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Kille Knobel Design for Pearl Jam “Dark Matter” Tour Strikes a Perfect Balance with Elation Lighting

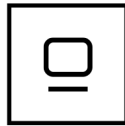
Legendary band Pearl Jam embarked on their highly anticipated “Dark Matter” world tour in May, sharing their introspective brand of rock with audiences across North America and Europe before heading to New Zealand and Australia in November. Lighting designer Kille Knobel has worked with the band since 2000 and complements the “Dark Matter” shows with a minimalist yet impactful design that uses Elation KL PANEL XL softlights as a key visual element in creating the distinctive looks.



The show brings video projection to the forefront with soft, organic visuals and minimalist lighting. When choosing fixtures for the tour earlier this year, lighting vendor Upstaging hosted a fixture shootout in Los Angeles for the designer, where she ultimately selected the [KL PANEL XL](#) and [PROTEUS MAXIMUS](#) as part of a larger lighting package. The fixtures were essential in creating the desired balance between video projection and lighting, two visual components that trade prominence throughout the show.

Soft color washes

Knobel reveals that the band has always liked color washes and in the early iteration of Pearl Jam shows—before she came on board—they often played beneath PAR can rigs. “The band loves the



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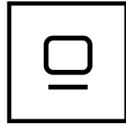
feel and simplicity of soft color washes and they brought that back up as a discussion topic for this tour,” she shares. “In the early design phases, I kept coming back to the idea of a ‘light box’ above the band to create very dispersed light, like you would have in a film shoot, but in a way that wouldn’t disrupt the projection. The KL PANEL XL gave me the control I needed, and with the addition of barndoors and intensifier lenses, I could manage the light perfectly,” she explained.

Knobel’s lighting concept included five lighting pods, each pod equipped with two softlight types, a row of KL PANEL XLs working with beam wash moving heads (Elation PROTEUS BRUTUS for the European shows). “The pods were a hybrid idea,” the designer said, “a combination of a light box with a beam wash fixture that could move and do more but was also soft.”



“The most beautiful color range”

The KL PANEL XL’s full-spectrum LED array, with RGBW + Lime + Cyan color mixing, provided Knobel with what she says is the best-mixed color she has come across. “I think the KL PANEL XL has the most beautiful color range of any fixture I’ve used,” she stated, noting that she is notoriously hard to please when it comes to color mixing systems. “In terms of the bandwidth of color and nuance of color I could get with it, I was just mesmerized. The richness I could get out of the colors is just gorgeous, and for me to say I like color mixing in a light is really noteworthy! It’s those extra color channels that give you the depth of color you’re able to achieve and for a band that loves color washes, these fixtures were the perfect tool.”



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KL PANEL XL

The KL PANEL XL is an LED softlight that delivers full-color washes or beautifully soft white light up to 44,000 field lumens. With precise color temperature control, full-spectrum color rendering, and even wash coverage, it provides exceptional lighting quality. Section control provides additional creative capabilities for color effects and visual impact.

Knobel says that because the color is so rich, the fixtures are best seen when they stand on their own. “I add them to contribute to the big looks, but when they’re the backbone light of the look, that’s my favorite way to use them,” she says. “And because of the lens and the fact that you can do cell control, when you do run effects on them, it’s actually very organic looking. Because it’s such a diffused lens, you don’t see pixelation, which fits with Pearl Jam’s visual aesthetic. With a dimmer effect on them, it looks really good.”

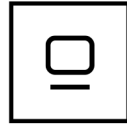
Knobel, who has 75 songs programmed in the lighting console, says she has a whole range of colors in her palette that she calls dirty colors. “It’s really easy to create them with hard-edge lights but it’s hard to achieve them with LED panel lights. That was my only challenge with the KL PANELs. The colors are so pretty, I couldn’t make them look dingy enough!” She describes the look in a song that features a slow progression of panels coming on randomly over a minute and a half with some strobing. “I just love the simplicity of it, the edginess, where it feels like you’re in a different space, not a traditional rock and roll application.”

Horsepower and control

The designer acknowledges that initially, she was a bit worried about the level of horsepower from the fixtures and their ability to provide dispersed soft light across the entire stage. “When I put my meter on them at the shootout, I was a bit concerned as these were going to be at 45-to-50-foot trim heights in order to clear the projection. When we got to rehearsals though and I turned them on for the first time, I knew we were going to be ok!” Each of the KL PANEL XL units in the show is outfitted with an intensifier lens that is optimized for longer throws by increasing the center intensity by over 30% while keeping the field smooth.

Between the focus and the use of barndoors on the KL PANELs, Knobel was able to control the light and avoid light spill. “I was a little nervous about it because there’s a lot of horsepower in the rig. I needed to know, in those songs where the lighting was doing more of the lifting, was I going to blow out the projection. The way that the fixtures were utilized and placed, I had faith in the concept and it ended up working out great.”

A standout look that Knobel says defines how she wanted to use the light features a single KL PANEL XL in a minimalist, low-level blue wash that transitions between songs, creating an intimate, unconventional rock show atmosphere. “I love that I can turn on just one or two KL PANELs, and it’s enough to light the entire stage,” she said. “The simplicity and subtlety create an entirely different experience than what you’d expect visually at a rock concert.”



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PROTEUS MAXIMUS

In addition to the KL PANEL XL, Knobel utilized Elation PROTEUS MAXIMUS fixtures as the hard-edged lighting component. Although initially uncertain about using the 50,000-lumen LED profile, Knobel ultimately found it outperformed her expectations in a side-by-side comparison with a comparable fixture that she had used before and liked. “I wasn’t happy with the MAXIMUS in a previous non-music application, but in this shootout, it blew me away, especially in terms of color, correction, and output. I walked out of the demo thinking, the MAXIMUS wins hands down and they became an essential part of the rig,” she said.

The MAXIMUS, positioned upstage, on the sides, and in stadium wings, provide dynamic backlighting and effects along with occasional washes into the audience or onto the stage, complementing the softer wash from the KL PANEL XLs.

“Dark Matter” is proof that Pearl Jam is as fresh as ever and the band continues to sell out performances around the globe. Knobel’s thoughtful use of lighting provides the perfect visual accompaniment to the band’s legendary sound while maintaining the band’s signature focus on the music.

Production Manager: John Lafferty

Production Designer/Technical Producer: Spike Brant, Nimblist

Lighting Designer/Director: Kille Knobel

Lighting Programmers: Will Flavin, Mark Humphrey, Eric Marchwinski

Creative Director: Rob Sheridan

Video Director: Blue Leach

FOH Lighting Tech: Dallas Sisson

Lighting Crew Chief: Mike Green

US Lighting Crew: Brendan Langord, Adam Morrison, Zachary Boebel, Luke Dobson, Emilion Aguilar, Maya Hughes

Head Rigger: Davy McCready

US Lighting Vendor: Upstaging

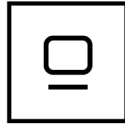
Video Vendor: Fuse Technical Group

Photo 1: Rob Sheridan

Photos 2, 3: Dallas Sisson

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At Elation, we represent the elite in the lighting industry. We design and manufacture a comprehensive range of best-in-class entertainment lighting products valued by production/rental houses and lighting designers the world over. Our dedication to extraordinary quality and creative solutions has established us as the go-to choice for professionals. With a storied legacy of brilliance, our influence extends from iconic stages to cutting-edge studios across the globe. We also offer an advanced line of lighting control products



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through Obsidian Control Systems, as well as a full range of dependable specialty effects called Magmatic. We invite you to take a closer look at www.elationlighting.com

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