

# UAE 50TH NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

THE UAE CELEBRATES ITS GOLDEN JUBILEE WITH AN AUDIO-VISUAL SPECTACLE CENTRED ON A GIANT ROTATING DISC FLOATING IN HATTA DAM.







Every year, the UAE's National Day celebration is one of the most important dates in the region's live events calendar. With 2021 marking the country's Golden Jubilee, the UAE National Projects Office pulled out all the stops, calling on most of the same team behind the hugely successful 49th National Day celebration in 2020 – which centred around a unique kinetic sculpture installed in the Abu Dhabi mangroves – to ensure that the extra-special anniversary would be celebrated in style. Reprising her role as Artistic Director and Designer, Es Devlin once again worked with LarMac PROJECTS Executive Creative Producer, Jo MacKay in leading the creative team, producing a spectacle that charted the country's history in the lead-up to its inception in 1971 and throughout the subsequent 50 years.

"Following the success of the 49th UAE National Day, the client decided that they wanted Es to design the 50th. It was to be a big celebration of how the UAE has developed over the years," began MacKay.

"This year, Es' creativity was the most technically audacious and emotionally ambitious in order to deliver a country's attitude to its past and future." The show on 2 December was performed in front of an invited VIP audience

and broadcast to key locations around the UAE, followed by 10 additional daily shows from 3 to 12 December – all featuring specially composed songs and poetry, drone-launched fireworks, a light show, water displays and 5.1 surround sound to convey the relationship between people and nature, and the ties between Emiratis, their homeland, and the environment.

TV Production company, Done+Dusted and acclaimed TV Director, Hamish Hamilton filmed the event on 2 December for the live TV broadcast, with huge audience numbers tuning in from all over the UAE. The show is still viewable worldwide through the official website.

"The whole show and audience floats," explained Devlin. "We explored some new ways of using less pyrotechnics to elevate the fireworks into the air, using drones to lift them to a height, then a combination of drone and fireworks to create a new illusion that I certainly haven't worked with before. In addition, we created projections in mid-air using water screens, as well as a huge sculptural element that, again, is floating. All of these things pushed engineering to its limits at the site in Hatta."

LarMac enlisted a team of 650 creative, cast, technical and safety personnel from 100 countries to bring Devlin's vivid designs to life,

with 1.5 million hours of work necessary to build the floating stage alone. Wonder Works provided technical design and engineering, Al Laith supplied temporary infrastructure, Stage One oversaw the centrepiece rotating disc stage, and EFM supplied logistics services. PRG supplied lighting, audio was provided by Agora, and Creative Technology handled projection – utilising VYV Photon media servers.

Industry veteran Bruno Poet was the show's Lighting Designer, Luke Halls Studio created the detailed video content, while Auditoria, led by Scott Willsallen, took charge of the complex audio design. Groupe F handled the pyro and drone displays, Matrix Laser provided special effects, and Crystal Group supplied the water effects systems. Aggreko Events Services was appointed as the turnkey temporary power provider.

Gulf Crewing Company provided crew, while iRIG was tasked with production rigging, structural anchor drilling and automation and performer flying solutions.

The entire production required monumental teamwork, as LarMac PROJECTS Director, Ian Greenway explained: "Like all National Day projects, this one came with its challenges," he noted. "We hadn't built a lake on top of an existing lake before, never mind with automated





stages or grandstands on top. As always, we try to engage with the best and only by promoting a collaborative team effort were we able to pull off this unique and culturally significant event. We relocated hundreds of talented teammates to the Hajar Mountains and, at times, had to rip up the manual of how to stage events,” he continued. “We learnt how to build mountain roads, install dam bed anchoring systems, float audience reception and grandstand areas, and manage water safety and diving teams. Most of all, we were inspired every day thanks to the incredible UAE landscape that we were working in.”

As well as Greenway and MacKay, the LarMac PROJECTS team comprised Executive Producer, Nick Levitt; Technical Director, Simon L. Lachance; Creative Producer, Siobhan Shaw; and Assistants to the Producers, Zoe Gillespie, and Finlay Bowrey. “Thanks and congratulations should not only be extended to the crew and companies working under the LarMac PROJECTS umbrella, but to the five young Emirati female creative forces at the heart of the 50th National Day celebrations,” MacKay noted. “Creative Executive Producer,

Rawdha Al Qubaisi; Artistic Director, Shaikha Al Ketbi; Scriptwriter, Maryam Al Dabbagh; Voiceover Artist, Raihana Al Hashmi (‘Voice of the Nation’); and Brand Designer, Kholoud Sharafi, who have truly contributed to a meaningful cultural evolution in the region.”

**‘BIG BOOTS TO FILL’**

Talking to TPMEA after the dust had settled on the event, MacKay looked back on the “crazy roller-coaster ride” of a project, which saw Devlin’s 19m-high rotating disc-shaped stage set in the turquoise waters of Hatta Dam. “With the dam reaching depths of 22m in places and the water liable to rise and fall significantly depending on the weather, finding a floating device that could take the weight of the 200-tonne stage and 700-tonne grandstand was a huge challenge,” she recalled. “That’s where Wonder Works were amazing. Working with Piers [Shepperd, Director, Wonder Works] is always a pleasure. He loves trying to find solutions for crazy ideas.”

After assessing all the options, it was finally decided that the best solution would require

giant floating pontoons tethered to the bottom of the reservoir to prevent movement in the wind. With over 400 tonnes of water sitting on top of the pontoons to create the illusion of a lake on a lake, this major engineering feat took an army of industry specialists over 18 weeks to perfect. “It was touch and go for a while,” MacKay admitted. “We weren’t sure if it would be physically possible to float that amount of weight, but the engineers looked at it with Piers and eventually came up with the solution.”

Another major challenge came courtesy of the remote location and harsh terrain of Hatta’s Hajar Mountains. Around an hour-and-a-half outside of Dubai, the steep roads and loose, rocky ground made transporting materials to the site a difficult task – and even once the site was reached, there was the not-so-small matter of the dam wall to consider. “There were around 200 pontoons and each one had to be either brought over the dam wall or floated round from another area of the dam,” MacKay recalled. “Every piece of equipment was craned in over the dam wall. It added a huge amount of time to the load-in.



Nobody had done anything like it before.”

The process was aided by the work of Wonder Works’ Technical Designer and CAD expert, Ben O’Neil, who was on site from early September capturing 3D information using a Trimble SX10 laser scanner, which allowed the team to form a clear picture of the terrain to make design decisions with confidence.

“Es Devlin’s creative ideas always push the boundaries of what is possible, which is why we love working with her. We are very proud to be part of a trusted team that can deliver such an ambitious concept without having to compromise on the result,” Shepperd said of his company’s involvement. MacKay added: “Having Wonder Works’ technical knowledge and Ben on site was what enabled me to sleep at night on this ambitious design. No matter the creative, Wonder Works will do what’s needed to deliver the best possible solution.”

Much of the performance infrastructure was engineered, procured and constructed by Al Laith. “This was an extremely exciting project for us to be part of, which presented many unprecedented challenges we have never experienced before, given the unique nature of

the location and its design,” said Al Laith Senior Technical Manager, Devan Bezuidenhout.

Al Laith’s scope was to engineer, procure and construct the main stage platform, the majlis and grandstand, which included two custom elevator systems as well as construct the floating cast and technical walkways. Al Laith also constructed the technical bunkers in the mountain, plus provided ancillary equipment to support site logistics including fences and barriers, ablution units, site offices, lighting towers, golf buggies and mules.

“Initially, building on the floating pontoons provided its own challenges considering the lack of access into the dam with our vehicles and machinery, but our biggest challenge was to engineer and construct a 12m-wide and 300m-long transportation buggy ramp alongside the dam wall on an almost 45° slope,” Bezuidenhout recalled.

“This was especially challenging as we had to resolve the potential issue of the entire structure sliding down the dam wall and into the water,” added Al Laith Engineering Manager, Malcolm Rees. “We were able to resolve this issue by engineering and installing a heavy-duty rigging solution, using a steel cable tying the structure to

the top of the dam wall via 68 chemical anchors equally distributed along the ramp.”

The ramp had a 15m-long gangway bridge to enable access to the rear of the majlis that was floating and was hinged to accommodate a rise in water levels in case it rained. The ramp weighed 34 tonnes in total and was installed manually by Bezuidenhout and his team of construction personnel through a variety of complex lifting and rigging methods.

“We are privileged to be trusted by our clients and the National Projects Office of the UAE to undertake such a critical project,” stated Al Laith CEO, Jason English. “The trust that our clients place in us is an honour we take seriously, and I am extremely proud of Devan and the entire team for their dedication and commitment to delivering this project safely and on time.”

The rotating stage was engineered, fabricated, installed and operated by Stage One. “It was an audacious concept from the get-go,” stated Stage One Managing Director, Tim Leigh. “Engineering something like this is one thing, engineering under pressure to hit an immovable deadline is another. The location alone created particular challenges; being in the desert, in the





mountains, in a remote setting.” Starting work in July, the sculpture was designed, built, and transported to site in just three months, with teams arriving to install it in early September. Once fully loaded on site with scenery, reflective water pool and performers, the disc weighed in at almost 300 tonnes.

The key challenge for the Stage One team was engineering a heavy steel structure that would remain balanced in a cantilevered state on the floating pontoon. This was achieved through judicious structural and marine engineering and “a hefty serving” of ballast. To allow the disc to revolve, it was constructed on top of three concentric track rings and was driven by four motors, controlled by Stage One’s proprietary automation system, Qmotion.

With Stage One another returning supplier from the 49th National Day, Leigh was delighted to get the band back together again. “I’m a big believer that being among friends breeds bravery, so working with the same team as last year meant a seemingly impossible idea, while incredibly challenging, felt achievable,” he said.

Mackay added: “Working with Stage One last year with Artistic Director and Designer Es Devlin’s rotating cube enabled us to work together to fine-tune another ambitious rotating project with a lot more challenges. It was

delivered by a methodical and hard-working Stage One team.”

Another returning supplier from the 49th National Day was UAE-based iRIG, which was tasked with production rigging, structural anchor drilling as well as automation and performer flying solutions. “This project was the perfect opportunity for us to introduce our new automation partner, SimpleMotion, to the Middle East,” commented iRIG Owner and Managing Director, Ryan D’Cunha.

“The challenges that all departments faced during the installation are impossible to convey. However, as always, the fantastic suppliers all went above and beyond to produce the most stunning National Day to date. Following last year’s show, we all knew that we had big boots to fill to ensure the wow factor was surpassed, and we feel that this was certainly achieved. It was our pleasure and honour to be invited back.”

Unsurprisingly, the project required a vast workforce, which was provided by Gulf Crewing Company (GCC). Over the course of six months from August until January, GCC supplied 11,545 crew, who put in a staggering 147,708 hours to ensure that the ambitious project was achieved.

“GCC was – and indeed still is – honoured to play a part in another National Day Celebration. To be part of its 50th is a badge we wear with

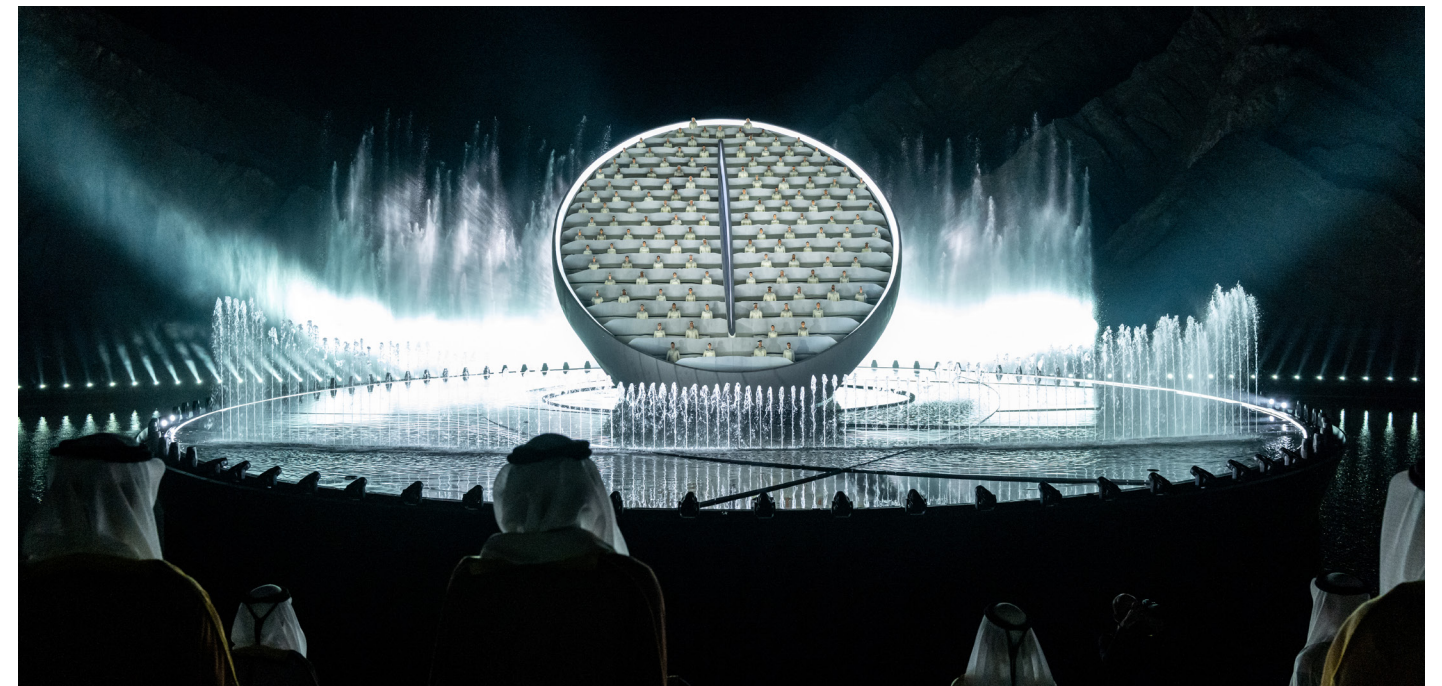
pride,” commented GCC Managing Director, Karen Beaton. “The team love working on these shows, but it’s not only about delivering one of the most incredible cultural and heritage shows – it’s very much about working with clients and friends who are part of the wider GCC family.”

#### ‘A VERY HOLISTIC APPROACH’

Auditoria, led by Scott Willsallen, designed the complex L-Acoustics audio system, which comprised near-field, far-field and very-far-field systems working in combination to deliver specific elements of the show.

“As with all of Es’ projects, it starts with her design, which is as much about architecture as it is about the stage and performance. It was a very holistic approach to celebrating the 50th UAE National Day,” began Willsallen, talking to TPMEA after the 2 December show. “The architecture is very strong, so I was keen to do something near field for the audience as well as a more distant panoramic sound field and a third layer to celebrate the environment that we were in.”

The three-layered sound design led the development process of the geometry of the audience grandstand. “The focus was on fitting the required technology into the grandstand so we could deliver that near-field sound as well as local displays for each audience member,”



Willsallen recalled. With this in mind, the grandstand seating was configured mostly in couples, with each couples seat benefitting from three L-Acoustics 5XTs and individual left, centre and right based on a central LCD display. X4i loudspeakers were used for rear left and right, while a further 20 Syva Low dual 12” bass speakers were distributed evenly throughout the audience area.

“There were an enormous number of small speakers and displays to fit in, but we were independent of the main design of the staging

object, so the iconic design could lead the whole look of the show,” Willsallen commented. “We didn’t want anything to get in the way of that. It was labour intensive, but from an integration point of view, it was straightforward.”

Comprising over 500 5XTs, 300 X4is and 20 Syva Lows, this near-field system provided a spatial listening experience for every listener – something Willsallen was particularly pleased with. “Part of the brief for this project was to provide an audio experience that is unlike anything anyone has ever heard. To do that,

rather than treating the audience area as one large plane and making it the same across the board, we needed to treat each member of the audience as an individual.

“In the design phase, we focused on one member of the audience and asked ourselves, ‘how do we make that person’s experience memorable?’ Then we repeated the process another 350 or so times – keeping in mind that whatever we did for one person couldn’t impact on the person sitting next to them – until we were sure that each audience member was

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getting the best experience." The far-field audio element consisted of six arrays of six L-Acoustics K2s distributed along the elliptical walkway and an array of 16 L-Acoustics KS28 subs at a distance of 110m from the grandstand. This system was used to add depth of field to the music – particularly strings, choir and percussion – and for sound effects relating to the projected content.

Moving outward to the very-far-field, a system of eight L-Acoustics KARA arrays comprising six speakers each was distributed around the site, using the mountains as a reflective tool to bounce sound back towards the grandstand. "From the early planning phases, there was always the idea to activate the mountains in some way to celebrate the environment and the heritage of how the locals would communicate across these valleys in years gone by," he said.

While the possibility of rigging the arrays in the mountains was briefly considered, after some thought, the Auditoria team decided instead to point the speakers directly at the cliff face and bounce the sound back towards the audience.

"I started with eight dots on a site plan and the rest we figured out once we got on site," Willsallen said of the speaker positioning. "Four out of the eight positions worked very well

straight away and the other four required us to experiment with some different positions until we found a solution that worked. We listened to each individual location and made tweaks to try to make it sound more diffuse, but also balanced to avoid pulling the audience one way or the other," he added. "What amazed me is how much power we had to put through the system to get a sufficient level back. We didn't break anything, but we certainly pushed the limits."

For control, a mirrored pair of DiGiCo SD7Q consoles with a pair of L-ISA Processors, one per console, were used, connected using MADI. The signal distribution system consisted of multiple DiGiCo SD Racks for inputs and various Optocore network devices distributing the outputs to LA-Racks around the venue. The L-ISA session included 96 MADI inputs and 10 outputs. The inputs consisted of mono stems and solo instruments and mono sound effects objects, as well as a printed 7.1 sound effects package. The L-ISA Processor was controlled in several ways including directly from the L-ISA Controller, via DeskLink from the SD7Q and from the Ovation / Pyramix system using the L-ISA Plug-in.

"I'm familiar with all the main products and this is the one I feel most at home with – it feels the most intuitive and tends to give me the best

results for my kind of projects," Willsallen said of the L-Acoustics system. "There's also a lot of L-Acoustics available locally."

With a total of 979 loudspeakers used on the project, good availability was vital. "The quantities are massive," he laughed. "Thankfully, the timing worked well for a lot of the kit that was used on the Expo 2020 Opening Ceremony to be prepared and sent to Hatta. It was an efficient way of getting huge amounts of product onto site with very little freight required."

The location of the floating stage made load-in a considerable task – "it was a day's activity to install the amp rack alone" – however, Willsallen conceded humbly that "the biggest challenges on this project were nothing to do with sound". He expanded: "Whatever the biggest challenges were for the audio department paled into insignificance when it comes to the mammoth task of building a giant floating platform and creating the stage and grandstand. The effort of others should be celebrated far more so than us on this project."

Looking back on the project, the Auditoria owner reflected on the "very enjoyable process" of working in the core creative team. "It's been a huge collaboration between all departments. It's such a short journey from having an initial idea,





to generating a design, to having it installed. That whole process is a satisfying and surprisingly efficient experience. The whole project moves so quickly that as soon as a conversation happens and an idea is brought to the table, it is implemented immediately.”

He added: “Our directive was all about enhancing the creative and making something memorable from an audio point of view. I’m really pleased with the creative direction that was taken, the uniqueness, how special the experience of the show is and how much we were able to add to that.”

The Auditoria team also included Richard Sharratt on FOH, Martin Dineley on systems, Simon Sayer and Matteo Peraccini on replay, with remote support from Luis Miranda and Steve Logan. The system was supplied, installed and maintained by Agora.

**‘A TRULY MESMERISING SHOW’**

Creative Technology (CT) was selected to provide projection technology and personnel to deliver Devlin’s creative design, with detailed hardware requirements provided by Projection Director, Anthony ‘Bez’ Bezencon of VYV. “CT were proud to have once again been a part of the Official Celebration of UAE National Day, working for LarMac PROJECTS to deliver the projection for

the show,” said Senior Project Manager, Stuart Young. Projection was used throughout the show to create various looks, transforming Devlin’s iconic disc into everything from a sundial and a solar eclipse to a compass, cityscape, palm-filled desert, and a giant UAE flag.

The projection system, designed by Bez, used 20 Panasonic RQ50, eight RZ31 and two RZ21 projectors, all fed individual feeds from VYV Photon servers. “The new RQ50 projectors are super bright and super reliable,” Young said. “They have excellent depth of field in the lenses and we experienced zero failures, making the projected content look stunning.”

As well as the main rotating cast disc, images were projected onto a variety of 20m-high water jet screens, provided by Crystal Group.

Projection control was located within the main production compound and projector feeds were all sent over fibre-optic, with a run of 1,500m required to reach the most distant positions. “Operating the show with projectors mounted on both land-based and floating structures and maintaining multi-projector alignment across such a wide variety of areas without any immediate pre-show time to check the alignment was one of the biggest challenges,” said Young, who also praised all departments for navigating the ever-changing COVID-19 situation

throughout the project. “The risks of an outbreak within the department, being PCR tested every other day, and being in a bubble for more than three weeks were logistic challenges endured by all departments. Ensuring that crew wore correct PPE, including face masks and life jackets when working near the water, was also vital.”

The show also benefitted from an extensive lighting rig, designed by Lighting Designer, Bruno Poet and supplied by PRG.

Describing the project as “a thrilling challenge”, Poet looked back on his main brief. “Es Devlin’s show design was a sculptural form in an unbelievably beautiful setting, and the lighting had to bring this sculpture to life and support the storytelling. During the performance, the sun set and night drew in, so it was important to light the landscape to keep the mountains and the lake alive. It was essential to see the stunning environment we were performing in,” he recalled.

“The lights needed to deliver scale and spectacle in response to the soundtrack, magnifying the energy of the music, and framing the stage design with elegant, geometric and sculptural rays of light.”

The size and scale of the venue meant that extremely bright sources that would register in the vast landscape were required. “I wanted a consistent quality of light across all sources,”

he said. “Everything had to be symmetrical and exact – there was nowhere to hide. For this reason, and to save power, I was keen to base the rig on LED sources.”

Being surrounded by water, open to the elements, and on a purpose-built floating stage next to a 20m water fountain, the chosen fixtures had to perform against the elements. So, working closely with PRG, Poet selected predominantly IP65-rated fixtures to ensure the correct level of weather protection. In all, PRG provided around 1,000 fixtures, including Ayrton Perseo and Huracán Profile, Claypaky Mythos, GLP impression X4 Bar 20, SGM Q-7 and P6, Color Kinetics iW Blast TR and PRG GroundControl Best Boy follow spots.

Also included on the rig were Elation Professional Proteus Hybrid and Proteus Maximus moving heads. “The Elation Proteus Hybrid and Maximus were an obvious choice because of their IP rating,” stated Poet. “I had never used them before, but I was blown away by their brightness, quality and reliability – they worked consistently in unbelievably extreme conditions of heat, moisture, wind and dust. They were as bright as I had hoped and had fantastic consistency of

colour and beam edge from unit to unit. They had the punch to work as narrow pencil beams to scythe through the air, but also the flexibility to make big wide sheets of light as well. They were truly remarkable units and there is no way we could have delivered the graphic air looks the production required without them.”

PRG Sales Director (Music), Yvonne Donnelly Smith, commented: “Our team has worked tirelessly with the brilliant production team at LarMac, Es Devlin and Bruno Poet to set the stage for an experience that proudly showcases the country’s history, progress and potential.”

PRG Managing Director, Bruce MacLean added: “The vision, scale and spectacle of this show is nothing short of astounding. Having first played a role in UAE National Day almost three decades ago, PRG was proud to once again provide technical support for this truly mesmerising show.”

A custom haze distribution system was provided by UAE-based Matrix Laser, with the installation and execution guided by Poet and his lighting team. A total of 32 Look Solutions Viper 2.6 smoke machines and fans allowed haze to be

dispensed in a continuous and consistent density from a 24m-long slot on the focal point of the display. “We had to ensure that the haze units were positioned in such a way that they would be protected from contact with the water from the fountains,” said Matrix Laser Managing Director, Michael Hilgemann.

“To be able to contribute to such an awe-inspiring jubilee spectacular to celebrate the remarkable progression of the UAE, is an enormous honour for us,” he added. “The result was mind-blowing, and everyone agreed that this show went above and beyond to honour this great nation and its leaders. It was wonderful to work in sync with the extremely professional and talented team from LarMac PROJECTS as well as Lighting Designer, Bruno Poet.”

EFM supported the project from a logistics point of view, supplying a range of services including customs clearances, preparation of permits and customs documentation, charter aircraft, sea and air freight, local trucking, supply of rental containers and lifting support systems.

“It is always a pleasure working with the team at LarMac PROJECTS around the world







and this project has been a special highlight for us,” commented Lisa Ryan, Chief Commercial Officer at EFM. “We love a challenge and have been operating extensively in the Middle East for many years, with our first regional EFM office established in the UAE 15 years ago. This year’s 50th National Day Celebration was spectacular.”

Aggreko Events Services was appointed as the turnkey temporary power provider, with a specialist team on hand working on site to specify, design, project-manage, deliver, install, operate, and then remove all the power generating equipment along with electrical distribution, cabling and end-to-end connections. “It’s always a thrilling moment when a bare and unused site transforms into a fully powered and operative activation capable of accommodating thousands of staff across the event preparation period and visitors when everything is ready for the show,” stated Martin Nichol, Regional Events Manager MENA.

“We were also pleased we managed to bring a sustainability element to the site lighting using solar-powered LED lights capable of delivering more than enough lighting capacity during the night to ensure the safety of construction and operations at the relevant areas.”

**‘IF THEY CALL ME, I’LL JUMP ON THE BOAT’**  
Groupe F – another returning supplier from the 49th UAE National Day – provided pyro and drone

displays, which formed a key element of the visual spectacle, with 426 drones combining with an arsenal of firework effects to create a stunning backdrop for the show.

“Es is one of the most precise directors I have ever worked with,” began Groupe F CEO and Creative Director, Christophe Berthonneau. “The level of detail in her projects is massive.”

Groupe F had two main goals for the project. “The first was to complement Es’s vision, using the landscape to create depth and add to the sense of expression,” he noted. “And the second was simply to create something that had never been achieved before.” Berthonneau’s process started with an appraisal of the site. “In this case, the space was hugely complex, but beautiful. For me, it was perfect, because you have the flat line of the water combined with the skyline and the mountains, which are full of depth. So, the three-dimensional space is an incredible canvas for us to work with.”

In fact, Berthonneau was so taken with the environment that he decided to sleep in it. “A personal pleasure for me was to stay in a little caravan close to the event site for 10 days,” he revealed. “I’m not a very urban person, and this allowed me to become closer to nature, feel the air, see the plants and animals, look at the stars and see how the mountains are lit by the sun and the moon.”

Part of Devlin’s concept was to have the

show start at dusk as the sun was dropping behind the mountains. “This is the worst time for artificial light as the levels are not stable, but it was important to the concept,” he said.

Running for 36 minutes in total, the show was split into nine sequences – each of which focused on a specific element of the UAE’s growth as a country from past, to present, to future. “Each sequence of the show was an opportunity for every element of the production to come together like a huge orchestra,” Berthonneau smiled. “You have the iconic structure and the beautiful environment, but the reason why we were all there was to create a party – and that was a collaboration between all creative and technical departments.”

Among the plethora of effects achieved by Groupe F, one of the most unusual was pyro being fired from drones, lined up in formation in mid-air. “Three weeks before the show, I still wasn’t sure if we would be able to create this effect,” Berthonneau laughed.

“I advised everyone from the beginning that what we were doing on this project was truly experimental and had never been used in the field before. Thankfully, everything worked according to plan and now we have this as a demonstration of competency.”

According to Berthonneau, there is a big difference between ‘launching’ and ‘delivering’ pyro. “Drones are very interesting artistically

because they enable you to control how pyro is lifted into the air. They allow you to create a pure design, because the launches are fixed exactly in the point in the sky that we want them.”

Reflecting on an “enormous technical challenge”, Berthonneau was full of praise for the entire team – especially LarMac. “I have worked with LarMac twice and both times they have been practical, efficient, confident and creative – and, best of all, artistic intent is always high on their list of priorities,” he commented. “I really

admire both Es and Jo. They take opportunities like this to create a piece of art, and I’m full of respect for that.”

Does that mean he’ll be back in the UAE for the 51st National Day? “Who knows?” he replied simply. “My life isn’t to live in hope of the next project. What I can say is that after the past two years, I will always leave the capacity to work with this team again. If they call me, I’ll jump on the boat – and with a result like we managed to achieve together, why not?”

*Photos: D&D / Nicolas Chavance*  
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