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Im Dschungel

Lichtblicke auf ein Musical
über die Basler Mission

**Rückblick Mitglieder-
versammlung**

Neues für Augen und Ohren

Schweizer Theatertreffen

28. Mai bis 6. Juni

Schwerpunkt



IM DSCHUNDEL

Die Lichtdesignerin Minna Heikkilä berichtet von den Herausforderungen für das Musical «Das Grab des weissen Mannes» (S. 10)

MITGLIEDERVERSAMMLUNG

Über klingende Höhepunkte und Neuigkeiten aus der Branche (S. 6)

SCHWEIZER THEATERTREFFEN

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Willkommen im Dschungel

Das Musical «Das Grab des weissen Mannes» wurde für das Jubiläum «200 Jahre unverschämt viel Hoffnung» der Basler Mission von Kaspar Hort geschrieben und arrangiert. Es erzählt von den Anfängen der Mission Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts in Ghana und wurde vom 29. März bis zum 12. April 2015 im Oekolampad in Basel aufgeführt. Das Ensemble bestand aus elf Sängern, drei Tänzern und einem Kammerorchester. Die Autorin hat den folgenden Beitrag auf Englisch geschrieben. Zugunsten der Authentizität wird er in ihrer Sprache belassen.

TEXT AND PHOTOS:

MINNA HEIKKILÄ

EDITING: GAETANO FLORIO

principles management

The concept was a well-kept secret until autumn 2014 when I as a light designer could start to research the topic. After the discussions with the director it seemed important to bring to the stage the feeling of a ruthless and merciless jungle where the missionaries are total strangers and nothing is safe. The environment is alien, savage and unforgiving, the heat and hu-

midity overwhelming. Keeping this in mind, the director wanted to maintain a certain level of realism in the visualization. We both thought that it would be interesting to enclose the audience also into the rainforest. After laying the ground stones of the world we were creating, the director gave me free hands to design.

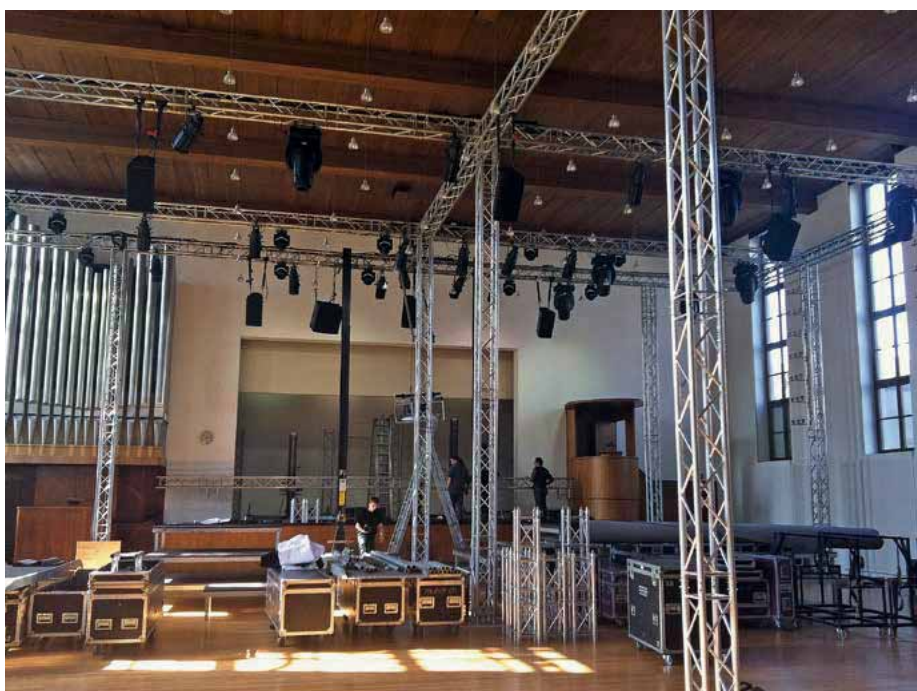
As I design, I always do extensive image research to determine the essence of given theme and try to find interesting dramaturgical angles to use. In this case I came to the conclusion that rough high-angled top-light, expressive strong sun-

sets, moving night-time shadows and perpetual haze are essential to Africa. In a way it is my tribute to Sir David Attenborough, whose documentaries of Africa I grew up with.

Jump to the unknown

The venue was complicated, to say the least. The Oekolampad at Allschwilerplatz square is a former church with a pipe organ, a pulpit and a stage. As such, a protected historical monument. Which meant that there was no chance to drill even one single screw to the building, no hanging

« There is a massive organ and a pulpit in a white space, both of which are very present at all times. »



In der ehemaligen Kirche entsteht das Gerüst für einen afrikanischen Dschungel.

points to fly anything etc. In practice we had to bring with us the whole theater, standing on it's own legs. Therefore I had to design the whole truss system that would support the light and sound systems and part of the set design. There is a small proscenium stage in the venue, but none of its equipment was safe to use any more.



Grosse Gefühle im afrikanischen Dschungel: Gottlieb, der Missionars-Assistent und Lydia, das Dienstmädchen, offenbaren einander ihre Liebe.

The first problems surfaced already in autumn 2014 when I couldn't get any precise information about the set design. In January, there was a very vague sketch and rumors about pre-stage on risers and certain mobile-elements, which would only be constructed when on venue. Visiting the rehearsals, where the stage areas were marked with toilet paper rolls in a space three times smaller than the actual venue, didn't help me much. How can you design something specific if you don't know what the target will be? In the end, time was running extremely short for rental quotes on technical equipment. So I had to decide to use equipment that would have extreme flexibility to respond to almost anything that might be staged.

To bring alive the idea of rain forest, I chose LED washes for direct top-light to mimic the scorching sun of the equatorial. One of my key reasons of choosing particular type of wash was big zoom range

to maintain flexibility. The second main element for my design is Vari-Lite spots of which I chose the 3500Qs especially for the fact that they have shapers (knives) to cut the beam. The VLs would be the main source of the moving shadows from the high right side to the whole area, both stage and audience through the whole performance. The beams with gobo would be visible in the haze and could be seen as the sun/moonlight shattered by jungle foliage. For the face-light I reserved for the risers some units and decided to divide the known stage areas in three and light the areas up from both front corners with ETC 25-50 750W Zooms.

The backbone of my design idea, in all its simplicity, was to stage the day and night of equatorial. – And the moments in between. Africa is bold, passionate and extreme, so I wanted to paint this with the colors of sunsets and sunrises and let these moments flow and blend into each

other – for Sir David. In addition to this, there are some special colors for particular characters and moments, but other than that I didn't want to over-colorize it. For the specials I chose some simple asymmetric floodlights.

[Bringing in Mama Africa](#)

Our first get-in day was March 12. The start was very enthusiastic, but pretty soon it was obvious that some re-thinking was necessary. I designed my plot according to what the set designer finally told me, but this turned out to be another set of measures than what was delivered. Some re-adjusting was needed, but luckily I noticed this before the rig was hoisted up. And of course the sound wanted to occupy the exact same square-centimeter of the truss. Nothing new there.

Over the next days, the set-designer started to slowly carry some material in. Boxes after boxes full of stuff. Cardboard



Stimmgewaltig verarbeiten die Missionare Andreas und sein Assistent Gottlieb ihre Emotionen.

flowers and glittery green wicker balls, rope and thread, leaves in all shapes and sizes. Finally there stood a facade of a mission house on the left side of the actual stage and on the right some bushes and reed roofs of native huts (both of which are supposed to collapse during an earthquake). Three big mobiles of dozens of cardboard flowers and leaves were swinging above the risers. It was obvious that this would be a problem concerning the front light, but the director didn't mind about that, and at least the «lettuce» (Kopfsalat) is constantly moving slowly. Still the fact remains that some performers just are like black holes, they suck in all the possible light and manage to position themselves exactly where the shadow is. It's comfortable when it's not blinding. But should there be a re-run of the shows, I will order some Clay Paky Sharpies to play Space Invaders with the flowers, which anyway look rather more like space crafts than flowers. Just zap 'em away.

The sky telling the story

I wanted to have an element that would speak for me dramaturgically but not be too overpowering. Only during the rehearsals did I realize what it could be. As it happened the actual stage had a white back wall which I negotiated with the director and set designer to be left as open as possible. There I could create my dramatic sky of puffy clouds of a summer day and happy moments, of upcoming storm and sorrow, of passionate setting suns and love. The sky turned out to be my most important element, and it breathes not only with the time of day but with the emotions the performers bring on stage, and even fades into almost grey-scale at times. The practical approach to it was the most surprising even to me. I used some

simple floods in both L132 and L120 to make a top wash and L105 from the floor for the sunset. Then I shot one of the VLs with a gobo to it. The night sky was created with fuzzy standard «Alpha Rays», whereas the day clouds were made with the tackiest 80's triangle break-up messed up with «Glacier gag» from the second gobo wheel, all standard in VL3500Q. One could never tell that they were triangles to begin with. Make do with what you got and make the equipment work for you, and not the other way around.

Conclusion of the jungle in the church

A church is a space which has been designed so that everyone can hear The Word loud and clear. This turned out to be the biggest problem of the whole production. All the equipment seems to be very noisy in a space like this and the DF50 hazers turned out to be practically useless during the performance because they have only on-off switch and they sound like tractors. Since I wanted even and steady supply of haze in the space throughout the whole duration, I had to rent two extra Tour Hazer IIs to keep it up.

On other hand, one has to remember that it is a church. There is a massive organ and a pulpit in a white space, both of which are very present at all times. So they have to be taken into account for the whole visual look. And the premises also function in a different manner than what is usual for a proper theater. It took us three days to get the clearance for the use of haze, because the person with knowledge about fire alarm system of the premises couldn't be tracked down.

Otherwise I have to conclude that my vision of Africa turned out pretty much as I hoped it would and that both the production and spectators seem to believe in it. I even managed to implement the fireflies. I wonder what Sir David would say?

- Please visit www.basel-musical.ch for more information about «Das Grab des weissen Mannes»

Crew:

Concept and directing: Kaspar Hort
 Producer: Pia Müller, Basler Mission
 Production Manager: Gaetano Florio, principles management
 Light Design & Light Operating: Minna Heikkilä, MPH Effects
 Stage Manager & Assistant to PM: Michael «Mitch» Jann
 Sound Design: Thomas Strebel, audiopool GmbH
 Sound Design & FOH Engineer: Laurenz Zschokke, audiopool GmbH
 Microports: William Hudson, audiopool GmbH
 Stage Technician: Luigi «Gigi» Sinnone
 Set Design: Christoph Knöll

Lighting Equipment:

14x Vari*Lite VL3500Q Spot
 20x Martin MAC Aura LED-Wash
 02x MartinAtomic 3000 Stroboscope
 21x ETC Source4 25-50° Profiler
 08x asymmetric flood 500W
 01x symmetric flood 500W
 13x music stands incl. lamps
 02x Reel EFX DF-50 Hazer
 02x Tour Hazer II
 01x Lycian Starklite 1271 follow spot
 01x grandMA 2 light
 01x AudioRent ArtNet splitter rack - ArtNet 12in8 DMX-Splitter / 8x 12channel-multicore
 01x Avolites Art2000 dimmer rack 24x3.5kW chnl & 24x3.5kW power channel
 01x Avolites Powercube 12 dimmer- & 12 power channel
 312 meter Eurotruss FD34
 1200 meter various cables

Video Equipment:

01x Projector DLP Laser Panasonic PT-RZ670BE 8000 ANSI, 1080p,
 01x Barco Seamless Switcher DCS-200
 01x Mac Book pro incl. Keynote
 01x Denon DN-V310 DVD player
 01x DVI 100m fiber optical cable

Audio Equipment:

01x DiGiCo SD8 FOH-Pult incl. D5 Stage Rack
 16x Shure WL
 14x Clair™ P-2
 05x Clair™ FF-2
 02x Clair™ BT-218HP subs
 06x PRISM™ SRM Wedges
 12x Lab.gruppen PLM20000 amps
 01x TiMax system
 2000 meters of various cables

Miscellaneous equipment:

01x Marley Floor for all stages
 26x risers incl. legs & steps
 50 meters of molton
 01x set of walkie-talkies
 01x personal genie
 02x ladders

ZUR AUTORIN:

Minna Heikkilä ist eine freischaffende Lichtdesignerin aus Finnland und lebt zurzeit in Basel. Sie arbeitet seit 2003 für verschiedene private Theater und Tanzgruppen. Daneben begleitet sie als technische Managerin weltweit Tourneen. MPH Effects, www.minnaheikkila.fi

