

Jun 1, 2003 12:00 PM, Sharon Stancavage

In television, the late-night slot is where the competition is fiercest, and ABC is hoping to shake up the status quo with the addition of a new face and a new attitude. *Jimmy Kimmel Live* premiered in late January and its star, known for his work on *The Man Show* and *Win Ben Stein's Money*, certainly brings something, er, unique to the time slot. The show immediately became notorious for its raucous guests, outrageous antics, and, briefly, before parent company Disney banned it, a studio audience that imbibed cocktails.

For lighting designer Simon Miles, a veteran of *The Arsenio Hall Show*, *Vibe*, and many awards shows, the gig began last June with a call from Doug DeLuca, the show's producer. Miles signed on to the project, and they began at the venue: the El Capitan, located on Hollywood Boulevard, opposite the famed Kodak Theatre (home of the Oscars).

The most notable feature of the El Capitan is the size. "It's a very small building," Miles says. The venue seats approximately 200, and is essentially 85'x65' (25.5x19.5m) with a 15' (4.5m) ceiling. "The building itself is architecturally significant, which meant that anything we did to retrofit could not change the basic fabric of the building," he says. Consequently, because of the historic designation, many ideas couldn't be realized and were changed to fit the needs of the building — a situation that wouldn't have arisen if the show was taped in a studio. "The frustration is trying to balance the wishes of the producers with the actual space you're in," Miles comments.

Miles immediately began to work on his equipment list. "The first thing we started with was the lighting system, really without knowing anything about the show," he says. "I developed a list of lighting equipment I wanted to use and we put that forward. Our list included conventional lights as well as a moving light package from Vari-Lite that incorporates VL5Bs™ and VL2000™ Spots. The conventional equipment is mostly ETC Source Four ellipsoidals and PARs, and a smattering of 1kW and 2kW fresnels from Strand." Fortunately, he adds, "The package was exactly what we needed."

Early on, before the show was fully developed, Miles had a firm concept in mind. "The idea was to be as theatrical as possible." The studio is actually a ballroom located in the El Capitan, a baroque movie theatre, which naturally lends itself to a theatrical lighting style. "The idea was to light the set with texture and a rich palette, like you'd expect in an old picture palace," the designer observes. "The idea was to keep away, as much as possible, from the big TV lighting fixtures, to make it very directional, very focused. A lot of the lights have extremely specific tasks to accent one piece of architectural detail or another," he adds.

The set, designed by Bruce Ryan, has three basic areas: home base (Jimmy's desk), the band area, and a demo area. Of the three, the desk area is the most traditional from a TV standpoint. "Jimmy is illuminated with a 2kW fresnel frontlight and a 1kW fresnel backlight," the designer explains, adding, "The set area behind him is lit section by section with Source Fours shot very tight to light either a column or some piece of scenery."

The band area proved to be more of a challenge than the desk. "Bruce Ryan wanted to have a backlit wall behind the house band that could change color, create patterns, and do dynamic lighting," Miles says. Remember the dimensions of the room — this is a point where they're critical: "Because of the building's size, the backlit wall is, in parts, literally inches from the wall of the building," the LD says. As a result, many of the usual techniques for creating a color-changing wall were suddenly out of the question: "Traditionally, I would have thought of backlighting the band area with something like Vari-Lite soft- and hard-edged lights, so we could use gobos and color washes. But we just didn't have the space to do that. The second choice would have to be neon or fluorescent, but again, space is a big issue."

With automated lighting, neon, and fluorescents out of the picture, Miles turned to LEDs. "My company, VX Inc. of Los Angeles, developed a design and built the prototype for the LED lighting that we incorporated behind the house band, in what we call the 'light organ,'" he says. "We've also incorporated a lot of LEDs into the stage steps, the band fascia unit, and the columns." The LED units, which use RGB color-mixing and have instant on/off, actually fit the bill quite nicely. "This is the first time I've used LEDs on a set, and they've worked out better than I hoped," he adds.

Located stage left of Kimmel is the demo area. "When we have segments there, we have no audience in that part of the studio for the entire show," Miles says. "The demo area is front- and backlit with 1kW and 2kW fresnels, while the background of it is lit section by section: The columns are illuminated independently from the walls, which are illuminated independently from the headers, which are illuminated independently from the scenic pieces." The columns are lit by Source Four ellipsoidals, while the wall panels between are lit by VL5s from above and Source Four PARs from the floor.

The lighting, which is keyed at about 30fc, also features two Robert Juliat spotlights at the back of the house on tiny platforms. "We use the followspots to get people from one point to the other on the set," Miles explains. The spotlights do have one slight disadvantage. "If the audience stands up, you see them in the beams; there's a certain roughness to it, a lack of gloss," he adds.

Miles also has an ample number of units to illuminate the audience and the room itself. "The VL5Bs are wall washers, so we can change the color of the room if we need. The VL2000 Spots circle the audience; they're used as wall washers as well, and we can also change the texture on the wall in the demo area, too," he says. "For commercial bumps, we can swish the audience with gobos and color from the VL2000s and change the colors on the set with the LEDs as well."

Color is key to the look of the show, but not on Kimmel or his guests. "Jimmy and the guests are always keyed white," Miles says. "The audience has white frontlight and white crosslight at an extremely low level, but they're backlit in a dark lavender with Source Four PARs," he explains. "I think every other light has some sort of color in it, and the Vari-Lites never run white," Miles adds.

Since the theatre itself is so colorful, a gentle touch is the key for Miles. "The idea is to enhance the color of the set by adding a little bit of gold in some of the lekos, or a little bit of blue or purple here and there just to bring out the range of colors in the set." Miles also uses color temperature to his advantage. "Another way we use color is to use a light that's going to be way too bright and then run it at 15% to 20% off the dimmers — the warmth of the bulb becomes the color."

While Miles has moved on to other projects, programmer Christian Hibbard and a couple of Vari-Lite Virtuoso™ DX consoles are there for the long haul. "The DX is actually a very good console for this show, partially because it's smaller than the full-size Virtuoso and has multiple DMX outputs at the board, making it very versatile," Miles comments. There is also a variety of lighting positions (once again, with both Vari-Lites and conventional fixtures) within the lobby of the venue, which keeps Hibbard busy. "It's a pretty heavy programming show," Miles admits.

*Jimmy Kimmel Live* airs weeknights on ABC at 12:05am ET, following *Nightline*.

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**JIMMY KIMMEL LIVE**

**Lighting Designer**

Simon Miles

**Lighting Director**

Matt Ford

**Production Designer**

Bruce Ryan

**Programmer**

Christian Hibbard

**Gaffer**

Maurice Dupleaxis

**Best Boy**

Geno Fitzpatrick

**Art Director**

Eric Larson

**Lobby Production Designer**

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- 96 ETC Source Four PAR WFL 575W
- 24 ETC Source Four PAR MFL 575W



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