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Rob Koenig lights Metallica M72 World Tour with Proteus

Proteus Excalibur match energy and power on legendary metal band's highly anticipated 2023/24 outing

One of the hottest tours of the summer—or any summer—is Metallica. Metals greatest band launched their M72 World Tour April 27 in Amsterdam with Rob Koenig again at the helm as lighting designer, an outing that has the thrash rockers playing a unique two-night, no-repeat schedule in cities across Europe and North America. Koenig crafts unique lighting looks using 600+ automated lights, a rig that includes [Proteus Excalibur™](#) sky beams from Elation Professional. Lighting supply is by Premier Global Production.



Koenig, a big Metallica fan growing up, has been part of the Metallica family since 2008. He started as lighting director under John Broderick, eventually moved into the lighting designer role and is now on his fourth record cycle with the band. Metallica is touring in support of its eleventh studio album, 72 Seasons, which released in April. The number 72, which refers to the number of seasons in a person's formative first 18 years of life, is a theme that runs throughout the show and indeed in the rig itself, where fixture counts elude to it, for example the rig's 72 Proteus Excaliburs.

32 unique looks

Metallica is visiting 22 different cities around the world and playing two nights in each city, each night with a different set list and different opening act. The brief, says the LD, was to make each show look different while using the same production each night. That's 32 different looks

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over the course of the two shows although Koenig says they programmed about 46 songs in order to have alternates. “We don’t think by any stretch of the imagination that the set list will remain the same the whole tour,” he said.

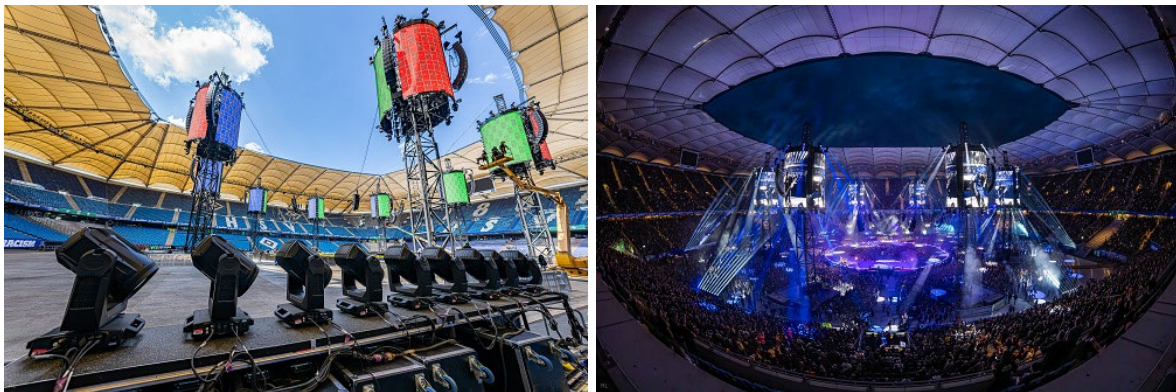


When talking about his choice of the all-weather Proteus Excalibur, the designer reflects back to Metallica’s WorldWired Tour in 2017 when there were few IP-rated lights to choose from. “There was really nothing on the market then, only one fixture that was a moving head,” he recalls. “Fast forward six years and a lot has changed. We looked at a lot of great IP-rated fixtures for this tour but unfortunately most of them failed on the uniqueness aspect. We really liked the Proteus Excalibur because it had something that a lot of the other fixtures didn’t.”

In-the-round

The M72 tour features an in-the-round set with a circular stage encircling the band's iconic ‘snake pit.’ An in-the-round show comes with a number of challenges however, such as a lack of rigging points, and is not an easy thing for a designer to pull off. “You’re going into a stadium environment so you can’t magically make a mothergrid appear above you,” Koenig says, “plus you have to think about sightlines from the floor all the way to the top. How are you going to convey an in-the-round show to a large audience with no rigging?” Braun’s solution? Eight cylindrical towers topped with video, PA and lighting, along with a suspension grid over the stage for near-field PA. The exterior of the stage is wrapped in lighting and there are other lighting positions further afield where we find the Excaliburs.

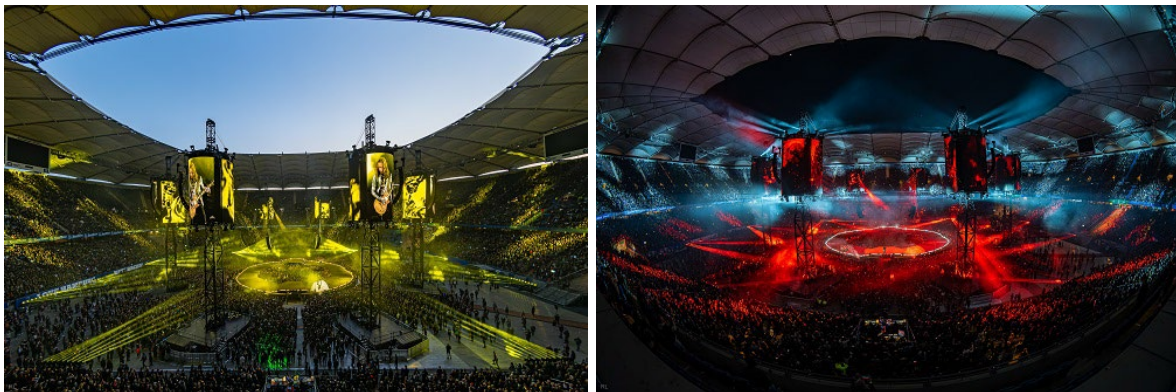
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In the field

Positioned in the corners of the field, on a riser shelf, are eight groups of nine Excaliburs each. “We needed a howitzer for that position because we didn’t know on a daily basis where exactly they could be placed. It depended on the venue, the size and the scalability (or the fire code),” the designer explains. “We needed something that could go to the extreme ends of the end zone if we needed to and still read on camera shooting all the way back towards the stage.”

When testing fixtures for that position, Koenig says the Excalibur was the brightest fixture they encountered. “It has a giant piece of glass on the front of it [10" lens] and is a really nice canon of a light. That’s something that’s lacking on the market right now.” Emitting 20,000 lumens, the Excalibur’s narrow 0.8° beam can be widened to 3.5° using an expander lens. “Also, the color mixing is really smooth and it has just enough tricks to give you some flavor throughout the show. It’s not just a collimated beam. We became more reliant on them than we ever anticipated; worth their weight in gold.”



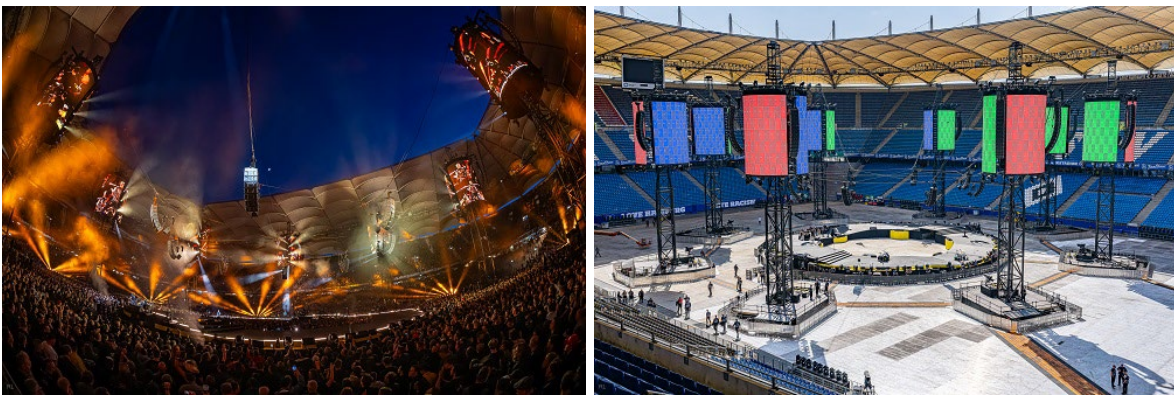
Aerial attack

Production complements ideally the in-the-round format with an electrifying lightshow accompanied by video and the timely use of pyro. The Excalibur fixtures are used for big aerials

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throughout the show, providing not only dramatic background looks to the stage but a breathtaking backdrop that fills the stadium and matches the energy and power of the music. “We also go straight across the stage at the band with them,” Koenig says, “almost like they are attacking the stage. They are amazing.”

With over 600 fixtures and a profusion of songs to customize across two shows it’s a heavy lift programming-wise, duties that Koenig says were skillfully handled by Metallica programming vet Joe Cabrera and Cat West. Lighting vendor is Premier Global Production out of Nashville who have been with Metallica for close to 20 years.



Building anticipation

Described as a “perfectly executed stadium metal masterclass,” the M72 tour is harnessing praise at each stop, delivering as only Metallica can with a classic show that, according to Koenig, is nevertheless a bit different from past tours. “There is more of a theatre aspect to the current show compared to past tours,” he says, namely segue intros that have added a different dimension. “We have interstitial moments now more frequently than in the past where the band will exit the stage and the next number is introduced with teasing video and lighting. It adds more of a flow, more theatre, and gets the crowd excited. Then boom, they are back on stage. I am loving it because it’s building a bit more mystery, more anticipation for each song.” The longer song intros also give the band more opportunities to recharge between numbers, not a bad idea for a band that has been rocking hard since the early ‘80s.

The M72 World Tour runs until September 2024.

Creative Director, Scenic & Production Designer: Dan Braun

Production Manager: John “Lug” Zajonc

Lighting Designer: Rob Koenig

Lighting Programmers: Joe Cabrera, Cat West

Vendor: Premier Global Productions Nashville



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