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X-Factor Rocks Wembley Arena With ELP Lighting

An X-Factor series without a visit to Wembley just wouldn't be the same. And so it was that the latest 10th series of the show paid a visit to the 'hallowed Arena' as part of its 'auditions' stage of the competition.

The show format had undergone some changes from the latest series, with a return to the intimate hotel room judging setting perhaps the most noticeable for early stage auditions. Auditionees had already made it through two rounds, with the best now being given the chance to sing in front of the judging panel and a live Arena audience.

The Arena auditions took place between Monday 15th of July and Thursday 18th of July, with two filming sessions each day.

Tom Sutherland was the Lighting Director for the Wembley events. He brought with him a new approach to how the stage was built, lit and presented. The key changes being the shape and structure of the stage sides, the use of flown curved truss above the stage and a less beamy lighting look.

Tom split the stage sides into quarters with truss walls mixed with video angled outwards to create a funnelled effect. Truss blocks above the stage were layered incorporating two curved rows facing the audience. These features combined in creating a greater sense of depth within the set.

"I was really pleased with the way curved truss looked decorated with Robe Led Beam 100's and Jarag L's" remarked Tom. "They added shaping and texture to the trussing without one feature overpowering another. It's a nice contrast to the beamy angular looks of previous Wembley shows."

Tom's design allowed the screen graphics, with its distinctive 'X' branding, to dominate and not have to compete with overpowering lighting. Producers were keen to accentuate the brand as much as possible and they were delighted with the LDs suggestions. *"It was about complimenting each element of the set without any individual element taking control."* Observed Tom.

ELP supplied over 80 Mac 600s for Tom to create this bold retro rock and roll look. The 600's helped outline the stage trusses and also added some pretty reflections onto the floor. ELP also provided the LD with 18 new Clay Paky Sharpy Wash lights which encircled the front-of-house area to provide even illumination across the massive Wembley stage. *"I've been really impressed with the new Sharpy wash 330s"* enthused Tom.

ELP supplied around a hundred Sunstrip Active DMX battens and dozens of six lamp bars to further decorate the flown curved truss. These fixtures also combined to provide lighting behind the audience around the perimeter of the Arena.

ELP supplied all the dimmers, distro systems, rigging hardware and truss. The majority of the front-of-house truss was silver Tomcat GP truss but the LD specified black truss to frame the giant video wall (supplied by Anna Valley). Once again, this was to accentuate the 'X' logo branding.

MAC 3 Performances were deployed to key light the judges and stage. They provided tracking flexibility if contestants moved away from the main stage area. *"It's quite common for contestants, and judges for that matter, to go walkabout"* comments the LD. *"And using these moving lights we can offer production a totally automated solution. They were also great to adjust colours and facial tones on the judges to make sure they all look at their best".*

Throughout the show, the Lighting Director has been able to combine some older moving light technology with the very latest wash light systems to create an impressive and highly appropriate Wembley look.



A key factor in Tom's ability to effectively communicate his design concepts to producers was the use of WYSIWYG. Alex Mildenhall, who also programmed the show, works closely with the LD to visualise and render concepts. This work also benefits the crew as they can anticipate how every lamp will behave and make adjustments at early stages of the build process. *"I can't emphasise enough how important the WYSIWYG software has been to the smooth running of the show"* says Tom.

The LD went on to describe how this has been the smoothest Wembley visit to date and that this was in no small part to the excellent communication between core team members and the extensive preparation before arriving on site. ELP project manager Barry Denison, head riggers Dave Morrell and Bowie Ebrill from DLM Events and Crew Chief Craig Broughton worked seamlessly together on the project each bringing their expertise to the party.

Crew Chief Craig Broughton spent a couple of days in the ELP warehouse with his crew prepping gear and looms so that load-in was achieved with the precision and speed of a rock tour. *"It just flew in"* commented the LD. The crew included Mike Sherno (dimmers), Simon Carris-Williams, Mark Newell, Terry Archer, Justin Denchfield, Matt Chalk and Robert Watson.

In conclusion, Tom Sutherland said *"Barry & the ELP team have been brilliant. He's put a fantastic package together for this show and has given me total support especially in these times of tight budgets. Back up from Barry and the ELP team has been phenomenal. They just take the headaches away"*