



*Opposite: Queens of the Stone Age's Josh Homme once again led his band of faithful musicians and crewmembers on the Villains world tour.*

# QUEENS OF THE STONE AGE

*There are many reasons you may want to pursue a touring career - be it pure wanderlust, a passion for live events or just a rejection of the traditional 9 to 5 lifestyle. Some who call the road home embark on careers in the hopes of perhaps one day working for their favourite band. Late last year, Stew Hume's TPI got to meet a handful of men and women who achieved this particular goal.*

For over 2 decades, Queens of the Stone Age (QOTSA) have been labelled everything, from stoner rock to alternative, producing 7 studio albums and garnering the praise of critics and the wider rock community. Despite several line-up changes, one constant throughout the various renditions of QOTSA is the devil-may-care attitude of frontman Josh Homme who, once again, led his band of faithful musicians and crewmembers on the *Villains* world tour. After 2 American legs, the band made their way to Europe, playing an array of venue sizes, and culminating in a UK arena run. As TPI met the various components of the QOTSA touring machine, it was clear just how many of the crew were fulfilling a dream by collecting this particular tour laminate.

## ...LIKE CLOCKWORK

Rob Highcroft led the production. No stranger to the pages of TPI, the PM was last seen with British metallers Bring Me the Horizon. As Sheffield's finest take a break, Highcroft took up QOTSA's management offer to oversee the *Villains* tour. "I got a call just over 2 weeks before the first tour of the cycle started," began Highcroft, backstage at Manchester Arena. "Admittedly there was a lot to catch up on but we soon got in the swing of things. The last few months have been great. The band are a pleasure to work for!"

For the UK run, Highcroft employed the services of Eighth Day Sound, Christie Lites, Creative Technology, All Access Staging and Productions, Outback Rigging and Bittersweet Catering. For travel and logistics, the PM used Rock-It Cargo, The Appointment Group, Beat the Street and Transam Trucking.

Highcroft wasn't the only member new to QOTSA. Two other fresh faces, who TPI met in the production office, were Stage Manager Jack Dunnett and Production Assistant Vanessa Correa. "It was great to get the call to

work for Queens when Rob rang," began Dunnett. Correa admitted she still couldn't believe her luck to be on this tour. "I've been with the band for the last 3 weeks, after meeting Rob when the band passed through this year's Cal Jam," she said while unpacking her brand new, bright pink, Peli Case - who said touring can't be stylish? "The tour so far has been amazing. It's great to be touring Europe in these arenas."

## GOD IS IN THE RADIO

Those who witnessed QOTSA's latest UK invasion were bound to notice the massive wall of vintage guitar cabinets on stage. "In total they have about 5,600kg of backline equipment," stated Highcroft. "The gear they have is incredibly specific with vintage cabs and heads making an A and B system almost impossible. It's key to the band's sound, so we plan around this from the set design to our logistical planning. With many productions you will have to work around some elaborate stage designs but it's nice for a band to put their music and equipment at the forefront."

Both Highcroft and Dunnett have worked towards maximising the efficiency of handling such a bulk of vintage gear. "I remember when Rob and I rocked up on our first day in the States we got a feel of just how much backline the band had - most of which was still in individual cases," commented Dunnett.

One of the 3 backline techs for the band was Wayne Faler who handled guitarist, Troy Van Leeuwen and keys player, Dean Fertita. Starting out last year while QOTSA toured with Iggy Pop, Fertita lent a hand during the recording of *Villains* and "naturally transitioned" to their road crew. The wall of amps certainly had some elements that would excite any vintage guitar lover, including several from EchoPark's line, and even a reissue Magnatone. Discussing the impressive arsenal, Faler outlined some of the technical challenges for the backline team. "During the show all the



*Production Manager Rob Highcroft; Stage Manager Jack Dunnett; LD Emmanuelle 'Gigi' Pedron; Production Assistant Vanessa Correa.*

amps are live, which can create some issues with gain structures. Also touring with vintage gear can lead to some surprises." Although, as Faler stated with a smile; "that's all part of the fun."

He continued: "QOTSA are the furthest thing from a digital amp band. They like to have control of their volume and have the ability to tweak their tone without having to put their head into a rack unit. There are certainly flaws in some of this older gear but that's all part of the charm and very much in keeping with the guys' style. It's the imperfections that add the flavour!"

#### IN THE FADE(RS)

Tending the Eight Day Sound PA was FOH Engineer Stuart Bennett. The PA consisted of a complete d&b audiotechnik system with 18 J-8 and 2 J-12's per side, and 6 J-SUBs flown per side. Also included were 2 stacks of 3 B22 ground subs and 16 J-8's per side for side hangs. For those fighting for their place at the barricade, there was a centre cluster of 8 V8's and lip fills of 8 Y10's. Across the board, d&b D80 amplifiers were used to power the system. Out front, Bennett utilised a Solid State Logic L500 Plus with Waves Soundgrid and a Waves MGO MADI optical to Soundgrid interface for input and output inserts. To replicate several of the effects from the album, the FOH Engineer used the Eventide H9 effects processor. Aiding Bennett each day was the Eighth Day crew, consisting of Andrew Gilchrest on FOH Audio Tech duty, and PA techs Daniel Buckley and Ben Sliwinski.

Behind his DiGiCo SD7, handling the onstage mix and the band's in-ear mixes was Monitor Engineer, Spencer Jones. Another long-time fan of the band, Jones pulled out all the stops to secure his space on the crew roster. "Earlier in the year I had already put myself forward for the FOH Engineer role but once I heard Stewart was already in place I asked if they had found a Monitor Engineer. There was a few weeks of silence but then got a call

to see if I would like the gig and fly out to LA the next day for rehearsals - I dropped everything and bought my ticket!"

On stage Jones handled the mixture of IEM and side fills for stage sound. The band and 3 techs used JH Audio JH16 with Shure PSM1000's. For side fills, Jones had 2 d&b audiotechnik V-8's and a J-SUB each side with a further J-SUB for drummer, Jon Theodore. "After 5 months we have settled into a nice rhythm and I know what each of the guys likes," commented Jones. "But I still like to try new things, especially with Jon behind the kit, as it gets fairly loud there. For each song I have a snapshot - although the mix doesn't vary a great deal apart from the keys that can be more dominate in certain tunes. Josh's in-ears, in particular, I treat more as a FOH mix, altering to the venue we are in and reacting to certain crowd moments." Jones explained there was little need for wedges thanks to the wall of guitar cabinets on the upstage. "A lot of the band are using smaller cabinets rather than full stacks but they still pack a punch," commented the engineer. "Through the tour we have worked out positioning for each cabinet to minimise as much bleed as possible to the vocal microphones." Mike Veres, Monitor Tech, added: "Stewart, our FOH Engineer, came up with another solution to minimise spill and slap back by deploying a foam product behind the amp. Especially between Troy's 2 rigs this helped isolate each of the mics."

The Telefunken M80 was chosen for vocal microphones across the stage due to its "tight pattern and condenser-like HF," according to Bennett. "They have worked out great," added Jones. "They were using another brand on the last cycle but were open to change." The Monitor Engineer went on to talk about the rest of the stage. "On most of the guitar cabinets we have Telefunken M81. The roll-off on its high end means the brighter guitars can sound slighter darker and warmer, which fits QOTSA's sound." "DiGiCo is always my go-to," continued Jones, who handled around 90



Guitarist Troy Van Leeuwen and multi-instrumentalist Dean Fertita, both of whom were looked after by Backline tech Wayne Faler; Monitor Engineer Spencer Jones.

inputs and 24 outputs (8 stereo and 15 mono). All RF management was handled by Veres who used a Shure Wireless workbench to ensure clean transition for all IEMs. "On this tour we have several LED elements on the stage [more on that later] which I was originally concerned about," said Veres. "However they haven't affected the guitar rigs in the slightest."

#### GO WITH THE FLOW

During the initial design of the *Villains* tour, the band and management brought in world-renowned Show Designer, LeRoy Bennett, who came up with concepts, recalled Highcoft. "In the initial design he had this idea of LED bars on stage giving a prison bar effect, as well as an overhead beam of light." Upon approval, the show was handed over to LD Emmanuelle 'Gigi' Pedron, who took the concept and "ran with it!"

Very much at home in the world of rock 'n' roll, Gigi has already made a name for herself working with the likes of Jack White, Jimmy Eat World and At The Drive-In. Being at the helm of QOTSA's rig was another tick on her bucket list. "I have been a fan of them for several years and I know their back catalogue inside out," beamed Gigi. "It's definitely been a dream tour."

As already stated, backline was of paramount importance to the band. Many LDs may see this as an issue, working around such a large bulk of equipment - but not Gigi. "It's kind of my speciality," laughed the LD. "I seem to have specialised in acts like Jack White who don't have set lists and have loads of backline across the stage. A concert it should always be about the music first and then lighting should be built around it." TPI asked the LD if she was using any timecode or cues for the show, to which she had the best response: "Over my dead body!" She elaborated: "The last thing I would want from my light show is to limit the creativity of the band on stage. This is why nothing is cued and I ride the show live. It gives the band the freedom to play whatever they want and at any speed. I'm right there with them. It's like their song - I just *Go With The Flow*."

Christie Lites' new UK operation provided the lighting rig for the European tour. In total it provided Gigi and the crew with 41 GLP impression X4 Bar 20's, 21 Martin by Harman MAC Quantum Profiles, 70 Martin Quantum washes, and 40 Elation Professional ACL 360is. Also on the rig were TMB Solaris Flares and Elation Professional CUEPIX Blinders. "I was incredibly happy with the service given by Christie Lites," commented Gigi. "All the gear they supplied was brand new out of the box which was a rare treat! I was also very excited to have a full LED rig. Ever since I saw Andi Watson's work on Radiohead's 2008 tour - when he had the first all-LED show - I always wanted to tour with one. 8 years later and I finally have!"

Commenting on Christie Lites' involvement with the tour was Roy Hunt. "Working with Gigi was a pleasure," stated Hunt. "We worked with her on utilising the design to suit the large stock of fantastic equipment we have at our new UK shop in Coventry, and along with the outstanding crew, led by James Such, we were proud to have provided a service that is second to none. Nothing short of what Rob Highcroft and the production team deserve!"

Along with the sizable lighting rig, the design also featured 7 custom LED poles with an industrial spring base, which were scattered around the stage. "This was an idea from LeRoy's original design to have an LED product across the stage replicating a 'prison bar' look," commented Gigi. In the first rendition of the show in America, Upstaging provided the production with 8 I-Beams complete with LEDs. "However, Josh and the guys like to have a bit of danger on stage and want to interact with the gear around them," explained Gigi. This meant they needed a slightly more robust solution that could keep up with the band's stage antics. In a very short time, Upstaging produced several prototypes of the new LED product until they found a solution for both the band and Gigi. The tubes themselves contained an RGBW LED strip light, which survived the rough handling of the guys on stage, as well as allowing Gigi to mimic the other



For the UK tour, Creative Technology supplied the tour with a complete IMAG package; LD Emmanuelle 'Gigi' Pedron behind one of her custom taped MA Lighting grandMA2; Video Director Blue Leach.

colours being used in the rest of the rig.

Gigi described the changes made to the design throughout the campaign: "For the first shows in the States the main colours we used were red and white, echoing the album cover and conveying the idea of angels and demons - a theme QOTSA often explore within their music. More recently I have been throwing in some other colours too keep the show fresh."

The LD stated that the biggest challenge for the UK run was moving this show into large spaces. "The design of this show is very theatrical and intimate," she explained. "I also use a lot of haze, which can be tricky in these massive arenas when the AC kicks in. But the addition of the IMAG screens have certainly helped make the show look good for people at the back of the arena."

For control Gigi put her faith in an MA Lighting grandMA2. "I have been touring for around 17 years, always using MA. I started out with an MA Lightcommander and worked my way up. I've now been on the grandMA2 for several years and I really get on well with it. I also have a great relationship with the team at MA who are always on the other end of the phone if I have any issues or questions."

But Gigi's grandMA2 for *Villains* has a different aesthetic to others you might have seen on the road, thanks to the LD's now-famous custom tape jobs. Gigi's customisations have even sparked the interest of the MA Lighting, which brought the LD out to Prolight+Sound in Frankfurt in 2017 to exhibit one of her tape-masterpieces, a rendition of Piet Mondrian's *Composition with Large Red Plane, Yellow, Black, Gray and Blue*. "I strongly believe the equipment we bring on the road is a part of the design itself. So a few years ago, I started to personalise my boards according to the tour's major colour scheme." For this run, Gigi created her own version of the

*Villains* album cover, which many eagle-eyed fans spotted and took photos of as they made their way into Manchester Arena.

The UK run also saw the addition of automation to the set. "In the States the rig was similar, although we are doing 3 straight truss rig over the individual pods," explained Highcroft. "For Europe we have brought on Outback Rigging who have brought in a Kinesys system for the lighting pods." The rest of the rigging for the tour was provided by audio and lighting vendors Eighth Day Sound and Christie Lites, respectively. Finally, supplying risers for the tour was All Access Staging & Productions.

#### MISFIT LOVE

As QOTSA stepped up the size of their European shows, Highcroft and the band's management knew IMAG video was going to be a necessity. For the UK dates Creative Technology provided the complete IMAG and video package for the shows. Handling Video Director duties was Blue Leach. His 4-date stint with the band actually coincided with his 50th birthday, although according to the Director: "I couldn't think of a better way to spend it!" Prior to the UK tour, Leach was drafted in to cover the band's Antwerp performance and get a feel for the show. "This was the first time I managed to have a conversation with Josh and Gigi to get a feel of the aesthetics of the show. Especially as I'm the one coming into the tour I wanted to make sure I kept in line with Gigi's vision."

Creative Technology's Head of Music and Entertainment, Graham Miller, discussed how the company first got involved in the UK tour: "The band were doing a couple of shows in Europe with one of our sister companies, Faber, providing an IMAG package. Rob the reached out to us and asked if we could provide screens for the UK shows too - we jumped at the chance of course!"



Leach said the last 2 shows had gone great, although it was a “roll with the punches” style performance. “For Queens, no 2 shows are the same. You have to be prepared for whatever they throw at you. But that’s how I prefer to direct - reading the band’s movements and reacting accordingly rather than a hyper-choreographed show.” Jim Liddiard, Project Manager from Creative Technology looked after the QOTSA tour and even took on the role as one of the camera crew for the UK tour. “It is always difficult joining a tour with such an established crew, especially as an entire department,” commented Liddiard. “We were very conscious of integrating smoothly into load ins and outs so as to make our appearance seamless. That being said we felt very welcome from all departments and the addition of video for those few UK shows felt very successful.”

Creative Technology provided a Grass Valley Kayak with 16 inputs, 3 Sony HSC-300 cameras and 2 Panasonic robo cams. “I have worked with Creative Technology for a very long time and they were kind enough to offer a few extra bits including a track and dolly system for the pit cameras. They’ve enabled us to get some interesting panning shots,” commented Leach.

The Director also used his short time with the tour to experiment with some old school editing techniques. “When I spoke to Josh we discussed the ‘psychedelic’ influences on the record, which I wanted to try and replicate with the video footage,” explained Leach. “We dug out a vintage Panasonic WJ-MX50 - the first desk I ever used in my early 20’s. We have it down stream for the Kayak and then feed it back through before sending it to the screens. Through the show we have been doing some old school tricks, such as still frames in a very horror-esque manner. We have also used some black and white and block colours, which gives a juxtaposition between aggressive and smooth looks.”

Leach gave his final thoughts on the tour: “Sadly I’m only on this tour until the O2 so it’s been short and sweet, but a great birthday celebration. There have been a few bands I have worked with over the years during

which I really have to pinch myself and QOTSA are definitely among them - the band are ridiculously good and I can’t believe I got the opportunity.”

#### AUTO PILOT

Bittersweet Catering ensured all the crew were fed on the UK tour. “While we were going through mainland Europe due to the logistics and tight schedule we simply used local catering,” explained Highcroft. “But for the UK shows we have had Bittersweet following us around.”

Ensuring the 29-strong band and crew got from A to B were Beat the Streets and Transam Trucking. “In total we have 2 crew busses and a band bus with 5 trucks,” stated the PM. Finally completing the travel team was Rock-It Cargo. “They were already in place before I was brought into the QOTSA camp,” stated Highcroft. “However I have collaborated with them several times in the past which made it easier. We have Joe Ryan handle our account”

#### TPI

Photos: Shirlaine Forrest  
[www.qotsa.com](http://www.qotsa.com)  
[www.leroybennett.com](http://www.leroybennett.com)  
[www.50shadesofbluelighting.com](http://www.50shadesofbluelighting.com)  
[www.christielites.com](http://www.christielites.com)  
[www.ct-group.com](http://www.ct-group.com)  
[www.8thdaysound.com](http://www.8thdaysound.com)  
[www.upstaging.com/](http://www.upstaging.com/)  
[www.outbackrigging.com](http://www.outbackrigging.com)  
[http://allaccessinc.com/](http://http://allaccessinc.com/)  
[www.rockitcargo.com](http://www.rockitcargo.com)  
[www.transamtrucking.com](http://www.transamtrucking.com)  
[www.beatthestreet.net](http://www.beatthestreet.net)  
[www.bittersweetcatering.co.uk](http://www.bittersweetcatering.co.uk)  
[www.appointmentgroup.com](http://www.appointmentgroup.com)