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Pods of Elation Dartz™ the centerpiece of Alec Takahashi design for Thomas Rhett tour

Country music singer and 2020 ACM “Entertainer of the Year” Thomas Rhett just wrapped an 8-week tour playing outdoor amphitheaters, a successful return to the road that saw enthusiastic fans at every stop. The tour, which ended October 9 in Raleigh, North Carolina, was also a visual treat with lighting designer Alec Takahashi incorporating pods of Elation [Dartz 360™](#) LED moving heads as the centerpiece of the show. Lighting supply was by Upstaging.



Cohesive look

Thomas Rhett is making history. With 18 No. 1 hits on the U.S. country charts and currently holding the record for most consecutive No. 1 hits on country radio, he continues to secure his place among country music elite. Takahashi, who first teamed up with the artist in early 2018, began discussing with Thomas Rhett preliminary design concepts for 2021 in January of this year. Then, with a new album “Country Again: Side A” released in April, Takahashi and Thomas Rhett sat down to go over the theme of the release, the stories behind the new songs, and the emotions in the music.

“Initially, we were designing for a couple of TV performances, as well as a live stream event,” Takahashi explains. “I thought it was very important to keep the scenic design and theme throughout the album cycle cohesive with what the tour would look like. I wanted everything to match and be on brand as far as visuals. From there we brainstormed the initial TV performances and slowly formed the tour design. Ultimately, we came up with the design that is currently on the road. There have been revisions along the way but we landed on a place that feels really good and matches this album theme and cycle very well.”

Focus on the music

Following a cancelled 2020 tour, the artist was eager to get back on the road and was among the first to announce a 2021 tour schedule. “Thomas was excited to engage with his fans again,” Takahashi says.

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“He really wanted to push for a show that was all lighting and leave video elements behind in order to put more focus on the music. We wanted to be strategic with how the show is dynamically with lighting. The final design has a lot of layers to it and it came together really nicely.”

Country roots

With “Country Again,” Rhett leans into his country roots. “We looked at a lot of front porch and living room textures from the South, wood finishes, oriental rugs, warm colors, old filament lamps, that kind of feel,” Takahashi states. “Much of the show is warmly colored yet there are a couple of songs that still have that pop punch. It was important to him that the design still have that pop vibe to it but then pull back to the more country themed looks.”



Dartz 360

The fluid design required a compact yet powerful lighting fixture that could adjust to a variety of looks and the choice fell to the compact, narrow-beam Dartz 360. Stacked across the upstage wall as the centerpiece of the lighting design are 15 pods, each housing 6 Dartz for a total of 90 units, a configuration that allows for a variety of expressions - tight beams, gobo looks with prism, beautiful LED coloring with frost, and much more. Takahashi says the Dartz compact size allowed it to fit nicely in the pods.

“Orchestrating how the show was going to play out visually was very important in order to reveal some of the tricks that could happen throughout the rig,” the designer says, “and the Dartz have a huge role in that. I start out with the frost in for the first three songs without revealing the beam or prism features but as the set list plays out, it progresses into many layers. Eventually the whole rig reveals itself in a big pop look. That was strategically planned out as the set list was curated and we picked those moments when we wanted beams to punch through or have those soft moments of frost or full looks with the prism.”





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Takahashi can control all 90 Dartz in unison or access individual fixtures, or pods, to create special looks. He explains: "There are times where most of the pods are dark with only a few pointing downstage onto Thomas for a more intimate moment, and other times where they are all on. There is also a song where I treat each pod as a single lighting fixture, where the Dartz move in unison as one big beam coming from each pod." Also playing a role in the design are Elation SixBar 1000 IPT™ linear battens, which line the top of band risers for matching color and effect.

Upstaging

Upstaging has taken care of Thomas Rhett's lighting needs for years as the star has risen to the top of the country music world. "The Upstaging relationship is fantastic," Takahashi concludes. "They are a valuable partner who come with excellent suggestions and worked closely with us on fixture selection. Account Manager John Bahnick has been taking really great care of us and the gear is in flawless condition."

Personnel

Production Design: Butter Knife Designs
Lighting Designer/Programmer: Alec Takahashi
Assistant Lighting Programmer: Luke Elrod
Production Manager: Kevin Twist
Touring Lighting Director: Alec Takahashi
Lighting Crew Chief: Kile McClure
Lighting Crew: Nick Schlosser, Aaron Walchli, Tony Quinn
Video Director: Rob McLaughlin
Video Crew Chief: Ricky Krohne
Tour Rigger: Clay Christian
Tour Barista: Trey Smith
Lighting/Video Company: Upstaging
Upstaging Account Manager: John Bahnick
Staging Company: Tait
Tait Account Manager: Aaron Siebert

Photos: Todd Kaplan

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:

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