



Live Music

The Specials Encore Tour

It was great to be back working with one of the most legendary bands of their time who are still going strong. We enjoy a great relationship with the Specials' long-serving TM Mike Darling who trusts us to deliver on all levels for every act that he looks after, which has led to our involvement with some truly stunning live shows.

Phil Stoker, Director, Adlib

Adlib upped the ante on the 'specials' front providing design services, lighting, audio, custom drapes and staging elements for the most recent UK leg of The Specials' Encore album tour ... just as the record topped the UK album charts, providing the band's first ever number one album.

The "rocksteady beat", buzz & excitement proved that political issues and some of the concerns they so raucously highlighted in the 1970s/1980s... are every bit as relevant today. Coupled with that full-on, legendary ska sound and punk attitude that hit the road.

For production manager Mike Darling, working with Adlib was a perfect solution – one company to provide a turnkey touring package.

Adlib's Simon Pettitt was back as lighting designer, having lit the band since 2014. Simon was also instrumental in developing the stage design, and he was joined by their regular audio engineers, Marcos Ferrari at FOH and Marina Martinez Sebastian on monitors.



Adlib's lighting account handler was Dave Eldridge, while Phil Stoker looked after all things audio.

Adlib offered the use of its full tour prepping facilities – a designated pre-production space in the company's massive new Knowsley warehouse – to ensure that the production left the warehouse complete and ready to roll.

Design

Simon received an outline brief from the band. This was mostly on the dynamics of the set and that the overall look should be “theatrical”, and he further evolved the production design from there into the full show.

The band were having a selection of eye-catching protest signs made as the main scenic element, so Simon helped organise a design of complementary drapes and flooring that would help them stand out.

Part of the brief was for the stage to be toned grey in keeping with the Encore album artwork. With Mike & James sourcing custom grey risers and knowing that a grey matte backdrop was in order, Simon suggested adding a matching Marley floor. Sourced by Adlib from LeMark, Simon remarked that “the floor also masked the variety of stage surfaces we knew we would encounter, giving the show more consistency from day to day.”

Whaley’s were commissioned by Adlib to make the 40 ft x 24ft wool serge drape which was dyed to match the flooring.



Adlib’s new pre-production space was invaluable in the construction & development of the ‘protest signs’ and how they would integrate into the stage and backline setup, and simultaneous to this happening, lighting was being programmed in Adlib’s WYSIWYG suite.

A dedicated adjoining office was assigned to Mike Darling & assistant tour manager James Hayward, while Simon and lighting operator on the road Tom Webber worked next door, so Mike could easily oversee all the preparations. At the relevant moment, the band's Terry Hall visited to review the design, and this meant everyone was fully on the same page ahead of the first show.

Lighting

The scenic elements were one basic starting point for the lighting, and another was having eight musicians onstage. They played an important soundtrack & shouted about some burning political issues of the day – including Brexit, austerity, Tory rule, Black Lives Matter and mental health – in the new material.

Simon's primary aim as an LD was to present the band and the songs strongly and in the true spirit of The Specials – historically and contemporarily. "If superfluous lighting effects are distracting people away from this music, I'm not serving the show," he says. "So I made a conscious decision just to tone and present each song – let the music do the talking."

To evoke the necessary theatricality, he knew that pastel tones and shutter work would read well on the drape and floor and lighting the signs from different angles allowed them to be punched forward in a look or isolated as silhouettes.

Looking towards the elements that would form the base of each look, there were plenty of angular washes from sidelight, footlight, and top light, and traditional conical moving light beams interspersed with something different – Simon wanted 'shafts' of light that would read well through the air and bounce off of the grey floor.

For overhead lighting positions, he utilised three standard trusses, a formula he knew could be achieved in every venue.

Martin MAC Viper Performances were the main profile moving lights – distributed on front, mid and back trusses, with eight MAC Aura XB LED washes on the back & four Viper washes on the mid and another four on the front truss.

Twelve GLP X4 Bar 20s were distributed between the back and the mid trusses with eight Prolights STUDIOCOB WW LED PARs on the front truss.

The floor package comprised 12 x Aura XBs, four Viper Washes, six Chauvet STRIKE4 LED blinders and another nine STUDIOCOB WWs.

The Viper Performances were the general workhorses, also taking on a lot of the theatrical intricacies like framing people / risers, producing bright shards of light piercing through the band as well as cool animation ripples.

The Aura XBs – some with added top hats – also worked hard and extensively as a general wash luminaire. Simon likes the brightness and the quality of their LED engine “all in a tiny package and ideal for side light.”

The GLP X4 Bar 20s were used to achieve the ‘shafts’ Simon wanted, as well as other versatile looks throughout the show.

The STUDIOCOB WWs proved very handy in the floor package. Their native beam angle is a useful 60 degrees (a few fixtures were fitted with reduction lenses), and Simon likes the way their COB source renders shadows and notes that the lack of amber shift was actually desirable for this application.



Operating lighting on the road was Adlib's Tom Webber, utilizing an MA3 light console (running MA2 software), and chosen because he and Simon are both firm fans of the MA architecture and OS. “It can easily handle the heavily-cued theatrical nature of the show, and it's also a standard for us. We wouldn't consider any other control platform for a project like this,” he concludes.

Audio

Co-ordinating the audio side on the road was Adlib's systems engineer Kenny Perrin and monitor tech Sam Gallagher, looking after Specials' engineers Marcos Ferrari (FOH) and Marina Martinez Sebastian on monitors.

Kenny and Marcos specified the L-Acoustics K2 system together, chosen for its flexibility and light weight.

With a wide selection of venues on the itinerary, flying wasn't always an option, and when it was, there were often tight weight-loading limits, so a lightweight system that functioned equally well flown or ground-stacked was the key to picking the PA.

The largest configuration used was 10x K2 & 3 x KARA down elements flown each side, or six K2 per side ground-stacked utilising the K2 tilt adjustment screw jacks.

These ran in conjunction with 12x L-Acoustics KS28 subs which proved excellent for the all-important groove section and the distinctive ska sounds that the Specials have made their own with classic hits like "Too Much Too Young" and "Ghost Town".

Where possible, the subs were arranged in two-high clusters stacked at 1-metre intervals across the front of the stage to create a sub arc for the best low-end coverage across the room.



This was complemented with six L-Acoustics KARA speakers, 8 x ARCS II and 4 x X8 for fills.

LA12X amplifiers powered the main system.

System processing was delivered via an L-Acoustics' LA Network Manager 2 with one of Adlib's standard Lake control rack comprising 2 x LM44s and 2 x LM26s for front-end control.

Marcos' FOH desk of choice is a Midas PRO X. He used this combined with some classic outboard delays and reverbs, including gems from the analogue era like a Yamaha SPX2000 digital effects processor, Lexicon PCM91 and 480L reverbs and an iconic Roland Space Echo which is prominent in creating the vibrant and complex ska sound.

The FOH effects were fed into the console via a Midas DL451 rack and the onstage mic preamps were sent via two Midas DL431s.

In monitor world, a feast of wedges included 10x Adlib MP4s driven by Lab Gruppen PLM10K amps. A rack of six Sennheiser G3 IEMs dealt with the brass and keyboard players with an Adlib MP4 sub for the drummer.

The side fills – two ARCS and a KS28 per side – offered plenty of oomph, and the monitor console of choice was a DiGiCo SD10.

Kenny's main task each day was to deliver as much sonic continuity as possible in all the different venues.

Adlib's Director Phil Stoker commented: "It was great to be back working with one of the most legendary bands of their time who are still going strong. We enjoy a great relationship with the Specials' long-serving TM Mike Darling who trusts us to deliver on all levels for every act that he looks after, which has led to our involvement with some truly stunning live shows."

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