



UAE 49TH NATIONAL DAY SHOW

AN INNOVATIVE AND SPECTACULAR LIVE PRODUCTION CELEBRATES THE UAE 49TH NATIONAL DAY, SET AMONG THE STUNNING LANDSCAPE OF THE AL JUBAIL MANGROVES IN ABU DHABI.

Celebrated every year on 2 December, UAE National Day is always a major day on the country's events calendar. While the holiday is typically marked with a massive live production attended by thousands, with mass gatherings off the table under the current circumstances, this year's show was a very different proposition. Conceived by Artistic Director and Designer, Es Devlin and produced by LarMac PROJECTS, the UAE 49th National Day Show took the form of a kinetic illuminated sculpture installed in the Abu Dhabi Mangroves. Themed *Seeds of the Union* and enriched by an incredible team of local artists and collaborators, the show recalled the UAE's rich history, expressed the country's values and celebrated the frontline heroes who have kept the population safe throughout the pandemic.

"The pandemic presented us with the opportunity to approach the 49th National Day Show in a new way," commented Devlin, who has

created a number of high-profile productions and installations over the years, including the London 2012 Olympic Closing Ceremony and the UK Pavilion at Dubai Expo 2020 (currently postponed until October 2021), among many others. "While reaching a vast digital audience through our broadcast, we are staging the show to a smaller, safely spaced, live audience in the Mangrove Reserve on Jubail Island – an area of profound natural beauty and environmental significance."

Indeed, the pandemic required a gargantuan effort to allow the show to be delivered in record time while under the strictest of COVID-19 protocols. The LarMac team, led by Jo MacKay and Ian Greenway and supported by Laura Hall, Siobhan Shaw and Zoe Gillespie, welcomed Nick Levitt as Executive Producer, Simon Lachance as Production Manager, John Wilson as Site Manager and Richard Wythes as Technical Manager.

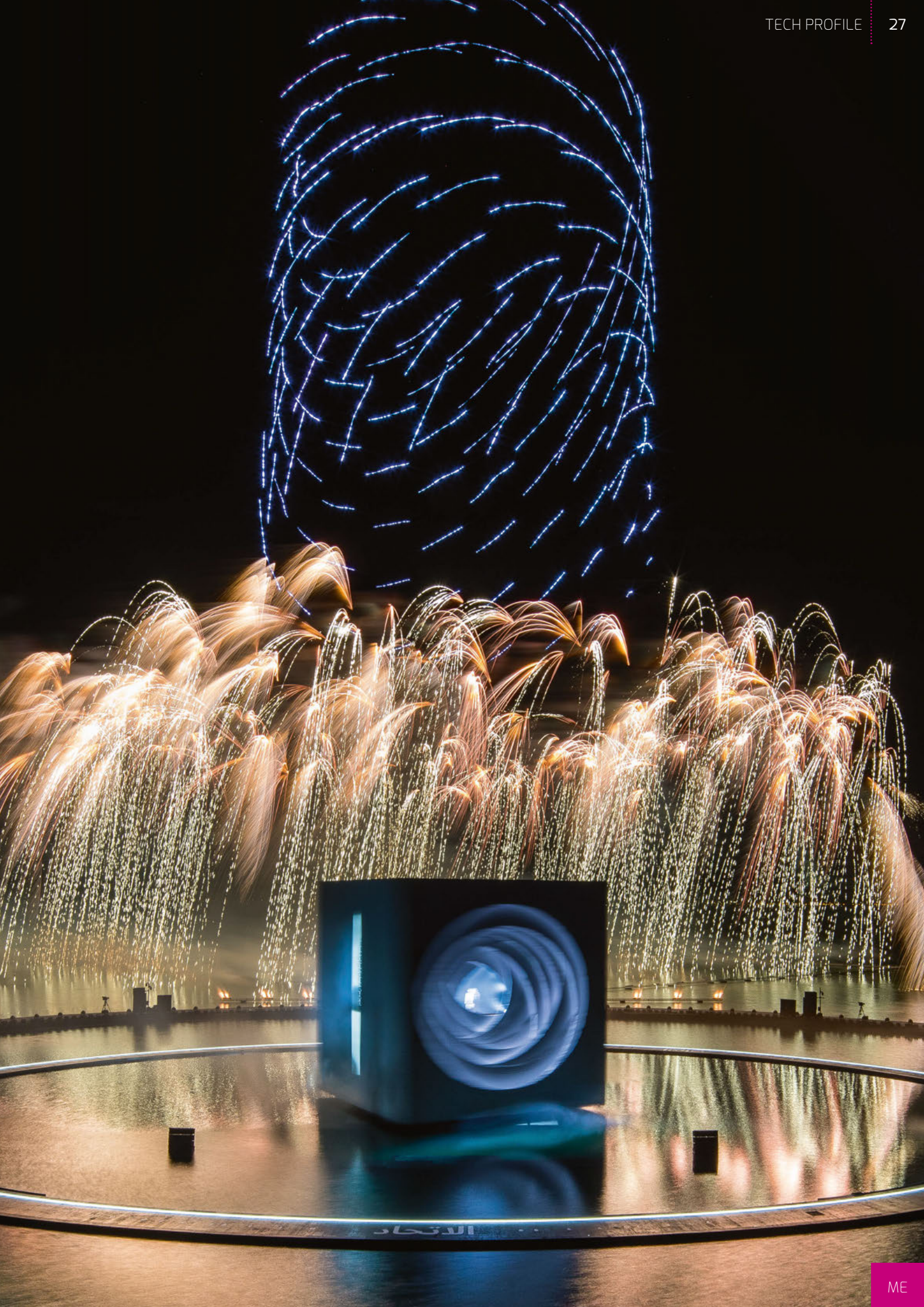
In all, more than 500 creative professionals contributed to the final production. Bruno Poet

was the Lighting Designer; Luke Halls was the Content Designer; VYV handled Video Projection; and the music for the show was composed by Musicom and Polyphonia.

Francisco Negrin was the Show Director; Gavin Robins was in charge of Stage Direction and Choreography; Lorenzo Gentile was Casting Director; while Stage Management and Show Calling was handled by Orange Jackets.

A truly one-of-a-kind spectacle, the project required a range of highly skilled and specialised suppliers. Wonder Works oversaw Technical Design; lighting, audio and projection were supplied by PRG; while the audio design came from Auditoria. SKYMAGIC delivered an accompanying drone show; Groupe F handled pyro; and SFX smoke was provided by Matrix.

The cube and automation were delivered by Stage One; Al Laith provided local support on temporary staging and scaffolding; Showtex took care of scenic dressing; scenic walkways were





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Wonder Works Co-Director, Piers Shepperd.

provided by VK; iRIG was appointed to handle rigging; site power came from Aggreko; and Gulf Crewing Company provided the local crew.

The centrepiece for the show was a 15m, 100-tonne rotating cube. Working alongside creative manufacturers Stage One, Wonder Works designed and delivered the impressive structure in under two months. “We have a great working relationship with Piers [Shepperd, Co-Director at Wonder Works],” commented Tim Leigh, Managing Director at Stage One, in a post-event case study published on the Wonder Works website. “He has the tricky job of staying

true to the design intent while being mindful that any proposal has to be buildable within the timeframe. Fortunately, the team was incredibly collaborative, and open to proposing a design that incorporated truss that could be adapted from stock components. This saved time and was a more sustainable approach than creating a structure from scratch.”

Set off the coast of Abu Dhabi’s Jubail Mangrove Park, taking a lead from the nearby Louvre and Guggenheim, the cube was positioned in such a way that it appeared to be floating above the water. With tides of up to 2m,

achieving this effect was no mean feat. However, thanks to an ingenious solution that saw the huge collaboration between LarMac and the National Marine Dredging Company, a temporary bund and foundations were built to allow crane access to get the installation underway.

With this in place, a larger 4m-high bund was built to create a temporary lake around the performance area, thus protecting the structure while still honouring the original creative vision. “Reclaiming the sea in this way allowed us to control the tide and create a truly unique venue for the ceremony,” stated Shepperd. An incredible



level of detail went into the design of the cube as well as the surrounding elliptical walkway.

VK provided the decorative finish of the walkway, including the text lightboxes, seeds and the perimeter lighting. "The finish of the walkway was of a great standard and the service from VK was very professional and thorough throughout the process," commented Scenic Production Manager, Alun Marks.

VK also supplied and installed the LEDs on the iris face – "a very challenging job as all the LEDs had to be installed in situ, after the cube structure was completed," Marks recalled. "The end result was fantastic and well received by the lighting designer."

Marks was also impressed by the work of Showtex, which was brought in to handle scenic

dressings. Describing the company's contribution as "very subtle, but incredibly important", he explained: "Most of their work was masking inside the cube. Although not that visible from the outside, without this masking, the lighting would not have been so dramatic, and the idea of the 'sculpture' would have been lost due to having all the internal framework visible." He added: "Their quick response to fabricating and delivering new masking was impeccable and incredibly important for the fast-paced nature of this project."

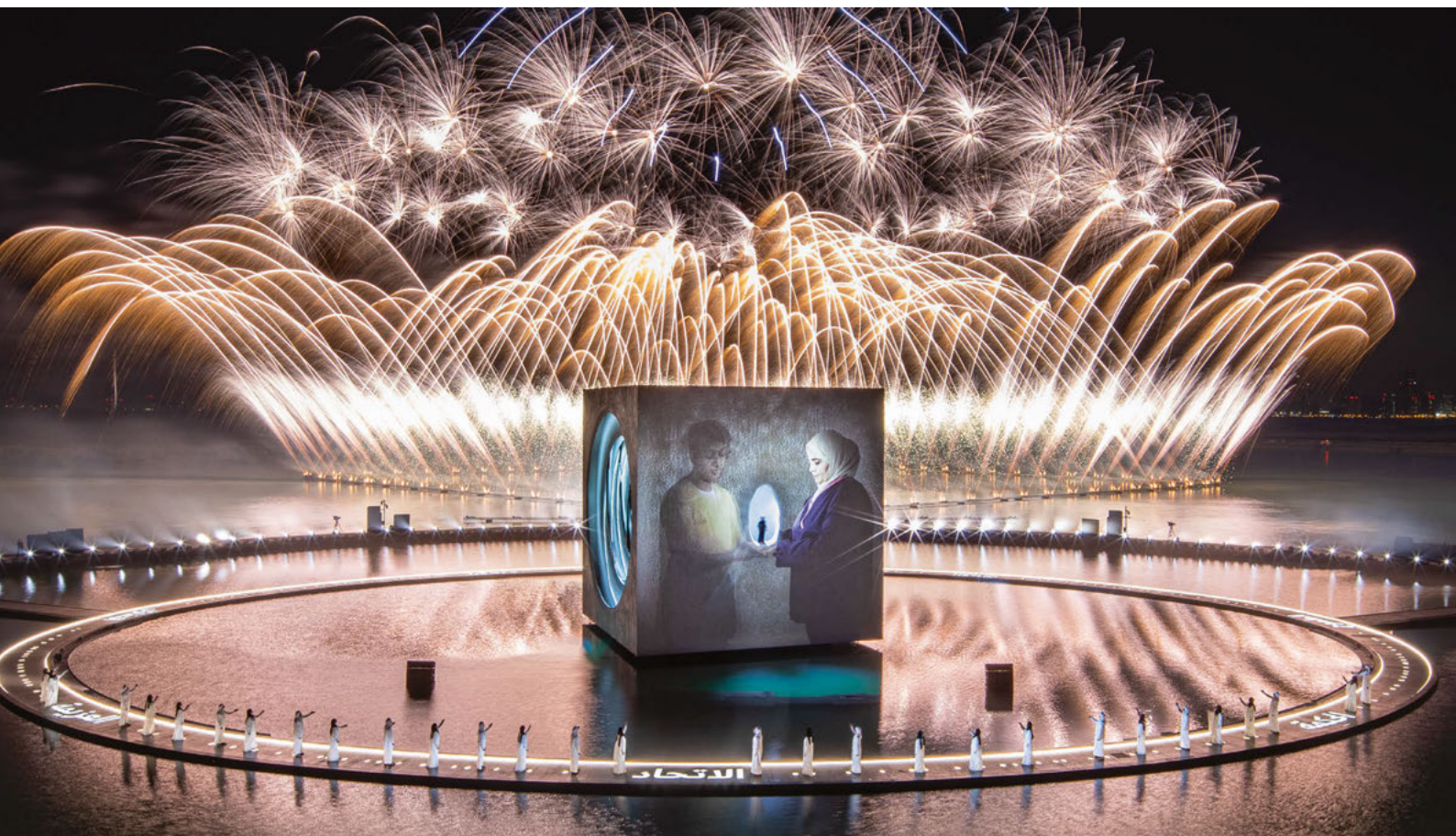
'A JOY TO DELIVER'

The audio system was designed by Auditoria's Scott Willsallen, with Richard Sharratt at FOH, Simon Sayer and Edoardo Michalori on replay and

remote support from Justin Arthur, Luis Miranda and Steve Logan.

The L-Acoustics L-ISA system consisted of four parts: the cube, which was originally designed as five arrays of three L-Acoustics K2s but later reduced to two in order to enhance the visual effect; the panorama, comprising eight arrays of six K2s and one array of 18 SB28s; the surround, made up of two arrays of nine KARAs and 11 SYVA loudspeakers mounted beside and behind the audience; and overhead, with 11 X8s suspended from the top of the lighting masts.

As well as the L-ISA system, Auditoria also deployed 180 5XT loudspeakers (one for each guest) in a distributed mono arrangement, which were used to deliver the show's dialogue and narration. "This technique allowed us to



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LarMac Director, Jo MacKay.

maintain the power and instrumentation in the music while also providing excellent speech intelligibility," Auditoria stated on its website.

The company went on to acknowledge some of the people who made the show happen. "Thanks to Andy Jackson and his team from PRG Deltasound for supplying, installing and maintaining the system for us. Thanks to Toby Chester and Martin Dineley for their efforts in managing the PRG audio team. A huge thanks to Es Devlin and her design team, Jo MacKay and the whole team at LarMac for involving us in this project. Congratulations on delivering a really amazing project that was a joy to deliver."

Using the cube as a storytelling canvas, visuals were beamed onto its surface using Barco UDX-4K32 projectors. While the cube was rotating, it was being tracked by media servers through positional data and camera-based IR

tracking, which allowed the image alignment and blending to follow the cube. There was also an impressive lighting package comprising Claypaky Scenius Unicos, Robe BMFL Blades, SGM P-5s and Q-7s, as well as GLP impression X4s.

The cube was also surrounded by a spectacular firework and drone display. In-keeping with the narrative of the show, SKYMAGIC deployed 300 drones to amplify the story being told on the cube high into the night sky. Reflecting on the event, the company's Creative Director, Patrick O'Mahony, commented: "It was an honour to be invited to work alongside the world-class teams, individuals and friends involved in the project and fantastic to be back doing what we love after such a challenging year."

With the UAE 49th National Day being marked in such style, plans for an even bigger and better celebration for the country's 50th

National Day in 2021 are already underway. "Our ambition is that the sculpture will form a legacy on a new site, sowing the first seed in the lead up to the celebrations of the UAE 50th National Day," stated Devlin. And this ambition is already being fulfilled via an unplanned phase of the project, as the cube centrepiece has been transformed into an art installation called *The Seed*, which was open to visitors from 14 December to 30 January.

Looking back on the project, LarMac's Jo MacKay concluded: "Being part of such a great project during these COVID-19 times lifted the spirits for many of the people involved. Everyone felt a sense of great achievement to be delivering any show in such difficult circumstances, never mind a show that truly has reimagined National Day celebrations forever."

Photos: Nicolas Chavance, Groupe F
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