



Comedy

# Russell Howard In-The-Round UK Arena Tour Production

*Delivering a tightly-scheduled in-the-round arena tour is incredibly challenging, but with all of our departments working solidly as one team, there was never a stress or problem that couldn't be solved quickly.*

*Phil Kielty, Client Manager, Adlib*

Adlib supplied a full production package incorporating lighting, video, sound and rigging for the recent UK leg of acclaimed comedy superstar Russell Howard's "Respite" stand-up tour.

This provided a great opportunity to further finesse their aggregate knowledge of designing and running the technical provision for an ultimate in-the-round experience.

The Liverpool UK-based production and rental specialist had previously presented Howard performing in the same format in 2017 and were thrilled to be back on the road with the comedian and his team. Neil McDonald from Clockwork Productions oversaw production and brought Adlib on board, having worked together on many previous projects.

Kumar Kamalagharan was again Howard's tour manager working closely with on-the-road production manager Andy Grey from Clockwork Productions.

Supplying full production for all related disciplines entailed the prep and advance process being accurate, streamlined and efficient. This followed through onto site with all departments commenting on how well this complex rig went together.

## Lighting

The lighting was designed by Adlib's Tom Webber, while the kit and logistics were coordinated by Dave Eldridge.





Tom took some of the base aspects from the 2017 design that had worked well and everyone liked, bringing in some new ideas to keep it fresh.

The technical infrastructure included a circular stage that was located centrally in the venue with four trusses just off the stage to fly the LED screens and lighting, plus a hexagonal truss immediately above the stage for all the overhead lighting positions

A large cable bridge facilitated cable runs from these trusses to the FOH control position.

The four screens around the stage were framed with vertical drop-down trusses each rigged with Martin MAC Auras to light the audience.

Four Robe BMFL FollowSpots were also deployed on these drop-down trusses, operated via a single RoboSpot remote system. Replacing traditional follow spots (located in the usual venue towers and cut outs) brought obvious sightline and labour benefits.

The super-bright BMFLs could get a nice, tight and neat throw angle which worked perfectly for key-lighting Howard. All four BMFL FollowSpots were on the one BaseStation remote which was stationed at FOH, with Tom having control of the intensities and some other essential parameters. This new approach enabled more seating to be sold, and virtually eliminated light-spill onto the front rows of the audience.

The moving lights were 56 x MAC Aura LED washes and 12 x MAC Viper Profiles, complemented by 16 x Chauvet STRIKE4 LED blinders together with 12 x Elation DTW BAR 1000s which were used as footlights around the stage edge for close up work and filler when needed.



The entrance was a big lighting number, and for the rest of the performance, the aim was to key-light Howard perfectly for cameras and live audience, with the crowd in the background atmospherically low lit by the Auras.

The console was one of Adlib's grandMA3 full sizes with a grandMA light for backup, programmed and operated by Tom.

## Video

The screens were a custom 6 x 4 metre size made up from Adlib's 5.9mm Unilumin LED product in touring frames. They were primarily used as IMAG, but also handled the graphical opening and ending of the show.

The playback elements – VT clips and holding slides – were stored in a custom 4K rack running QLAB which also handled the related audio tracks. "The system has been designed to be fully redundant, which give me great confidence throughout the show," comments Dan Brown who was running playback on this show.

Cutting the live camera mix was Iain Christie, with Adlib also supplying four camera operators for the new 4k Sony HDC-4300s – the company's latest camera investment. They were positioned at the back of the floor level seating around the venue, fitted with Canon UJ90 90x zoom lens and sitting on Vinten Vector 750 legs.



Adlib's departments collaborated closely during the prep and planning, explained Dave Eldridge, to ensure that the complexities of the rigging and cable management would work smoothly.

All power distribution was positioned at FOH below the cable bridge truss, allowing the cables to drop off neatly into a 'dead zone' behind the seating. The video processing was sub hung from the end of the cable bridge on custom made bracketry.

Adlib supplied all the hoists and associated rigging for over 60 points. UK Rigging managed the weighing of the rig during production rehearsals and formatted other related info from the different technical departments. They also supplied a head rigger and local rigging labour.

## Audio

Systems engineer Sam Proctor was familiar with the in-the-round format from previous tours and this experience was a great asset.

He was joined by Steph Fleming, Marc Peers and Billy Bryson, ensuring Howard's FOH engineer Sam Cooknell received comprehensive service and back up.

A CODA system was chosen as the best option for creating a truly 360-degree sonic experience for everyone in the room, utilising eight main hangs – each comprising 8 x CODA AiRAY speakers with 6 x ViRAY down hangs. One array either side of the four LED screens around the stage created a large 'sphere' in effect, with two PA hangs at each of the four corners.

These were complemented by 12 x CODA HOPS (high output point source) speakers around the front of the stage and six flown TiRAY speakers per side for Howard's monitors.

AiRAY was chosen to get the extreme vocal clarity and detail right to the back of the room. Also, with 112 cabinets, they needed to be light, so CODA ticked that box with both speakers and the Linus 14D amps which were also flown on the main four trusses. This meant most of the weight loading in the centre of each venue could be allocated to flying the lighting and video screens.

Several arenas on the itinerary are not designed for in-the-round presentation, so that was a major challenge for the sound team.

With an in-the-round design, multiple arrays are positioned in close proximity. This results in a lot more interaction between hangs in the lower frequency domain, audible as slower low frequencies can obscure clarity. Getting this absolutely spot-on is achieved by limiting the interaction between the speakers.

In this case, the low end content was primarily delivered by the larger hangs doing the long throws. This content was attenuated down in the hangs covering the sides of the arena. The coverage pattern of the lower frequencies meant that the audience in the side seats were still hearing this low end content, but without hearing multiple smeared versions.

This approach was one of the elements shaped by Adlib's learning curve of previous in-the-round comedy tours. "The knowledge we have gained is invaluable and this has been progressed in multiple areas," explained Sam, "from the speaker arrays to the signal distribution, the cable looms, trussing arrangements, etc., everything was fine-tuned from before to help deliver even better results on this."

The console was a DiGiCo SD9 running both FOH and monitors, with a fully redundant backup.

Russell Howard's vocal mic was a Shure Axient with an SM58 capsule, with a backup hand-held. Being so mission-critical, there was also a wired Shure SM58 as a third backup for that 'just in case' scenario ... which wasn't needed!

Client manager Phil Kielty commented: "It was great to be back with Russell, who we first worked with in 2008. He continues night after night to be one of the best comedians out there. Sold-out arena tours, a multitude of TV projects and causes highlighted, he is still one of our favourite comedians.

"Delivering a tightly-scheduled in-the-round arena tour is incredibly challenging, but with all of our departments working solidly as one team, there was never a stress or problem that couldn't be solved quickly.

"Being the sole supplier has many benefits to our client base, and the public's comedy experience is so much more inclusive with an in-the-round performance. Russell's tour continues around the world and we would like to thank Kumar, James Taylor & everyone at Avalon for – again – pushing live comedy boundaries."

**Discover other projects →**