

# BEYOND PYRO

For Gigantour 2008, Megadeth's LD used retro lighting looks and moving truss instead.

Photos & Text by Bree Kristel Clarke

"Musicianship" might be a word more commonly associated with a Chopin concerto or chamber ensemble than with the thrash metal bands Megadeth, In Flames, Children of Bodom, Job for a Cowboy and High on Fire. Those bands toured North America this year as the latest incarnation of *Gigantour*, the annual shred-fest launched by Megadeth front man Dave Mustaine in 2005.

When they first met to discuss lighting this year's tour, LD Brandon Webster admitted to Mustaine that he wasn't really that well acquainted with Megadeth's music. That, of course, has changed. "Megadeth is more than just metal," Webster says. All four band members — guitarist/singer Mustaine, guitarist newcomer Chris Broderick, drummer Shawn Drover and bassist James LoMenzo — "are incredible musicians."

## Showcasing Skills PLSN

Webster met up with Mustaine in late 2007 when Megadeth was touring Australia with Static-X, DevilDriver and Lacuna Coil. That tour, Webster says, was "a completely different show," with different "backdrops, set pieces, the whole thing."

Webster calls Mustaine "a mastermind" who is able to choreograph in his head "exactly who moves where, every night." But when it came to the lighting design for Gigantour 2008, Mustaine "gave me a lot of flexibility to do whatever I wanted," as long as Webster was able to come up with "a big rock show with a distinct 'feeling.' I responded back that I wanted to do this in a way that would complement their skills and the show, without taking away from the stage performance."



Aside from a false alarm, LD Brandon Webster hasn't had any major issues with his console.

## A Giant Rig PLSN

One of the first items to be considered was pyro. "They've had pyro in previous *Gigantours*," Webster says, "but I was of the mindset that, 'if you can't give me a really big number per week to do it, I'd rather not do it at all.' We might as well build a giant lighting rig and go from there, instead of going halfway with everything."

With the focus shifting from pyro, Webster was able to push for his retro vision of the kind of big rock rig seen before automated lighting arrived on the scene. "I've always had this wet dream of doing a 1970s-style show," Webster says, recalling the big rigs used for bands like Rush, "with 500 PAR rigs that flower out from the stage."

Moving truss also plays a big role in changing the look as the show progresses. "I wanted to change each block of the set so that it was different throughout the show," he says, "so it's not like you're just sitting there staring at the four guys playing the whole time. Everything is flat in the beginning, and then the truss moves and we change backdrops and give a flow to the whole thing."

Webster doesn't feel the need to try to visually pump up the energy with lighting by itself. "The band members are perfectly capable of spooling the crowd without my help. But it's completely useless if they

can't be seen. So I just try to do big open looks so everyone can see everything that's going on."

## Music, not Multimedia PLSN

Even during those times "when the songs are really really heavy, more often than not there's not a lot going on onstage," Webster notes. "They might be moving slowly, and I'm changing colors slowly, but I'm really not trying to take away from it. I didn't want to get caught up in this whole multimedia craze where there's so much going on visually that it takes away from the players" and the music.

As for his choice of colors, Webster generally just tries to match the mood of the songs, but not necessarily their tempo. "Even if the band is playing 100 miles per hour, it doesn't mean you have to go from color A to color B in zero seconds," Webster says. "The biggest thing for me was for each different song to have a distinct look." A song like "Hangar 18," for example, will need a "spacey" look, with some alien visuals. "The music really dictates it, in the end."

## Starting with Pen and Paper PLSN

Webster always starts his designs "with pen and paper," then when the rig is drawn, he uses VectorWorks at home, then moves on to previsualization software from ESP

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Vision. "They are great tools," Webster says, but adds that he still likes to spend three days in front of the rig itself before the opening show and an additional two days at the first venue to complete the looks.

Despite that level of preparation, the band rarely sticks to a set song list. "Dave bases his performance on the energy and how he feels about it, so he will just change the set list, skip a song, flip it or start a song within the middle of the song without warning," Webster says. "It doesn't really bother me that much. He knows that we are going to work this together and make it happen."

Webster programs the lighting on an Avolites Diamond 4 Vision console, which he considers "the most flexible console on the market. I can change or rearrange a set list on the fly, or I can grab a look and do an entire song on fader. I've found that to be more difficult on some of the other consoles I've used."

### A False Alarm

PLSN

The day before he spoke with *PLSN*, Webster had a scare with the console, but it proved to be a false alarm. "Just last night, I go to eat dinner, and I get a call to say, 'The console's dead. It's completely crashed.' So I walk into the venue and look at it, and I'm already sending people here with power supplies and cables because I have a very finite amount of time to fix it. I asked, 'Has anyone tried to turn it back on?' Somebody had accidentally hit the power switch," Webster says. But in defense of his crew, he adds that he, too, has a tendency to jump to the worst-case conclusions when glitches arise.

Webster also values flexibility and reliability in his lighting instruments. He's particularly impressed with the Martin MAC 700s. He likes their hard edge and the ability of the units to go "from arenas to small clubs, and their ability to not overpower the club." Relatively low power draw, brightness and reliability are other advantages, he says.

### Keeping the Beat

PLSN

Of all the songs Megadeth performs, Webster says his favorite one to light is Megadeth's "Trust," with its unabashedly crowd-pleasing beat. "I'm not really into the whole art school off-beat thing, you know," he says. "If I can't track a song or tap my foot and sing the song when I'm driving down the road, it kind of loses me. That song has these incredibly smooth transitions from one feeling to the next. It starts out really slow, just a drum beat, and you don't know what to expect, then the band comes in all at one time, and it's like, 'Here we are, let's do this.'" **PLSN**

## CREW

**LD:** Brandon Webster

**Crew chief:** Martin "Juice" Joss

**Lighting techs:** James "JimmyMac" MacKay, Cathy Martin

**Lighting company:** Premier Global Production Co. Inc.

## GEAR

**Lighting console:** Avolites Diamond 4 Vision

**13** 4-Light Mole-Feys

**18** Chain Hoists (1 ton)

**2** City Theatrical Aquafog 3300 dry ice foggers

**24** Color Kinetics Color Blast 12s

**14** ETC Source Four 19° ERS

**12** ETC Source Four PARs

**1** High End Systems Axon media server

**4** High End Systems DL.2s

**30** High End Systems Studio Color 575s

**13** Martin Atomic 3K Strobes w/ color changers

**24** Martin MAC 700 Profiles

**10** PixelRange PixelLine 1044s

**2** Two-stage kabuki drops



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