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The Activity, TAG and Elation help deliver stunning production at 2023 Ultra Music Festival

Patrick Dierson and the team at The Activity were again called on to handle production and lighting design for the Main Stage at the Ultra Music Festival in Miami and this year delivered a stunning visual presentation with the help of Elation IP-rated lighting and NETRON data distribution devices. The Activity collaborated closely with Ultra's Creative Director Richard Milstein, as well as TAG (Technical Arts Group), the primary lighting and video vendor for the Main Stage.



Ultra playground

Sure to please electronic music aficionados of every genre, Ultra's flagship festival in Miami is one of the world's largest electronic music celebrations. This year's event, at Bayfront Park, ran from March 24-26 and featured a stellar lineup that included Martin Garrix, Eric Prydz, Carl Cox, Rezz, Swedish House Mafia, Alesso, and many more. The Activity has been involved with the festival for over 10 years and Dierson says this year's event was "one of the smoothest yet" with Richard Milstein coming up with an overall production design for the Main Stage that provided "a really wonderful playground in which to operate."

Collaboration

As part of the pre-production process, The Activity traditionally operates in conjunction with Ultra's creative designer, Technical Producer Ray Steinman, the event production team, and chosen vendors to bring Richard Milstein's vision to an engineered reality. "There is a great deal of consultation regarding fixture choices, placements, and orientations while having a clear understanding as to what can truly be accomplished given the technical complexity and intricacy

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of a stage of this magnitude,” Dierson explains. “There’s a significant amount of equipment that gets built into these stages and that requires a significant amount of attention to detail well in advance of arriving onsite.”

Production elements

Milstein’s concept included a massive amount of production elements smartly placed throughout the space to complete a beautiful visual balance. This year’s look was primarily hexagonal in nature with undulating curves flanking the stage. Dierson says it was also beautifully layered and not just about lighting and video. The concept incorporated a plethora of pyrotechnic effects across the length of the downstage edge as well as the roof, cryo jets, water features that incorporated flame dancing atop fountains, and full fireworks displays every evening.



IP to the test

Elation fixtures played a large role in the design and according to Dierson most of the units were chosen not just for their expected performance but also their IP65 ratings. “The majority of the equipment on Ultra festivals is directly exposed to the elements and Miami in spring all but guarantees a few good tropical downpours throughout the course of the week,” he said, noting that load-in was fraught with heavy rains that put the gear’s IP rating to the test.

Dierson continues, “The IP ratings of the Elation instruments used can never be overstated in an environment such as this. I think that many people lose sight of what is entailed in protecting individual instruments at a festival - the concept of sending teams of technicians up the rig in harnesses to wrap exposed fixtures just before inclement weather is rolling in is never a great thing to have to do. Knowing that these fixtures can get poured down upon and still have shiny bits shooting out the lenses is a massive advantage to any outdoor production.”

Elation rig

Active within the rig were 92 [Proteus Hybrid™](#) moving heads, 27 [Pixel Bar 60 IPTM](#), 46 [Paladin Panel™](#) flood and effect lights, and 294 [SixBar 1000 IPTM](#), all IP65-rated luminaires. As EDM

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shows of this size require a massive amount of data that needs to be delivered quickly and responsively, TAG turned to 30 [NETRON EN12™](#) nodes from Obsidian Control Systems to drive the Main Stage.

The Proteus Hybrid moving heads served as workhorse units that were completely exposed on the sides of the stage. They were spread across four separate layers of truss and video, offering what Dierson says was the perfect complement to the rest of the rig over the stage. The linear SixBar 1000s provided the bulk of the LED strip lighting, lining both layers of Proteus trusses on the external sides of the stage, as well as a densely populated “hex” or “arrow” pattern directly above the center of the stage. “The SixBar units proved to be extremely bright and offered the individual cell control that we’re always looking for for this type of event,” Dierson stated. “This also allows guest LDs to effortlessly clone their fixture information from other LED batten types.”



For the interior of the stage, Dierson sought a “bright bucket of intense light” to outline the vertical hex video wall, as well as two flanking areas of truss downstage left and right. “The Paladin Panels were chosen and their raw intensity was completely underestimated. They were so intensely bright that they had to be limited to 20% of their output for the majority of the event.” Finally, the Pixel Bar 60 IPs were chosen to enhance the symbol of every Ultra Music Festival stage - its iconic “U” truss configuration mounted at the top center of the structure. Complemented with LED video panels, the Pixel Bar 60s helped to outline the truss structure and maintain the pixelated visual all the way to the top extent of the stage.

TAG

Lighting and video supplier TAG (www.TAGLIVE.com, [@gotaglive](https://twitter.com/gotaglive)), was a new addition to the Ultra team and according to Dierson passed with flying colors. “This was my first outing with TAG and it was a really enjoyable experience,” he said of the production and rental company. “I’m not going to lie. When you’re told that you have to work with and help manage a vendor with whom you’ve never worked, there’s always an air of skepticism but the team at TAG really put our minds at ease. This was the first Ultra Music Festival that they had ever

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done so there's a significant learning curve that comes with that. They're dealing with a new client, all new people with whom they must interface, familiar industry names that they've never worked with directly and don't want to disappoint. It's not a small or comfortable position for a vendor to be thrust into and TAG rolled with every challenge with grace and professionalism. We're definitely looking forward to working with them again soon."

The Activity also served as the technical liaison to all guest artists performing at the event, helping to track and manage each individual artist team's technical needs, integrating any supplemental equipment that those teams may have brought in, and ensuring that they have the most up-to-date technical information as they moved from pre-production to the reality of the build. Dierson says TAG was also instrumental in making that process as painless as possible. "This is one of the festival properties that I oversee directly and TAG's John Flanagan was tasked with working with me to manage all of the FOH and Pre-Visualization needs for guest artists. It was my first time working with John and he was an absolute professional powerhouse throughout the entire process."

Special moments

With over 25 performances during the course of the three-day festival and a versatile lighting rig to work with, the variety of special lighting moments was many. "The number of incredible looks that we saw from all the guest LDs was really fantastic," Dierson stated. "LD James Betts-Gray was handling duties for David Guetta's performance and he in particular created some extremely striking focuses with the Proteus Hybrids shooting down into the crowd that I was really struck by. Everyone brought their A game but James really did some particularly cool-looking stuff that stood out amongst a visually intense weekend."

Dierson says that for the most part, the guest LDs were quite pleased with the rig and gear choices. They were also a pleasure to deal with, he says, which he attributes to the positive tone during the pre-production process. He concludes, "For many of us, it was the first time we were getting to see each other again since March of 2020 so there were definitely a few emotional homecomings amongst friends within the EDM community. Normally, you don't have time for such personal interaction and catching up but between the efforts of everyone involved and equipment that simply just did its job, we all had a really enjoyable couple of weeks of onsite work. You surely can't say that about every production."

Elation Main Stage gear list:

- 92 x Proteus Hybrid
- 48 x Paladin Panel
- 24 x Pixel Bar 60 IP
- 294 x SixBar 1000 IP
- 30 x Obsidian NETRON EN12

Ultra Creative Director: Richard Milstein



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Ultra Technical Producer: Ray Steinman
LD/Artist Technical Liaison: The Activity/Patrick Dierson
TAG Project Managers: Kevin Mignone and John Gonzalez
TAG Lighting Crew Chief: Russell Felton
TAG FOH Technician: John Flanagan
TAG Video Crew Chief: Mike Wurtz
TAG Crew: Michael Hale, Lowell Hawley, Abraham Carrillo, Geoff Ford, Justin Volpe,
Ed Amico, Albert Chipperson, Jonathan Gue, Amilcar Fernandez
Video Director: Grant Davis
Laser Director: JDFX/Jeff Cornell
SFX Director: JDFX/Lusi Torres
Audio Lead: Neil Rosenstock
Rigging & Automation: Premier Global Productions/Justin Gauthier

Photos: Rutger Geerling (rudgr.com)

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



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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