

KOOZA

Cirque du Soleil

Kooza, a big top touring show from Cirque du Soleil, was hailed as a return to their daredevil acrobatic origins. This fast paced production features a series of dazzling acts that all defy the laws of gravity and rejoice in pushing the limits of the human body to nearly unimaginable limits.

The structure of the acrobats skeletons and muscles are not the only structures contributing to the uniqueness of this production – there is another, much less flexible, series of structures at work.

The staging and grandstand requirements for a touring Cirque du Soleil show are quite rigorous. These structures must be extremely rigid and offer high load bearing capacities while, at the same time, be able to set-up and tear down easily for touring.

The grandstand for Kooza can host up to 2450 audience members in shell type seating. The setup time for the grandstand structure is one day including fitting up the seating. All of the structure and seating must be able to load into 40' containers or flatbeds for touring. Lastly, the grandstand must comply with the highly stringent German TÜV codes. Meeting these code requirements ensures that the grandstand meets all worldwide standards since Kooza tours in both Europe and Asia.

The grandstand is a galvanized steel structure that features a clear crossover underneath the rear section to allow performers and crew to have access to all areas of the big top. This grandstand also incorporates ramps for handicap access and seating positions for wheelchairs in both the front most section and the mid audience section where seating can be quickly modified to receive the wheelchair as well as a folding chair for the accompanier.

If the demands for the grandstand code compliance and load capacities seem stringent, those for the staging and scenery are even more so. The rigging requirements of the acrobatic acts put enormous load capacity requirements on the stage and scenery.

As with all staging types, the touring stage for Kooza must bear a uniformly distributed load of a minimum of 125 pounds per square foot and meet code requirements for lateral loads. The point load requirement of 1,500 pounds on a 2" diameter with a maximum deflection of 3/8" is called for because of the acts that require poles or other acrobatic devices to be supported in an extremely rigid manner. Lastly, the stage must also bear tension loads from the guy cables that are used to stabilize the high wire acts and other aerial numbers. Tension loads

from 300 pounds to 1000 pounds must be able to be anchored to the decking and sub-structure of the stage in almost any location since the configuration of acts is likely to change over the run of the show.

The OST staging system developed by SE meets these needs while still offering a simple and quick assembly of the stage. The OST system uses a highly structural upper member to which the deck panels are fixed with a quick release system developed by SE. This patented OST member places all of the structural elements required to meet Kooza's specification directly under the panels therefore leaving the underside of the stage free of cross bracing. The OST also allows for legs to be spread out on 8' to 10' centers keeping the underside of the stage very clear. This allows for the unhindered movement of the acrobats and clowns so that they can appear from traps located throughout the stage.

However wonderful these structural solutions seem to some of us, the real wonder and elegance of Kooza happens on and above the stage. The set designed by Stéphane Roy, features a jewel box multi storied piece known as the "Bataclan". The Bataclan is revealed from behind a series of veils like some mysterious Eastern dancer and it is adorned in jewels and filigree. The live band is housed on the second storey and many of the acts are presented to the audience from directly below at stage level.

The Bataclan is on a track system and travels downstage while being wrapped by two curved staircases that travel on its circumference to meet at the downstage center point. The upper storey is home to a series of magical characters and also the launching pad for a series of sweeping plunges by the acrobats. Although almost fragile looking, the Bataclan is also built to meet the acrobatic human load rigging needs of the acrobats.



The grandstand fitted with chairs



The stage fitted with traps



The central alley of the grandstand



The Grandstand (foreground) and the Stage



The three-storey Bataclan is set on tracks to travel downstage
Photos: A. Malette