



The Heaven And Hell Of Show Construction

Black Sabbath Reunites And Take Their Goth Show On The Road

By Paul Dexter

In the Beginning

Several years ago (1981), I presented my lighting design for the upcoming *Diary of a Madman* tour to Ozzy and Sharon Osbourne in my tiny London hotel. I can remember it like it was yesterday. There was barely enough room for a single bed, a small desk, and a chair.

This was before 3D computer graphics came into our lives to enlighten new concepts. The drawing I used was painstakingly created with a sharp pencil on velum using a 12" ruler and a PAR-and-Leko template. Knowing every line that I had drawn, erased, and drawn over again before their arrival, the only presentation tool I had was that

primitive drawing and pure enthusiasm.

Ozzy Osbourne glanced at the drawing for about five seconds, and that lost him. He plunked down in the room's only chair, so my audience was his wife. She seemed genuinely interested in what I had to say, was gracious, shared my excitement, and asked pertinent questions. "Ozzy?" she said in her inimitable royal English accent. "Do you see what Paul's done with the lighting?" We turned our attention away from the presentation tool and looked for a reaction.

He was wearing a tan suede coat that day. The lengthy fringes were draped over the chair arms; his head was slumped over to the side with long hair covering his face. His eyes were shut, his

mouth was open, and...he was completely out. Political correctness aside for the story: Ozzy Osbourne had a hangover.

Having just finished two years touring with Rick James during the "Super Freak" heyday and his more serious troubles with crack cocaine, I had reached a crossroads in my career that day: "Do I really want to continue to depend on rock stars for my paycheck?" I started touring (1973) right out of high school, so now was the point where I decided that diversifying my knowledge and scope of services would probably be a wise move. That decision was a lot harder to implement than I ever imagined, but, in the interest of keeping this article

from turning into a book, I'll reserve that tale for another day.

Fast-forward to today: email, DVD, CAD, cell phones. Somehow I blinked, and rock bands of the 1980s are now "classic rock" that you download as a ringtone. Compare technology advancements and entertainment now to then? It was like we were living in the Wild West: "Go wrestle us up some Colortran dimmers and a two-scene board, boys!"

But even being familiar with all the technical advancements in 2007 and taking full advantage of their capabilities, there is one unchangeable characteristic that transcends time, and that's passion for what you do. It is the driving force that will tell you to carry on when you're tired or persist when you're about to give up hope, even when the odds are all against you.

With acquired diversity, innate passion, and keeping up with industry trends on my side, an all-encompassing project materialized for my little company, Masterworks Design. I became the production designer for Black Sabbath's *Heaven and Hell Tour 2007*, handling just about every facet of the visuals in the show—set design, lighting design, scripting the show, directing programming for

lights and projection, and even coordinating moves with the band, which wasn't that hard because they don't move that much these days!

For most of us out there, art is intrinsically linked with business. No production leaves home without it.

Art Meets Business

Satisfaction and fun of creating art: \$0.

Presenting an original idea that's glowingly lauded: \$0.

Seeing your finished product: priceless.

Inevitably, though, the bill will arrive. Okay, here's the part that's tricky: Balancing budgets and connecting with people that will help you bring your design to fruition and care for its integrity.

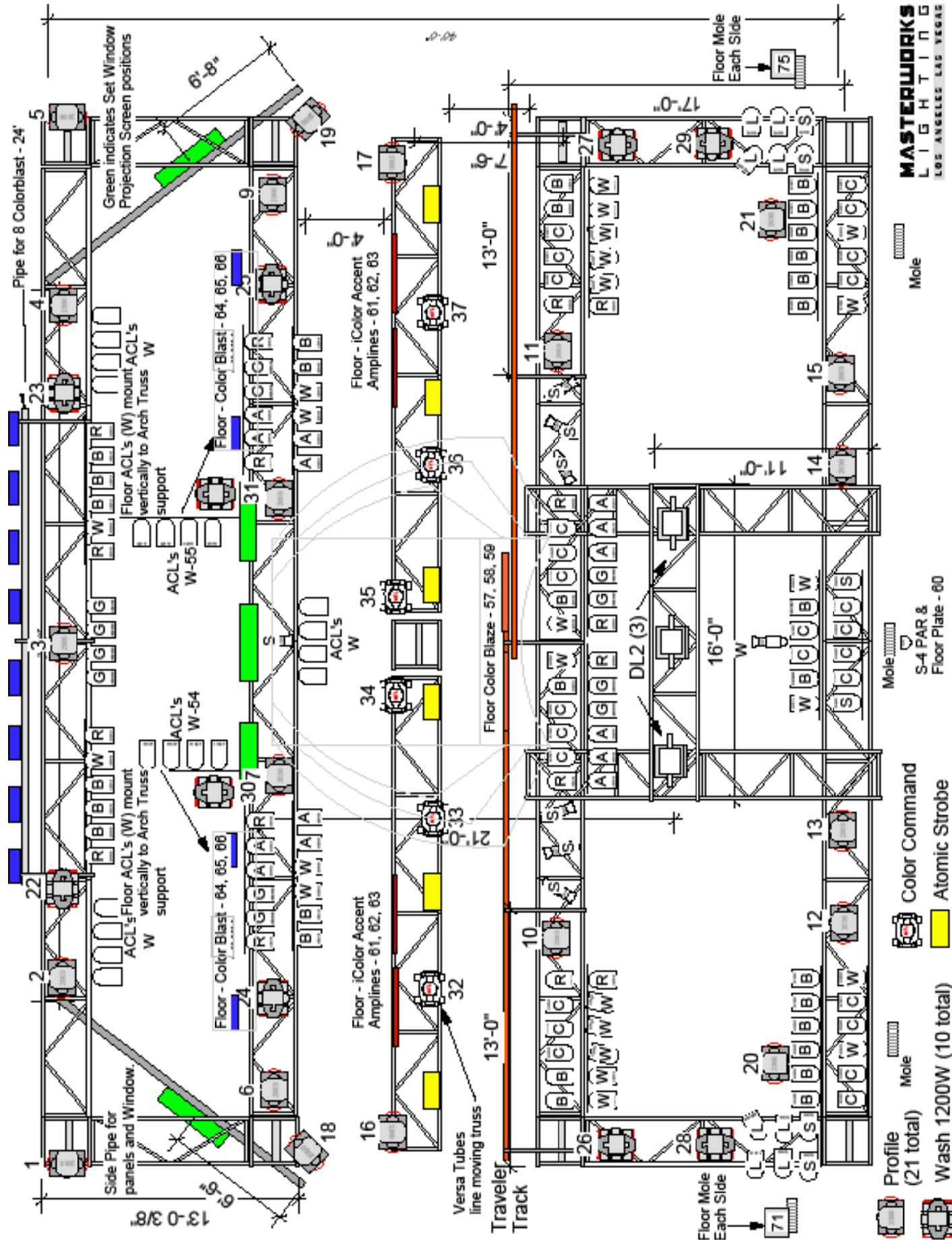
Priceless fun and creative processes sometimes

find a minefield of fragile ego and politics. Usually, this balancing act requires communicating with delicate doses of humor and diplomacy. In this instance, it took a lot of time to prepare 3D visual aids and then articulate a clear and concise plan spanning visual elements, practical conditions, and financial attention. The concept was shaped and delivered over the course of several weeks and then considerations were extended to the band (with personal tastes, theatrical concerns, and *please* don't mess with the sound!), management (there were three in this case, because the band members came together for this tour from their solo careers), a new set company (the Nature Factory), established vendor relationships (PRG), established set and backdrop painters (Superior Backings), a new projection system (provided by CWP), an LD (Mark Scrimshaw) who I hadn't worked with before, and a projection operator (Joe Denham) whom I had never met.

To ensure that my designs become realizations, the best diversity move I ever made was to learn about, and act on, the commercial perspective of those people that run our multifaceted industry. For most of us out there, art is intrinsically linked with business. No production leaves home without it.

Black Sabbath's *Heaven and Hell* Tour, The Nature Company contributed to the design, engineering, and build of the set.





MASTERWORKS
L I G H T I N G
LOS ANGELES LAS VEGAS

- Profile (21 total)
- Mole (10 total)
- Wash 1200W (10 total)
- Color Command
- Atomic Strobe
- S-4 PAR & Floor Plate - 60
- Mole

The Design

Having toured many times with Dio since 1983 and Sabbath (with Dio) in 1992, it was simple to conclude that, by sticking with the known theme—the usual gothic churches, medieval castle architecture, and the trademark crosses—I couldn't miss.

Once I learned that I was hired for the tour, my observation level increased ten-fold toward finding original ideas for that particular venture. Whether it's noticing a clause in a book, a movie scene, or today's newspaper, something will spark the internal idea factory.

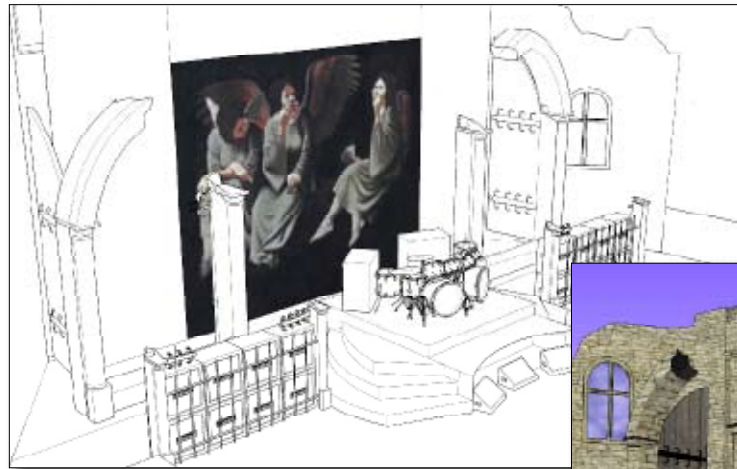
And here it comes: During a trip to Stanford University on a totally unrelated college search tour (no, it wasn't for me), I entered a beautiful Palo Alto, CA, campus church, and my focus was immediately drawn to three stained-glass arched windows. The arch shapes later became the main projection surfaces and the central part of the *Heaven and Hell* stage set.

Choosing A Set Vendor

Building the set could have sent the accountants into a tailspin. I had quotations for up to \$100K and, in England, for £100K. Just outside of Detroit, I discovered a burgeoning company, The Nature

Factory. They built the set for quite a lot less and, believe it or not, they were my first choice anyway.

Why? The Nature Factory manufactures a line of lightweight, durable nature materials. They've



perfected proprietary forming and coloring methods for all things natural, like tree bark, wood, stonewall, even rusted metals, and wrought iron—just the thing!

I liked the realism of The Nature Factory stone, but after several conversations, they won

me over as far as helping with design, engineering, and build. Mostly known in the exhibit trade and retail, they hadn't built anything like a theatrically weathered castle before, but they wholeheartedly embraced the project, resulting in scenic components that are quite unique to the rock-touring genre. This was a huge leap of faith that actually surprised us all.



The Nature Factory built a weathered castle set featuring three arch shapes used as the main projection surfaces for the *Heaven and Hell* Tour.





HEAVEN AND HELL TOUR 2007 GEAR

Video provided by Los Angeles-based CW Productions
Lighting and rigging provided by PRG

MOVING LIGHTS

19 Martin MAC 2000 Profile
12 Martin MAC 2000 Wash

CONVENTIONAL FIXTURES

120 PAR64 1kW Fixtures
8 Bars of 4 ACL Fixtures
5 Eight-Way Molefay
6 ETC Source Four Ellipsoidal 26°
1 ETC Source Four Ellipsoidal 19°
1 ETC Source Four PAR

SPECIAL EFFECTS

8 Color Kinetics ColorBlast 12
2 Color Kinetics ColorBlaze 4'
2 Color Kinetics 8' iColor Accent Powercore
14 Kino Flow 8' Fluorescent
6 Martin Atomic 3000 Strobe
6 High End Color Command

VIDEO GEAR

3 High End Systems DL.2
6 8' Kino Blue Tubes

CONTROL

1 Flying Pig Systems Wholehog 3 Console
1 Flying Pig Systems Wholehog 3 DP 2000 DMX Processor

DIMMING & POWER DISTRO

1 ETC Sensor+ 96x2.4kW Dimmer Rack
1 Mains Feeder System
1 Power Distribution System

TRUSSING

2 4' Sections Total Structures Mini Beam Truss
3 8' Sections Total Structures Mini Beam Truss
4 10' Sections Total Structures Mini Beam Truss
2 4' Sections Total Structures D Type Truss
21 8' Sections Total Structures D Type Truss
8 Total Structures D Type Truss Corners
8 8' Sections 28"x28" Total Structures Intelli Truss

RIGGING

6 ½-ton Columbus-McKinnon Chain Hoist
12 1-ton Columbus-McKinnon Chain Hoist

www.livedesignonline.com

Back Drops

After deciding on the exact castle stone, we sent a sample to Superior Backings in Burbank, CA—in my book, the premier scenic painters. They matched that sample so well that it was hard to tell where muslin backdrop left off and the hard scenic stone began.

Leave out the Black Sabbath signature cross? Never—it was replicated as windows, made with lightweight Nature Factory materials, so lightweight that the backdrop supports the windows with Velcro, introducing the realism of hard material into 3D painted soft material. Backlight streaming through the windows added the final scenic touch.

Lights, Projection, And Action

After 24 hours of listening to Black Sabbath music, I wrote scripts and lighting cue notes for 17 songs and Mark, Joe, and I did the customary up-all-night programming sessions. After production rehearsals and a ten-day Canadian road trip, I left the tour with a solid, no-stone-left-untuned integrated lighting and projection show.

Probably one of the hardest things for me, in the whole process, was to pass the console keys over and let it go. It's like giving up a child. Conversely, one of the most satisfying things for me was to hand over ownership to Mark and Joe and watch the show at the Forum in LA as an audience member, along with 12,000 enthusiastic fans. And, the best part? It will be received like that the world over. **LD**

Paul Dexter is the principal owner of Masterworks, www.masterworkslighting.com.

