL EFFECTS & LASERS  
[www.stagefx.ae](http://www.stagefx.ae)  
[info@stagefx.ae](mailto:info@stagefx.ae) +971 50 559 6399



## PRODUCTION PROFILE



warehouse located between Abu Dhabi and Dubai for future rental, and Leigh is certainly not ruling out a return to the Kingdom sometime soon. "What I like about Saudi is the ambition," he offered. "We're being discerning about the projects we take on, but to do something for Dragone is very prestigious and we were honoured to be involved."

ShowTex Middle East provided a range of scenic elements, including: 1,200 sq m of DekoTaft floor fabric used for centre-stage projection; 140 sq m of lightweight DekoSilk, which was controlled by just four performers using ropes on pulleys; Satinac Crunch projection fabric selected to match the stage design; 60 2m by 19m BannerDrapes, used on the ceiling elements and rolled up and down during the show; a super-wide Cyclo 200 CS print measuring 17m by 48m, which was used as the backdrop; 20 23m by 3m pieces of Voile CS used for kabuki fabric dropped on the first part of the show; and the biggest SpiderNet the company has ever produced at a total of 1,000 sq m.

ShowTex Middle East's Regional Sales Manager of KSA and Qatar, Romeo Sale, singled

out the 'Flying Page' element of the performance for its use of the company's DekoSilk. "That was one of the most creative ways of using the material at its simplest setup with only four performers, ropes, and pulleys," Sale recalled. "It provided a truly mesmerising part of the performance with the simplest of methods we have ever seen in our industry."

He added: "Project builds for a show this big will always have their fair share of challenges, from deliveries to technical issues and build schedules. However, the Dragone and Hwadi teams were very professional, and in the standard ShowTex fashion, we worked with them to find a fluid solution that works for everyone."

For Dragone's Robb, the greatest challenge was "keeping an overview on all the elements that were coming together so quickly" and ensuring that safety and standards were maintained throughout. However, she was delighted with the support from all the suppliers.

"All the vendors had to jump into a Dragone process and get onboard with the mission," she commented. "They went with us, worked hard, committed to the project, and went above and

beyond on all facets of their delivery. That's the beauty of a Dragone process – it brings everybody together behind a common goal, and the result speaks for itself."

While Robb wouldn't be drawn either way on the possibility of a future *La Perle*-style Dragone residency in Saudi Arabia, the COO offered her take on the possible next step following the success of *TERHAL*.

"What we created in such a beautiful way was a show with a distinct Saudi flavour that I believe could be toured outside of the Kingdom and enjoyed globally," she stated. "For Saudi to export entertainment just a few years into its journey into the field would be a wonderful opportunity to showcase the dynamic spirit of contemporary Saudi Arabia." ■

Photos: Dragone  
[www.dragone.com](http://www.dragone.com)  
[www.aloudminority.com](http://www.aloudminority.com)  
[www.bewunder.com](http://www.bewunder.com)  
[www.clairglobal.com](http://www.clairglobal.com)  
[www.pitchblack.ae](http://www.pitchblack.ae)  
[www.showtex.com](http://www.showtex.com)  
[www.stageone.co.uk](http://www.stageone.co.uk)