



#WeStandTogether



GANG SIGNS & PRAYER

At just 23 years of age, Michael Ebenazer Kwadjo Omari Owuo, Jr, or Stormzy as he's known to his masses, has become one of the UK's most respected grime artists. Yet his talents aren't restricted to a recording studio; the genre defying south Londoner is working alongside a dedicated team of touring professionals who ensure his live shows are worthy of a global audience. TPi's Kel Murray attends the Gang Signs & Prayer tour finale at Brixton Academy, which was filmed live for YouTube and included guest appearances from Wretch 32 and Ed Sheeran.









Equipment for the visuals was supplied by PRG XL Video and Neg Earth Lights; 21 Gun Salute, a duet with Wretch 32, featured intricate automation of the video screens via a Kinesys system.

Upon arriving at Brixton Academy, fans were lining the streets, waiting patiently in the early summer heat for the hottest ticket in town: the last of urban artist Stormzy's hometown gigs following his biggest headline tour. What's intersting about this artist is his ability to reach fans from all walks of life. There are high school students adorning the pavement outside and backstage there are celebrities turning up to show support. Accoustic guitar wonderkid Ed Sheeran took to the stage with a surprise rendition of *Shape Of You* (following his own sell out O2 Arena shows), and let's just say there are famous faces attending this gig who have more Instagram followers than the TPi office has had cups of Yorkshire Tea all year. In short, this is an artist in demand and everybody wants to see his live show unfold.

Tour Manager Trevor Williams greeted TPi with a wide-eyed smile at the venue's back entrance. The eager school uniforms look on in anticipation as he begins his story on the walk inside: "I was working with Wretch 32 - who is one of our guest vocalists tonight - when I met Stormzy's Manager, Tobe Onwuka. Although I'd heard the name, I'd never seen him perform before. Right from the start, I could see his energy was crazy and his potential as a touring artist was massive. Even though there's just two of them on stage, him and his DJ, Tiny, they really take control and get the whole crowd going.

"I was already working with his Production Manager, Bronski, with some of my other artists. We then approached our Lighting Designer, Steve Bewley and it all came together brilliantly - we're really happy with how the show looks; we wanted to go big and we did!" he affirmed.

TOURING WITH TALENT

Williams continued: "The thing about Stormzy is that it his genre doesn't define him. It doesn't matter that he's known for making grime music, because when you see him perform, he does so much more than that. It's been great watching him grow as an artist and to see his biggest headline shows bring in the likes of Ed Sheehan and Wretch 32 coming to perform alongside him, it's really cemented him as a valuable artist." The recpetion

this evening would confirm Williams' thoughts...

"A brilliant thing about working with him is that he gives us, the crew, the freedom to develop his shows, he trusts us and knows what we can bring to the table, so he's happy to invest in something that's is going to move his career forward. He is a lot of fun to be around - his energy is huge on and off stage! - but he's also a real professional; he trains hard, he eats well and almost treats each show like a work out - trying to beat his PB! This show is a statement and he's as blown away as we are that it all came together."

PRODUCTION AND SHOW DESIGN

Production Manager Bronski is a man of many crafts, an audio engineer who has in the last five years taken on the challenge of becoming a visual and creative designer alongside his partner Amber Rimell. He explained: "I was brought in originally at the start of the summer 2016 when Stormzy was first discussing how to 'up' his production values, utilise house video screens and make his shows more unique to him. On the whole, we kept it fairly simple, yet punchy - it felt too early to walk in and start talking timecode at that point!" he laughed. "Our show for BBC Radio1 Extra at the end of 2016 was the first time we added some set pieces and special effects, and that allowed us to visualise what we could achieve for a full UK tour.

"When I first got the dates though, the Brixton dates stuck out like a sore thumb... Stormzy wanted these homecoming shows to be a real spectacle so his brief was fairly simple, and went something like this: "I want this to be the biggest production Brixton Academy has ever seen!"

The determination to deliver the best show of his career allowed Stormzy's crew to get results with ease. Continued Bronski: "We spoke about how he still wanted to put on a show everywhere else in the UK, but the Brixton residency really needed to blow people away. He wanted everyone - fans, the music industry, critics and social media to be talking about these gigs. On top of this, I also had his full trust, which was an amazing starting point."



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ER Productions provided lasers, as designed into the show by Bronski; Notch software was utilised with d3 Technologies 4x4 media servers, used to operate parts of the visual content; SSE supplied an L-Acoustics rig alongside a monitor control package; Pyrojunkies was asked to deliver a sparkling finale to Brixton; The show was designed to deliver a range of looks, focussing on the idea of movement throughout.

SHOW DEISGN

Bronski commented on the first video concepts: "I had it in my thoughts from very early on in the process that I wanted this show to have a lot of movement within it. I worked on a few design ideas over the Christmas period and felt that with the size of the Brixton venue, we could get away with it being lots of smaller screens. It was a challenging design... so naturally I went down that route!

"We also wanted to avoid having screens and trusses in a straight line, so almost everything was angled. It's got to be said, our Head Rigger [and TPi Award winner] Pete The Greek did a great job; the mother truss ended up covering over half the roof!

"I was really keen on having the lower half rotate, except for Tiny's DJ booth, which would remain static. The Revolving Stage Company had great automation software, which meant we could really be precise and creative with how we positioned the six lower video screens and the Martin by Harman Sceptron video product hidden behind them," he noted.

The Revolving Stage Company supplied the tour with six revolving stages measuring $2m \times 1.8m$ diameter, $2m \times 2m$ in diameter and $2m \times 2.4m$ diameter, all of which were 305mm in height. The revolves were all connected to the company's own programmable software package 'RevolveSolve' which allowed operator Russ Stretton to move them at a specified time, either separately or in unison.

"With everything being able to move, it allowed us to have an element of surprise," continued Bronski. "Myself and my partner, Amber Rimell run a creative company called Tawbox. We decided the show should start by spelling his name out, with Stormzy himself becoming the 'Y' in silhouette. We kept it small at the start and built up the visual capabilities as the show went on. It's only at two thirds of the way through the show that the audience actually see everything we have offer."

The show was broken up into sections: 7 lower screens, 7 lower screens and 1 row of truss; 7 screens and 2 rows of truss, 14 screens (straight) and 2 rows of truss; 14 screens and 3 rows of truss (broken up); 14 screens and 3

rows of truss (formation).

"Adding lasers and the rotating screens within this, and we were able to create a lot of varied looks," he added.

The intricate show design was loaded into Brixton four days before the first show took place and two days of programming followed before Stormzy came in to rehearse.

"Myself and Amber have done a lot of content design and concepts over the last five years, we make some in-house and have some [secret!] colleagues and freelancers we work with too. In this set, nine pieces of content were created in-house, and the rest was outsourced to two trusted designers. Some content was traditionally made as per a standard map, while other content was created on bespoke loops, which we then parallel mapped. For automation, we used Kinesys and programmed the information into our d3 Technologies media servers, therefore the screens moved with perspective and the content design stayed true," he said.

An example of this could be seen during 21 Gun Salute, a duet with rapper Wretch 32 who made an appearance on the night. "We had a black and white sky parallel mapped, and the reflective chrome guns were all directly mapped into the centre of each screen. We utilised the new Notch software within the d3 server directly mapped, and then we parallel mapped."

The video equipment supply came from PRG XL Video, a favourite of Bronski's: "Our PRG Project Manager, Paul 'Macca' Macaulay, has been a massive part of my career move from audio to production / creative. He really has been super enthusiastic with watching me become more adventurous with video. Michael George at PRG put together a great broadcast package for us too."

The video rider comprised ROE MC-7 black face 7mm formed screens, d3 Technologies 4x4 media servers, the Notch Playback software used on the media servers, and Sony HXC-100 cameras for media server input. In addition, the YouTube live webcast and recording utilised Sony FS-7 cameras, Polecam, Movi Rig, a Panasonic 450 camera switcher/PPU and



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Stormzy was joined by several special guests: children who were freestyle dancing, Ed Sheeran and Wretch 32; The visual content was commisioned and created by PM/ Show Designer, Bronski; ER Productions created the laser looks.

Ki Pro recorders used with LiveU Webstreaming, an element of the show which was a huge success.

"We always had the broadcast element for YouTube in mind when creating this show, so there weren't any major additions apart from extra audience lighting," commented Bronski. "The live stream was a massive success - Stormzy got 10,000 new YouTube subscribers in one hour!"

LIGHTING

Over in lighting world, Steve Bewley took up the reigns for design and operation of the rig. Having already worked with Bronski during a Wretch 32 production, the LD was keen to help develop the possibilities of this project. He told TPi: "The camera manipulation system is pretty incredible; the Notch used within the d3 server allowed the content to look as though it's pre-mapped but it's actually happening live, following his movement. The more and more things we added, the more we knew we wanted everything to move - we've been lucky in that we got everything we wanted and it all came together as we'd hoped for the entire visuals of the show."

Bronski added: "I've trusted Caroline Beverly at Neg Earth for a few years now - both for touring and television performances because the crew and equipment at Neg is always top class, so it was a no-brainer to use them as our lighting vendor here."

Bewley was operating on an MA Lighting grandMA2 Full Size console, with 2 NPUs and Neg Earth's own networking. His chosen fixtures included: 24 Claypaky Mythos, 6 Martin by Harman MAC Viper Profiles, 54 Martin by Harman Sceptron 10's, 30 TMB Solaris Flares, 38 Ayrton MagicPanel R's, 10 Ayrton MagicBursts, 3 Philips Color Kinetics ColorBlasts and 92 Jarag 5's. A Follow Me followspot system with 4 Robe BMFLs were used for follow spots duties. Bewley elaborated on the reason behind this design choices: "The Follow Me followspot system is fairly new to the market, and I've been really impressed with it. We've got a shiny floor and generally, if you have a floor that is reflective, it interferes with your screens, yet the Follow Me system works around that by being on the truss instead of manually operated - it's a great bit of kit. The Aryton MagicPanel R's worked really well for picking up the drum rolls, and certain elements of the songs that should be highlighted and the Magic Bursts are the brightest fixtures I've ever worked

with; I was dying to get them on tour and have a play with them! They've really impressed me and I'm so glad we could use them for this show.

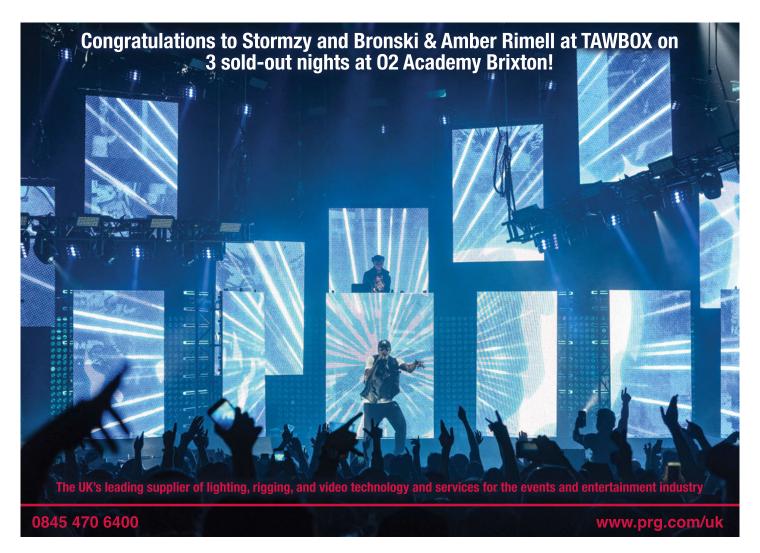
"I like to use the Solaris Flares because of their amazing colour options - you can create different scenes throughout the set, so they're a very versatile fixture to work with. The Claypaky Mythos were also a key fixture for both the first part of the tour where we had the smaller rig, and here in London. They're able to punch through everything else on stage and I knew they'd do the trick - the colour is perfect for what I wanted to ahcieve. The Mythos are placed in positions where they shine through the architecture of what we've physically placed on the stage."

MAC Viper Profiles are being used for side lighting too. An interesting aspect of this rig is the heady number of almsot 100 Jarags, a square, tungsten fixture. Bewley continued: "I remember when I first specified the Jarags, everyone thought I was mad! But it's created massive depth to the stage in such a subtle way; it's enabled it to look bigger than it is even though we have a lot of things happening up there.

"This has been such a great show to be a part of, and we're all really proud of it. For me, this job was all about effects lighting, and doing as Stormzy wished: making his hometown show look huge. We really wanted to give the stage everything he would give it - a varied, and high energy and big impact prodcution. He's crossed over into a lot of different genres - from grime to gospel, hip hop to love songs, so the themes of 'gang signs' evolved from the grime side and the 'prayer' derived from the gospel element of his music. You might not think it'd work, but it does, really well. It's a unique juxtaposition to be working with."

For the UK tour excluding London, Bewley requested some bespoke elements to feature in the smaller shows, and turned to Light Initiative's Technical Project Manager, Simon Cox to fulfil a key look for the other UK dates. Cox noted: "Steve came to us looking for a flexible solution to cope with the challenges of smaller venues, yet it was a very different design for the larger rooms. We made a bespoke creation for Stormzy's tour that consisted of custom-built 4m towers with a 20mm profile and fixtures with 14mm profile. It was a really clean design which helped to minimise any visual clutter on the smaller academy stages.

"Essentially we needed to create a cost effective, slim line lighting













Lighting Designer Steve Bewley with his grandMA2 is said to bring "innovative and creatively complex designs to our attention" according to Light Initiative's Simon Cox; Tour Manager Trevor Williams saw "Massive potential in Stormzy"; Production Manager and Visual Designer, Bronski knew early on that this design would feature many moving parts, leading up to a big reveal as the show went on; Sound Manager Raphael Williams has a close professional relationship with the UK's No.1 grime artist.

solution. Existing, off-the-shelf lighting fixtures weren't suitable for his design - Steve needed something similar to LED battens but more elegant - and much brighter. The output of our product is much brighter than found in standard fixtures and the whole system was run though our IntelliFLEX DMX personality. The system gives the flexibility to create video-style looks, without the need for a media server."

As always for a tour, speed of assembly was important, especially considering this was a bespoke item. Continued Cox: "The build took us around 10 days and the main priority in that time was stability. We created thin lines with maximum light output, and we had to ensure we could keep a continuous 8m horizontal line across the stage, which would remain perfectly straight. Steve is a pleasure to work with, he always brings innovative and creatively complex designs to our attention! He has used our IntelliFLEX personality for many different tours, so it was great to see it being used to its full potential with Stormzy."

LASERS & SPECIAL EFFECTS

In addition to the complex video and lighting designs, Bronski and Bewley also wanted some extra 'wow' factor bringing to Brixton, and opted to use ER Productions for laser effects. ER's Marc Webber commented: "Bronski sent me the show design and asked us to come up with a laser design based on the existing lighting and production design. We opted for single colour Burstboxes, which maximise the effects and can be integrated well into show designs.

"This show design was the perfect backdrop for Stormzy's characteristically energetic performances and gritty lyrics. Bronski created an edgy and mesmerising scheme of lasers, moving lights and video screens - the effects were well paced and helped to punctuate key elements in the show." he said.

Lasers were used at all the Brixton shows on tracks including *Lasers* were used at all the Brixton shows on tracks including *Cold, Big for your Boots, Cigarettes & Cush, Shape of You* and *Know Me From.*

"Although we had a relatively tight budget, the laser kit packed a punch. Our technician rigged 12 red and 12 blue Burstboxes onto the upstage and downstage truss and 2 full colour Tripan scanning systems were located upstage right & left. To enhance the beam profile of the lasers, a Viper deLuxe smoke machine and Unique hazer filled the venue with all-important atmospheric effects."

With so many moving elements in the performance, ER worked closely with the show's motion control operator to ensure that the lasers cleared the larger set pieces/screens.

"Safety is also paramount - all the laser effects were tested and cleared by the venue's Health & Safety officer and we used our propriety show stop solution, the ER E-Stop Interface, at FOH and on stage, providing an additional layer of security," noted Webber.

"Although it was the first time we'd worked with Stormzy, it's always a pleasure to work with Bronski. When he calls, you never know where it's going to take you!" he laughed. "It was an exciting project with a very high standard of production. And, it was great to have had quality programming time scheduled in ahead of the live shows."

TPi Award-winner Pyrojunkies was asked to deliver a sparkling finale to the Brixton shows via some special effects gags. MD Dan Mott spoke to TPi: "We were called in to work on Stormzy's last three London shows. When we got the call from Bronski, we knew we had to make it happen!"

The pyrotechnics expert was tasked with supplying the show design with effects that included, as Mott explained: "6 wireless positions of the Pyrotechnic 1/4sec by 6m jets and 2 Line Rockets that shot over the audience's heads from the stage lighting towers all the way to the back wall of Brixton Academy!

"We also deployed 2 MagicFX Superblaster XL Cannons in the pit with a whopping 20kg of white & silver confetti per night. This created Stormzy's own confetti storm!"

The Special Effect Op on the night was Dan 'Hesky' Eske who used a Galaxis Wireless Firing System from Galazis Showtechnik.

AUDIO

Looking after the tour's sound requirements is Manchester native Raphael Williams, whom TPi first met when he was mixing monitors for Tinie Tempah. Some five years later, and the sound engineer has made quite a name for himself within the rap and grime world - albeit by accident! Williams was managing both FOH and monitor mixes for the tour, moving solely to FOH for the Brixton shows due to the scale of the 5,000 capacity venue.

Williams, who has long been a supporter of Soundcraft desks, was managing the mixes on his own Vi2000. He said: "I use other desks, but for me, Soundcraft is something I've invested in and still love to use. This desk feels very natural to me - it's a warm sounding desk and has a great dynamic range, so it suits many kinds of artist.

"I have confidence in my FOH set up - once I know what the PA is doing following soundcheck, I do all of my ear checks and I'm ready to go. Although, before a show I am always nervous - I think if you're not in that fear zone, something's gone wrong! My personal point of feeling calm is the first time I hear his vocal line when we go live....

"I've worked with a lot of grime and rap artists over the last few years now - I'm almost labelled as a grime engineer! And although it's not necessarily my favourite genre, the music Stormzy is putting out is just so approachable; he really eases you into grime and, in my experience, turns people onto the genre. He's made it more accessible for people who wouldn't have listened before. That's partly down to the way he invites you, as the audience, into his performance and it's also partly down to how the show is mixed - it's a team effort and it's converting people!" he laughed. (Don't just take Williams' word for it - Stormzy's tour is in support of his debut album of the same name - Gang Signs & Prayer - the very first grime album to reach No. 1 in the UK charts.)

Williams had been working with Stormzy for two years when the young rapper was totally new to touring. During this time, Williams states Stormzy's performances have improved ten fold. "His whole character just wants to make things better - for him and for his peers. His attitude towards this means that we have a great relationship. We understand what we can do for each other; I know he can deliver a good vocal and he knows I can deliver a good mix!"

Having been a monitor engineer beforehand, Williams believes it's that experience that has allowed him to become a better FOH engineer. "It's personal to each artist, but I can really pick up what kind of mix an artist wants everyone else to hear out front. Stormzy really likes clarity, almost like 'clean' Grime and that's why he's so listenable. He's a great listener too, so if I say don't do a certain thing with the mic, he won't, because he trusts me to know the show will sound better because of it. He's always wanting to learn and improve his performance as much as he can."

This was evident when Ed Sheeran took to the stage and Stormzy praised his friend for giving him invaluable advice on the music industry and touring.

For his vocals, Stormzy uses a Sennheiser 935 microphone, which Williams is a big fan of: "This microphone works perfectly for his strong and dynamic range vocal range. I tend to turn it down but turn the receiver up as I get more output into the desk and can make it as loud as I want - before any feedback happens!

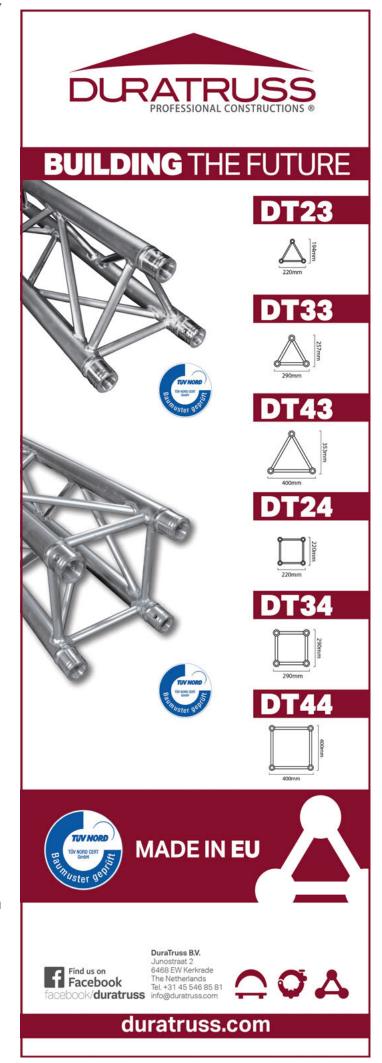
"My role has changed for the bigger shows, and we now have SSE helping out with both sound reinforcement and crew in London. SSE's Paul Keeble is mixing monitors on a Yamaha QL5, which has been working out really well. Stormzy is also using in-ears for the first time on tour. We're using Sennhesier G3 transmitter packs and he's using personally moulded Cosmic Ears in-ears. He loves them! It's a whole new world of sound that he's appreciating, which as an engineer, is really great to see. Having in-ear systems has taken him to a new level on stage; he feels like he's able to give a more professional performance with them in."

The PA system for the Brixton shows was an L-Acoustics K2 rig, which was already in the venue from a previous show, left installed upon request. "We have created two PA zones with two systems: 1 downstairs for the standing crowds and another for the balcony area. The system is comprised of K2 boxes for front hangs, KARA for infill and KS28 subs. We wanted to keep it in because... well, you can't really go wrong with L-Acoustics, can you?" Williams smiled.

CATERING, CARRIAGES AND KUDOS

Eat to the Beat provided crew catering, artist catering and dressing room riders during all 16 sold out shows across the UK and Ireland. Eat to the Beat served up freshly-cooked food, which included some of the artist's personal favourites such as Jerk Chicken and Duck Spring Rolls.

Extra crew for Brixton was provided by Stage Miracles, trucking was via Fly By Nite - which supplied 6 in total for the London residency - and tour







The #Merky touring crew; Stormzy is said to treat his shows like an athletic workout, delivering a high octane live performance to the fans who sent his album to No.1 - a first for UK grime.

bussing was supplied by Phoenix.

Tour Manager Trevor Williams summed up his thoughts: "The residency in Brixton has been incredible to see. The progression from seeing Stormzy begin his touring career in 200-person venues to doing three lots of 5,000 capacity nights in his hometown basically equates to him playing to an arena full of people - we're all excited to see what happens next because Stormzy's character allows you to have an opinion and run with hit - we feel very supported and supportive here."

The last word goes to Production Manger Bronski, who concluded: "The Brixton shows were a huge success and I couldn't be happier. We wanted to show his fans, the media, the internet, that Stormzy is a master in his chosen craft, and I feel we've achieved that - and then some! Everyone who worked with us on these shows were magnificent - we experienced pure professionalism and enthusiasm throughout - special thanks to our amazing Stage Manager, Felix Baird who ran a tight ship, every single one of the show crew and local crew (champions!), Steve Bewley for hitting the show hard, Trev for the ease of getting everything passed through from initial meeting to the very last show. And of course, my partner in crime

Amber Rimell who inspires the craziness!"

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