

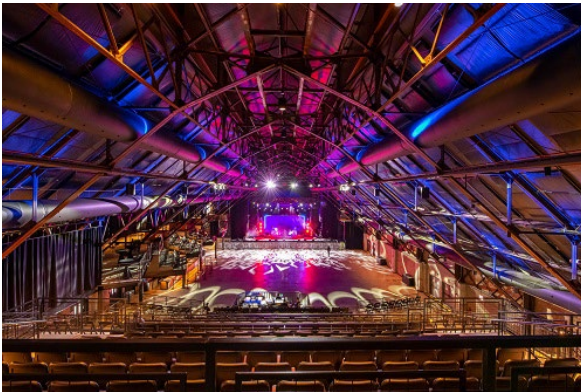
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22-May-2023

From Salt Production to Stage Production: Upstaging lights Chicago's Salt Shed with Elation

Historical Morton Salt complex transformed into Chicago's hottest new live performance space

The Morton Salt complex in Chicago had been in operation for nearly a century before it was closed down in 2015. Today, the complex has been transformed into a multi-purpose venue for live music and other events named The Salt Shed. Boasting state-of-the-art sound and lighting systems, including a comprehensive Elation stage lighting rig from Upstaging, The Salt Shed is quickly becoming the hot new performance space in Chicago.



The venue spreads over 1.5 acres of land along the Chicago riverfront and can accommodate around 3,300 people indoors and 5,000 at an outdoor performance space, which opened in the summer of 2022. The newly renovated indoor space was previously a storage facility for salt and features a distinctive A-Frame structure. Today, it boasts a performance stage and a cutting-edge entertainment lighting system of Elation [Artiste Monet™](#), [Proteus Lucius™](#), [Proteus Rayzor 760™](#), [Fuze MAX™](#), [Fuze Par Z60 IP™](#), [Protron 3K Color™](#), and [DTW Blinder 700 IP™](#) luminaires.

Upstaging

Director of Production Tim Schoen at The Salt Shed was responsible for procuring all the necessary production elements for the venue, including lighting, rigging, audio, staging, and other related equipment. He also oversaw the design of the stage, green room layouts, and docking area, among other aspects.



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Schoen compiled a list of vendors to work with and ultimately chose locally-based Upstaging to handle the lighting for the venue due to their excellent reputation in the industry. Upstaging was involved in the project from the planning stages, playing a crucial role as systems integrators in ensuring that the lighting system was executed to the highest standard. They also provided the power and controls infrastructure. “At the time we were just coming out of the pandemic and not a lot of companies had the resources to take on a project like this,” Schoen said, “but Upstaging did.” He adds that Upstaging has previous experience working with 16 on Center, the company behind the new space.

Historical yet state of the art

Steve Wojda and Mike Creager of Upstaging visited the site in 2021 when construction of the new facility was just underway. Schoen shared renderings of what the space would look like and asked Upstaging to come up with some lighting concepts. Various options for both the entertainment lighting and the architectural lighting elements were presented and refined over the course of a few months.

“We had more design input and suggestions on this project than we typically do,” Wojda commented. “We did most everything from the lighting standpoint – the indoor theatrical lighting plus lit the inside beams, but also lit the outside of the venue and the riverfront area using outdoor-rated fixtures. It’s such an interesting space and we wanted to accentuate the architecture and the fact that the space has unique historical value for the city.”

Despite the transformation, the restructure has maintained the building's architectural authenticity. “In a lot of ways it still looks like the Salt Shed that we saw originally, and that was the intent,” adds Mike Creager. “It’s an iconic and beloved building that the people of Chicago know and love and the Morton Salt logo is still around to greet you as you drive along the Kennedy expressway. It’s state of the art but has still retained its historic look.” Promoted as a mix use venue, The Salt Shed also hosts private gatherings such as weddings and corporate events.

Lighting rig

Wojda worked on the project with Rob Ludwig from Elation rep firm Five Lakes Marketing, who assisted with fixture choice and arranged for demo units. Schoen, who was very familiar with Elation products from having worked in two previous venues with Elation rigs, says he took Steve and Rob’s advice as far as fixture types. “I knew that Elation would have the type of instruments we were looking for and at the price point we were looking for,” Schoen said. “With Steve and Rob’s help we were able to put together a fantastic, thoroughly filled out rig.”

The lighting rig consists of seven parallel sticks of truss. Over the 52-ft wide by 32-ft deep stage are four 46’ trusses at 19–25-ft trim heights with an additional three trusses suspended in front of house. Because the Salt Shed is a long narrow building some of the lighting positions are up to 100 feet from the stage. On a 20’ FOH truss furthest from the stage, and working with a

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followspot system, are four 45,000-lumen strong Artiste Monet™ LED profile moving heads. “Even though the Monets are almost 100 feet from the stage we get some incredible punch for the follow me system,” Schoen says.



On FOH 2, 76 feet from the stage, are four Proteus Lucius™, IP65-rated LED profile moving heads used for front lighting. “They are also incredibly bright,” says Schoen. “With their white LED source and CMY with variable CTO, they make for excellent white balancing and getting great skin tone.” An additional four Lucius fixtures work from FOH 3, about 20 feet from the stage, with two additional units in the overhead rig and used for side light.

Spread across all four overhead stage trusses are 12 Fuze MAX Profile™ and 12 Fuze MAX Spot™ LED moving heads. The Fuze MAX fixtures are full-spectrum LED moving heads with RGBMA LED engine (92 CRI) and 21,000-lumens of power that rivals 1000W/1200W class discharge fixtures. They form the bulk of the overhead lighting system and work with 10 IP65-rated Proteus Rayzor 760™ LED wash effect units and a mid-rig cluster of 8 IP65 Fuze Par Z60 IP™ color-changing PAR lights with zoom. Providing high power, full color strobe effects are 8 Protron 3K Color™ LED strobes with four IP65-rated DTW Blinder 700 IP™ as audience blinders.

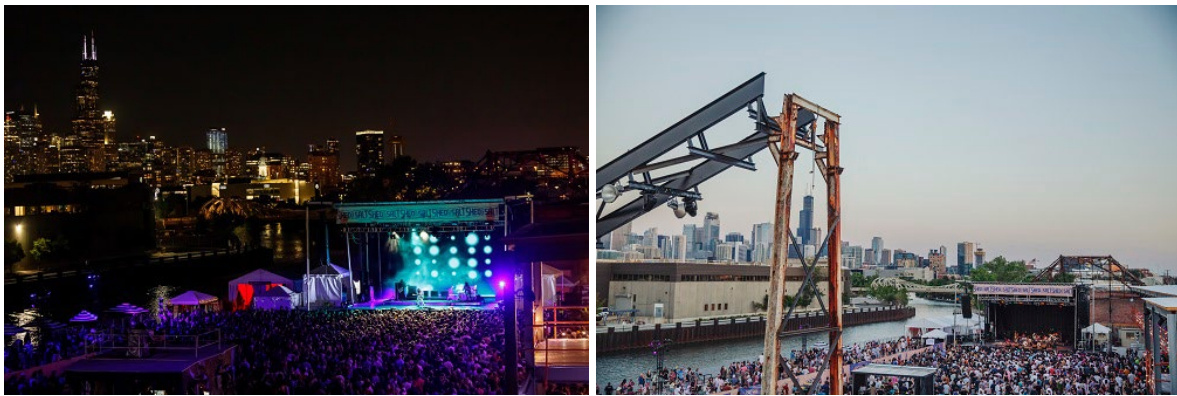
“The whole package melded together nicely,” remarks Wojda. “Elation has a great range of lights to choose from with the flexibility to work for both longer throw FOH lights and closer stage lights. It was also nice to reap the benefits from using just one manufacturer.” The lighting plot for The Salt Shed indoor stage was created by in-house lighting designer Joshua Light while Danielle Sanders serving as electrician, both members of IATSE Local 2. The lighting system was hung in February.

Outdoor space

The Fairgrounds, a 5000-capacity outdoor performance space at The Salt Shed, holds a summer schedule of concerts and Upstaging will be installing an 8-post outdoor stage for the series. Wojda says that since a portion of the indoor lighting equipment is IP65 rated, it is suitable for

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outdoor use on the Fairgrounds rig during summer shows. “With the weatherproof lighting, they can move the lights outside and not have to worry about protecting the fixtures. They can do an FOH truss and downstage truss on the outdoor stage with the IP-rated lights and then mix in some of the non-IP fixtures on the upstage.” During the summer, the IP-rated gear will work both indoor and outdoor events, depending on the requirements.



The Salt Shed has curated an eclectic mix of acts from EDM to Iggy Pop, Flaming Lips, The Roots and many more and are selling out most shows. “It’s a beautiful space and the rig fits in with every act that has come through,” Schoen comments. “Guest LDs come in, fire up the rig and have a lot of fun.” He adds that bands typically bring in their own floor package to complement what the venue has in the air, which is why they wanted to make an impressive sky package.

“Our motto from the start has been to make a world-class venue,” Schoen concludes. “We want to not only wow the audience, but also the LDs and A1s and everyone else who walks through the door.”

Elation gear:

- 4 x Artiste Monet
- 10 x Proteus Lucius
- 12 x Fuze MAX Profile
- 12 x Fuze MAX Spot
- 8 x Fuze Par Z60 IP
- 10 x Proteus Rayzor 760
- 8 x Protron 3K Color
- 4 x DTW Blinder 700 IP

Photos 1, 2: ©Sandra Steinbrecher, @sandysteinbrecherphotography (instagram), @sandragoldin (twitter), Sandra Goldin Steinbrecher (facebook)

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Photos 4, 5: Cat Florea



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Photo 6: Elizabeth De La Piedra

About Elation Professional

Based in California with facilities in Florida and Mexico City, as well as European offices in The Netherlands, Elation designs and manufactures a comprehensive range of innovative lighting products known for its superior performance, excellent efficiency, and outstanding price: value ratio, all backed by a hard-earned reputation for Total Support. Elation also offers an advanced line of lighting control products through Obsidian Control Systems, as well as a full range of dependable specialty effects called Magmatic. Our mission has always been simple: to provide best-in-class products and service while offering the best value: performance ratio in the industry. Elation products continue to be a part of the industry's most exciting projects across the globe. We invite you to take a closer look at www.elationlighting.com

For more information, contact:

Elation Professional US

6122 S. Eastern Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90040
USA
Tel: (866) 245-6726 (toll free)
Tel: (323) 582-3322
sales@elationlighting.com
www.elationlighting.com

Elation Professional EU

Junostraat 2.
6468 EW Kerkrade
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0)45 546 85 66
info@elationlighting.eu
www.elationlighting.eu

Elation Professional Mexico

Av Santa Ana 30,
Parque Industrial Lerma,
Lerma, Mexico 52000
Tel: +011 52 728 282 7070
ventas@elationlighting.com
www.elationlighting.com