

## 14 SEPTEMBER BIDVEST ON BROADWAY WITH GEARHOUSE

By Gearhouse South Africa 10th Sept, 2015 – Johannesburg

The annual Bidvest Awards Gala Dinner corporate function is one of the largest on the SA corporate calendar. The international Bidvest Group, with almost 150 000 employees in countries all over the world, gathers to celebrate excellence and take stock of their performance. An international gathering this prestigious demands a special event for its entertainment.

Usually held over three nights, the event comprises of a banquet each night and a performance of a specially created stage show for Bidvest's top executives and employees, who travel in from all over the globe for the event.

In keeping with the event in recent years, the production team for 2015 was once again headed by Show Directors , Creative Directors, Producers and Chorographer Debbie Rakusin and David Bloch, who are always given the same mandate by the charismatic Chief Executive of Bidvest, Brian Joffe - to come up with an innovative, captivating, boundary-pushing show.



Bidvest on Broadway

That mandate was answered by one of the most spectacular but also technically advanced shows ever mounted for the Bidvest event. Built on the theme of 'Bidvest on Broadway', a cast of singers, dancers and bona-fide star name Broadway entertainers took an enthralled audience on a journey as seen through the eyes of six aspiring artists, all hoping to 'make it big' on Broadway.

The live band for the event comprised of top local musicians, once more under the lead baton of Musical Director Bryan Schimmel.

Gearhouse South Africa once again designed the event's lighting, visuals, sound, as well as setting and implementing the technical parameters, working closely with Rakusin and Bloch. The company is renowned for the ability to not only deliver cutting edge product and support, but also to provide among the best technical and creative expertise in the country.

Particularly for the demands of this kind of large, one-off event, Gearhouse's global experience in design, lighting, staging and sound helps overcome many of the potential logistical and technical challenges that inevitably arise.

For the Bidvest on Broadway show, event veteran Pieter Joubert from Gearhouse company Sets, Drapes, Screens (SDS) was the set and technical director while Gearhouse stalwart Eyal Yehezkeley project managed the crack team of lighting, audio, content and staging specialists.

Gearhouse luminary Tim Dunn brought his vast knowledge and expertise to the event as show and lighting director. Dunn is renowned for pushing the envelope on his shows in terms of aesthetics, imagination and technical ambition. This year's Bidvest event was no different. Based on a very precise brief by Rakusin and Bloch, Dunn and the Gearhouse team provided the ultimate virtual set for this year's show. Graphics, video and full 3D on an amazing stage set comprised of 1001 LED panels meant that Tim and the lighting and content teams could go to town – in this case, New York – providing all the backdrops, scenery and virtual environments necessary on a set which never physically moves, but which ultimately brought Rakusin and Bloch's vision to life!



Each 'stage set' on the LED panels reflected a particular Broadway or New York street scene, vista or interior, in keeping with the show-stopping musical number being performed. A team of singers and dancers performed each musical number. Two musical highlights stood out. First, South African performer Amra-Faye Wright, who has the distinction of playing the role of Velma Kelly longer than any other actress in what is now the longest running American Musical on Broadway, Chicago. Second, with over 21 million YouTube hits, New York's singing impressionist sensation, Christina Bianco. Both of these incomparable stage actresses were brought out especially for the show. They performed against a set that could stage spectacular, and instantaneous, switches between the advertising billboards of the classic Broadway vista familiar from a thousand Hollywood films, and various outdoor and street scenes, including one memorable number set in a beautifully lit and entirely believable Central Park. All these scene shifts were seamlessly accomplished.

Of course, Dunn and the Gearhouse technical team are renowned for going where no-one else dares, and winning. In this case, putting a purely virtual LED set behind the live cast of dancers and singers brought some risks. As he says, "Providing the perspective and the physical environments of the sets through graphics and lighting, as well as set changes, meant that the cumulative intensity of the LED panels had to be controlled to the nth degree. Even a slight miscalculation would have meant the performers being obliterated for the audience by the background set."

LEDVision's Graeme Baker, the LED systems supervisor on the team, adds, "The amount of detail that went into the on-screen content was amazing. For example, clouds scudding across the skyline in an exterior scene, as well as all of the moving billboard scenes, demanded that our content managers and producers, our programmers, lighting teams – in fact, everyone involved behind the scenes on the tech and production crew, had to collaborate fully to achieve the results we and the client wanted. A good example was the way in which the programmers incorporated the live footage of the Bidvest award winners into the 3D set – we achieved levels of detail that were no small feat given that we were working with well over 2 million individual LEDs."

### Collaboration first

The collaboration theme continued with the incorporation of the sound and musical direction into the lighting, visuals and virtual set cueing. Says Dunn, "We designed a system in which the Wings media system would run multitracks out through a Dante network to the Watchout timecoding. We were using the new version of Watchout on this production, version 6." Jako De Wit, the audio systems supervisor, takes up the narrative: "The cueing from the Music Director was completely integrated, through the Wings and Watchout systems, with the audio, lighting and video cues, thus creating a tightly integrated technical backbone for the show. Our sound systems were appropriate for large theatre space. The bulk of the speaker setup was from L-Acoustics. A straightforward left-centre-right configuration gave us a great sound spread and coverage through the Convention Centre space, and we used Shure headset mics for a visually sleek look for the performers. The main characteristic of the set-up, though, was how we were able to integrate the sound, cueing, and lighting with the musicians, performers, and the amazing LED set."

### Pushing the envelope

For Rakusin and Bloch, who have been involved with this event for the better part of 11 years, this was without a doubt THE best Bidvest production ever staged and much of that success can be attributed to Pieter Joubert, Eyal Yehezkeley, Tim Dunn and their entire team at SDS and Gearhouse.

Each iteration of the Bidvest Awards Gala brings a new opportunity for the Gearhouse team to stretch their imaginations and creative technical expertise. The spectacular virtual LED set for this year's production of Bidvest on Broadway was no exception, and again took the event to new heights of technological and theatrical innovation.

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