

Postcards from Yanni

LDs DAVID "GURN" KANISKI AND LEE ROSE

BRING LIGHT TO CONCERTS

AT INDIA'S TAJ MAHAL AND

CHINA'S FORBIDDEN CITY



Standing on the Great Wall of China at Badaling, it's practically impossible for most individuals not to experience a sense of insignificance by comparison. With Beijing's skyline faintly visible in the distance, the realization that this colossal structure was built by the ancestors of the planet's most populated nation only intensifies the lilliputian feeling.

Yet, if his *modus operandi* for choosing venues to showcase his live performances is any indication, Greek New Age musician Yanni is not affected by the petty insecurities that plague mere mortals. In fact, the opposite seems true—the grander the scale and the more exotic the location, the better. Four years ago, the musician fulfilled his dream of

performing at his homeland's historic Herodeion, the world's oldest theatre (almost 2,000 years old), which is adjacent to the Acropolis in Athens. The next year he performed at London's famed Royal Albert Hall, and he followed that up in 1996 with a performance at a Japanese festival in front of the Toji Temple. This year the quest for global recognition broadened further still, with concert events at Agra, India's Taj Mahal in March and Beijing, China's Forbidden City in May.

LD David "Gurn" Kaniski, who has worked with the musician for the past 10 years, remembers that even when no one had heard of Yanni—back when John Tesh was still a member of the band—how the show looked has always been as

Agra, India, home to the Taj Mahal, was the first stop on Yanni's Special Events 97 tour. These televised concerts, which took place in March, marked the first time the monument has been lit in its history. "The Indian government wanted to approve the colors we were going to use beforehand," says LD Lee Rose. "I think they were worried we were planning to make it look like a disco."

crucial as how it sounded. "When I think about the importance that he put on all those shows, including the very first show we ever did, it's the same," Kaniski says. "It's really amazing. I'd get the same vibe from him when he's talking about a regular stage show or about one of the Wonders of the World. He'll keep emphasizing, 'It has to look good; it's really important that it looks good.' Because his music is not controversial in



any way, lyric-wise or stylistically, he can travel anywhere and be welcome to play in these fantastic places. It has been a great opportunity to go with him."

Not to mention a great challenge for the entire production crew. From a lighting angle, these events required designs that would address each site's notable architectural details, work for the live concert, and provide the levels necessary for live television as well as for video. "Yami obviously has a strong belief in video, whereas I have more of a live performance attitude," Kaniski says. "I believe a lot more in the human eye, and its ability to perceive details, and I love to create those little subtleties that come up when you're sitting in a dark theatre."

To convert these nuances into comparable, video-friendly images, Lee Rose of

Ocean, Rose Associates teamed up with Kaniski to light these events, as well as the previous concerts at the Herodeon and the Royal Albert Hall. "Of course, every time Lee and I do a video together, we go head-to-head," Kaniski laughs. "We'll have an endless chase going and I'll complain that it's too much. Then he'll remind me that it's a video. And he's right, because the camera doesn't perceive all of it—it only perceives the motion and a few colors at a time."

When plans for this expedition began last fall, the first concert site scheduled was at the Pyramids of the Sun and the Moon in Teotihuacan, Mexico, so that is where Rose and Kaniski first focused their design strategies. This site was later canceled, as were plans to perform in front of South Africa's Table Rock

Mountain. "We worked out a basic design based upon what we thought the layout was going to be, at least as far as the riser platforms for the orchestra were concerned," Rose explains. "No matter where we went, we were going to want to see through the lighting system to something, be it the Taj Mahal, the Forbidden City, the Pyramids—wherever."

"Gurn, myself, Yanni, and George Veras, the director, had conceptual meetings where we decided we were going to go with a stage that had no roof," Rose continues. "That led us to creating the four upstage towers, so we could meet the backlight angle for television that would ensure that everybody received nice frontlight and hair-light, but at the same time wouldn't take up a lot of space visually in the back. Once



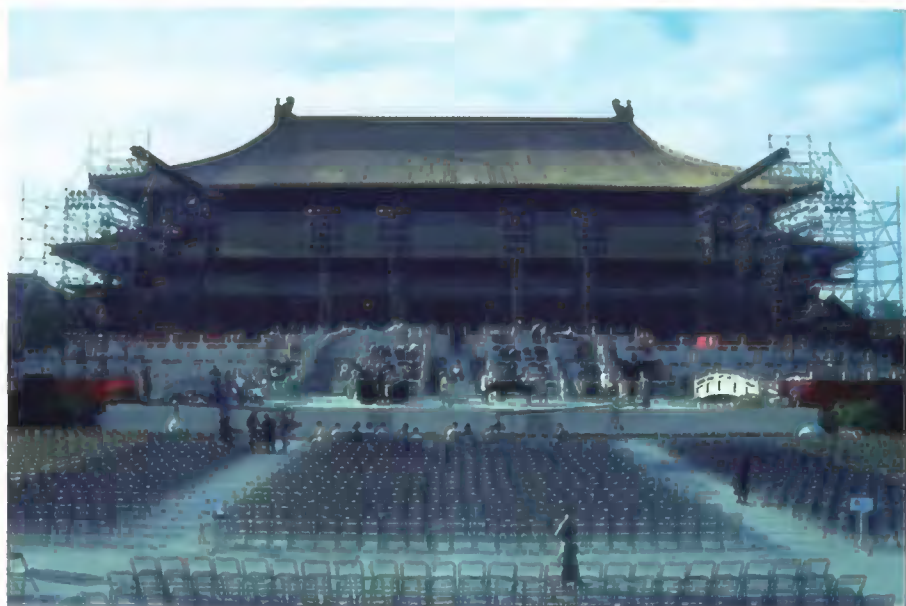
The Special Event site in Beijing's Forbidden City was set up in front of the Working People's Cultural Palace, a huge pagoda with two smaller pagodas flanking its courtyard (left). The 7k Xenotech Britelights shooting up from behind the structure could be seen from Tiananmen Square. The orchestra was set up on the pagoda's steps (below). LD Kaniski worked out the orchestra's configuration and the placement for the set design (which includes arched bridges over reflecting pools) with set designer David George of George & Goldberg.

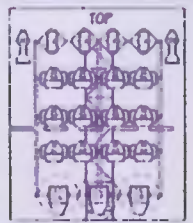
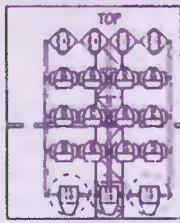
we lost all those overhead angles, we had to design something that would give us the positions we needed to get good-quality television closeups, and visually be an interesting element to add without overriding the background."

From there the designers played around with different equipment packages. "Originally those back towers had [Vari*Lite®] VL5s™ on them, but when they decided they wanted to try to purchase some equipment of their own, we had to expand them a little bit to accommodate the [High End Systems] Studio Colors® they bought. We decided to put [Light & Sound Design] Icons® on the towers' bottoms because they're the biggest units and they rotate gobos. When you're working outdoor venues and the smoke level is going to be whatever the gods were willing to give us, it was important to try to be able to get those effects without having to count on having a lot of atmosphere in the air."

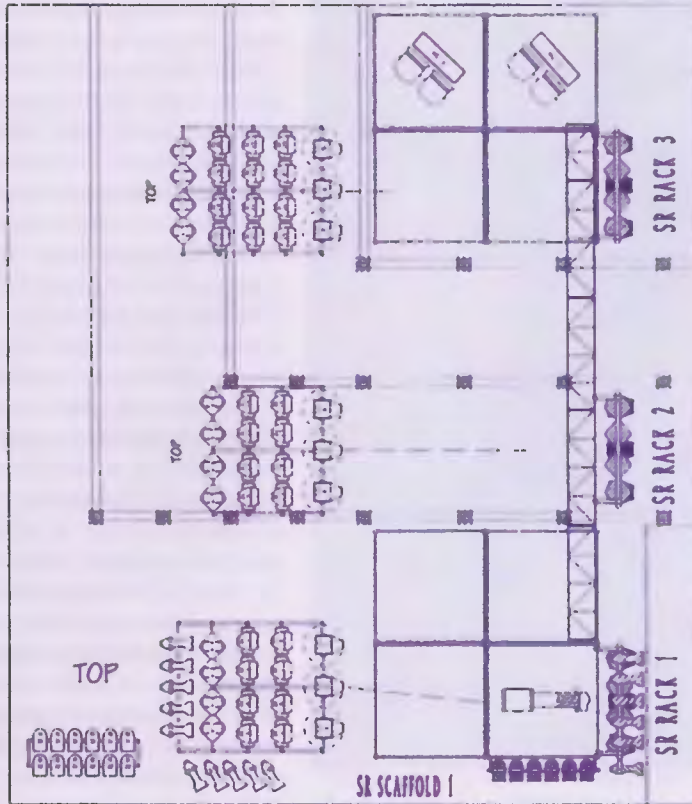
Once the upstage area was worked out, the LDs decided to continue with the tower theme, although the stage plans were still incomplete, as a production designer had yet to be chosen. "We knew we'd need a stage structure that could accommodate access on and off the stage for the load-in and load-out, as well as the monitor position. We also knew from previous experience at the Acropolis that, when you're shooting straight down the keyboard or straight across the keyboard rig, the shots of Yanni were side positions," Rose explains. "So to incorporate the position along with the spot angles that we wanted to use from the same neighborhood, we continued the lighting pod scheme down the sides, and built a scaffold to support it."

The LDs next concentrated on putting key lighting positions into the show. "Gurn and I knew we would have a front-of-house tower, so we had set it to a height of 50' (15m), which was a realistic height to build and would also keep the followspots from looking too flat," Rose

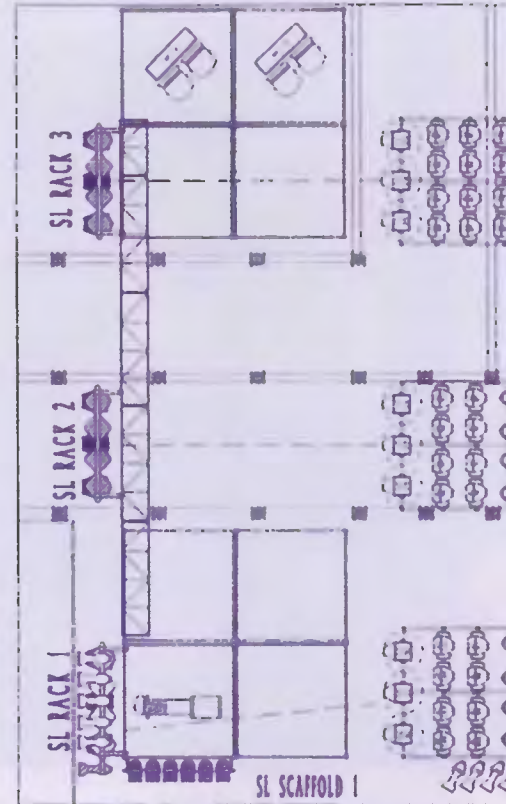




UPSTAGE TRUSS



STAGE RIGHT SCAFFOLD



STAGE LEFT SCAFFOLD

YANNI SPECIAL EVENTS 1997

LIGHTING DESIGNERS

Lee Rose, David "Gunn" Karvick

ASSISTANT LD

Paul Lertnori

ARTISAN PROGRAMMER/OPERATOR

Matt Firestone

ICON PROGRAMMER/OPERATOR

Warwick Price

STATUS CUE PROGRAMMER/OPERATOR

Dietrich Juengling

LIGHTING CREW CHIEF

Stephen "Oak" Harris

LIGHT & SOUND DESIGN CREW CHIEF

Ian "Dobbo" Dobson

GAFFER

Jeff Durling

VARI-LITE CREW CHIEF

Pete Radice

VARI-LITE TECHNICIANS

China: Cliff Myers, Ken Thorniley
India: Matt Croft, Jonathan Wood

FOLLOWSPOT TECHNICIAN

Greg Price

CYBERLIGHT/STUDIO COLOR TECHNICIAN

Tiffany McLane

VARI-LITE/MEGALITE TECHNICIAN

Keiter Thorniley

XENOTECH BRITELIGHT TECHNICIANS

Jeff Wilson
Carl Daniels (China)
Dave Laranaga (India)

DIMMER TECHNICIAN

Tom McGillich

ICON TECHNICIANS

Simon Caru-Wilson, Christopher Lohder,
Joseph Gonzales (India)

LIGHTING TECHNICIANS

Gus Thompson

MOLEMAG TECHNICIAN

Bill Cherrington

MASTER ELECTRICIAN

Lee Richardson

VIDEO DIRECTOR

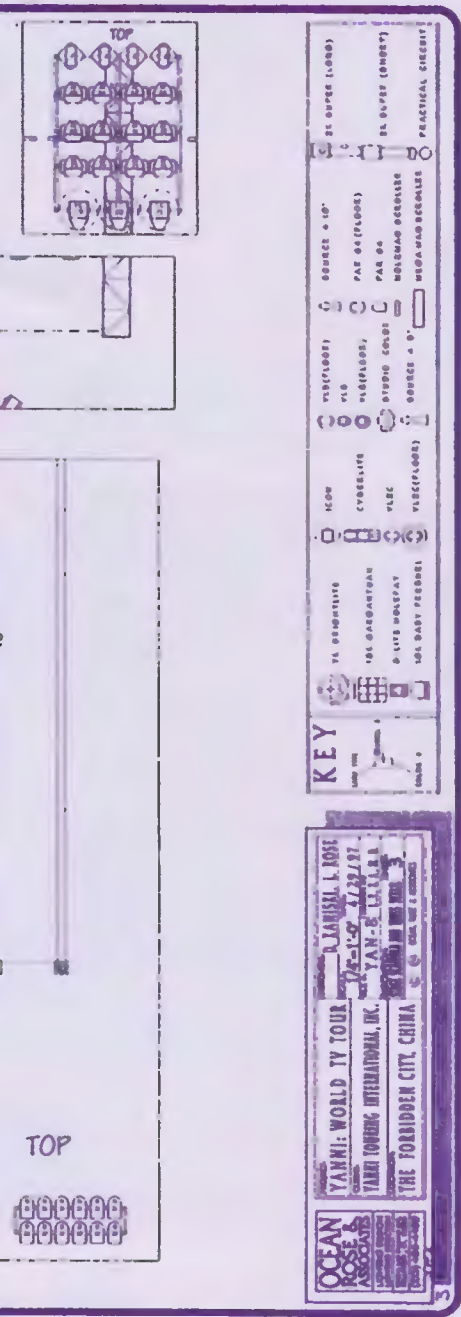
George Veras

TECHNICAL MANAGER

Brian Powers

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR

Ritchie Wirth



The stage light plot for the Forbidden City (left) is similar to the one used for the Taj Mahal, although many lamp positions were rearranged to light the area 360°.

says. "Originally, we planned to fly a truss off the scaffolding. The truss was about 16' (4.8m) wider than the scaffolding, so that we could get a little farther out with the key lights. Because in the orchestra setup, everybody's turned toward center, so if you want to light straight into the face of someone sitting on the stage-left side, you have to be on the stage-right side of the front-of-house tower to do it. Otherwise you end up profiling them, which just doesn't look as good."

With throw distances in the 120-150' (37-46m) range, the designers considered using ACL bars because at 50' (15m) in the air, they would provide about 160-175' (49-53m) throws. "That's what we used as key light for the Acropolis show, but we had had such success with the 5° and 10° ETC Source Fours at the Royal Albert Hall show that we figured we could cover the necessary sections with three 10° Source Fours. And two 5° Source Fours could cover soloists—even at those distances."

When the lighting crew arrived in India, they discovered that the truss for the Source Fours added too much weight to the tower, so they hung the lights directly off the scaffolding. "That saved us all the motor weight and the truss weight," Rose says. "It really worked out, so we did the same in China."

For audience lighting, the LDs consulted with Yanni, who said he liked the approach they had used at the Herodeon. "At the Acropolis it was all back cross-light; there wasn't much light on people's

faces, whereas at the Royal Albert Hall we created direct guide light, which wrapped around into people's faces so you could see them on reverse shots," Rose explains. "Certainly you want to see that people showed up for the show. But in Greece it was good that we didn't have their faces lit, because there were a lot of dignitaries from the government there who didn't really respond to the music. We lit the faces of the people in the first 10-15 rows, so if the camera operators wanted to get a reaction shot, they could. But pretty much the rest of the audience was lit three-quarter back cross, so that you got a sense that they were there without actually being able to see their faces."

Now it was time to move on to lighting the Taj Mahal, which, incidentally, had never been done before this event. The designers zoned the site areas into three lighting positions: 50-100' (15-30m), 100-200' (30-61m), and 200-2,000' (61-610m). "Our design for the Mexican pyramids turned out to be kind of a fire drill, but we established a basic package that would theoretically work for all three locations—and that included units that could throw huge distances," Rose says. "After doing a little bit of research, we came up with using the Xenotech 7k Britelights®, because there aren't really too many other lights that will push that much intensity over that distance and be able to remote focus and remote color change. Then for medium-distance coverage on any of the three monuments, the LSD MegaMags with the 10ks gave us the ability to spot and flood the units, which enabled us to decide how much light we needed over what distances, and still maintain color changers on them.

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Michael Weiss

TOUR MANAGER

Vincent Lorry

ASSISTANT TOUR MANAGER

Harrison LaDuke

SITE COORDINATOR

Greg Pope

ASSISTANT SITE COORDINATOR

Richie Bray

SITE LOCATION OFFICE MANAGER

Kent Black

SET DESIGNER/FABRICATOR

David George/George & Goldberg

RIGGERS

Dean Hart, Chris Schmidt

MASTER CARPENTER

Joe "Grank" Mrazik

CARPENTER

Clairry Lee

MAIN LIGHTING CONTRACTOR

Ocean, Rose Associates

LIGHTING SUPPLIERS

Light & Sound Design, Vari-Lite, High End Systems, Xenotech

LIGHTING EQUIPMENT (CHINA)

- (48) Vari*Lite™ VL2Cs
- (12) Vari*Lite™ VL5s
- (36) Vari*Lite™ VL6s
- (30) Light & Sound Design™ Icon
- (12) Light & Sound Design™ MegaMags
- (22) Light & Sound Design™ MoleMags
- (12) Xenotech™ 7k Britelights
- (24) High End Systems™ Cyberlights

(104) High End Systems™ Studio Colors

- (28) ETC™ 5° Source Fours
- (34) ETC™ 10° Source Fours
- (18) VNSP PAR bars of six
- (14) NSP PAR bars of six
- (14) MFL PAR bars of six
- (2) WFL PAR bars of six
- (22) Mole-Richardson™ Molelay 8-lights
- (24) 10k baby fresnels
- (4) Strong™ 2k long-throw Super Troupers
- (2) Strong™ 2k short-throw Super Troupers
- (1) Vari*Lite™ Artisan control console
- (1) Light & Sound Design™ Icon Console
- (1) High End Systems™ Status Cue control console
- (1) ETC™ Expression 2X control console
- (4) Reel EFX™ DF-50 foggers
- (4) High End Systems™ F-100 performance fog generators with remotes

For the close-in zone, we positioned the Megalites from TMB with the Wybron Garganturam color scrollers.”

The original plan was to light the Taj Mahal from three angles to provide some sense of the monument’s three-dimensionality. “Of course, when we got there, all the distances had changed—for political reasons and the fact that the river hadn’t gone down,” Rose says. “So we were farther away than we thought we’d be, and then our 70’ (21m) towers could not happen because our 80’ (24m) crane could only lift to 24’ (7m). So, we built them that high and put them at what would have been a three-quarter angle had we been playing the center of the Taj. But since we were playing the corner of the Taj, it was actually straight in on one side and off to the side on the other. We just made what we could work, given the fact that we were in a developing country and miles from anything.”

By keeping the basic plan together the lighting crew was still able to light the Taj Mahal on two sides. “You could see that it was actually a three-dimensional structure, even though it was about a quarter-mile away,” Rose says. “But there were a few times where they got in far enough on the lens so that it pulled the background into the back of a shot, and the Taj looked like it was 100’ off the back of the stage. We felt pretty comfortable with the way we had the Taj lit.”

For the show in China, the crew didn’t have to build roads, use camels to haul equipment crates, fight mosquitoes, or defer to the itinerant water buffaloes’ rush hour. Here the show was in the Forbidden City in a courtyard in front of the Working People’s Cultural Palace—which actually hosted the load-in of an art show during Yanni’s production set-up.

“We let our guard down slightly after India—our team was kind of cocky, because when we saw the space in China, we thought it would be a piece of cake in comparison,” Kaniski admits. “But we were also touring, and then Yanni added extra shows, which cut into our programming time. Then we were made aware of new building restrictions, plus it rained a lot. The MegaMags especially didn’t react well to the rain and the wind. They were ripping, and we were constantly repairing them. Lee and I were getting to the point where we considered just blowing them off. But even though it rained again right before doors opened, everything worked. The



In India (top) the musicians were set up on the production’s own stage, on the bank of the Yamuna River. In China, Yanni and the 40-piece orchestra settled onto the pagoda’s steps (above).

crew came in with big smiles, saying, ‘Okay, we’re ready. Everything is fine.’ We were really blessed with the people we had on our crew. All of them just kept on going, even though there were quite a few late nights because most of the designing there was done on-site. India was different because we had our own stage there. But in China we were primarily set up on the steps of the pagoda, so all the positions had changed.”

“China was a lot different, because unlike having one thing that was directly a quarter-mile off the back of the stage, we were up against a giant pagoda, and we had 360° to deal with,” Rose adds. “So we started with our basic package, then decided we would use the Xenotech Britelights for a beam effect in the air, because we really didn’t have to cover long-range distances. The MegaMags basically covered the roofs of the buildings, and the Garganturams were put at the back of the stage. Then we added

units for the side buildings: uplights on all the columns and the lights on the walls, just to give it a sense of depth.”

To treat each song with a suitable amount of depth, the rest of the shows’ lighting systems also included a substantial moving lights package, including Vari*Lite VL2C™, VL5, and VL6™ automated luminaires, LSD Icons, and High End Systems Cyberlights® and Studio Colors. “Management wanted to buy the Studio Colors for financial reasons, so Lee and I agreed we could use them on the back side washes only, because the color system is essentially the same as the Cyberlight flags coming in from the side,” Kaniski explains. “High End Systems were great to us in rehearsals. But of course we still needed to rent Vari*Lites and Icons and a variety of different lamps for layering. It’s all part of the design.”

Also integral to the design were the shows’ multi-layered lighting crew,

which the designers hand-picked for these demanding projects. "Pretty early on I knew that this was going to be an insane project, especially considering where we were going," Rose says. "So I had started talking to Gurn about who we wanted to have program the show and operate the consoles."

After much discussion and searching for available programmers and operators whom the designers had worked with before, Warwick Price signed on as Icon operator and Matt Firestone as Vari*Lite Artisan* operator. When the LDs realized that they couldn't feasibly split up the Cyberlights and Studio Colors onto those desks, they added a Status Cue* console and High End suggested operator Dietrich Juengling. "Paul Lennon, my assistant, then became the conventional board (ETC Expression) operator as well," Rose says. "Paul is a great, even-headed board operator, always on the money, and really good at tracking paperwork and cues and information so that Gurn and I can think about the artistic side and not have to worry about the technical details. I know some LDs really like to get very specific about that, but I just want it to happen."

The rest of the crew gradually shaped up as John Lobel at LSD suggested Stephen "Dak" Harris for overall crew chief, and Lee Richardson signed on for the unenviable master electrician monster job. Jeff Durling, who had worked with Rose years ago, became the project's gaffer. Pete Radice then signed on to crew-chief for Vari-Lite. From Vari-Lite in London, John Wood agreed to tech the Garganturams in India and Matt Croft also came along as another technician.

Kaniski has worked with Delicate Productions on many tours, so he hired Gus Thompson to tech the Cyberlights and Studio Colors. Tiffany McLane also joined the crew as a technician/followspot operator. "We also had Greg Smith of Arc Lighting doing the followspots that were loaded with 4,000W xenon lamps," Kaniski says. "They gave us extra punch, which was great. Greg and Bill Cherrington and some of the LSD guys also doubled as followspot operators because we couldn't rely on anybody out there. That was nice, because then we had a little family on it."

"Xenotech's crew kept changing until

the last minute, but LSD had their crew laid out fairly early on," Rose says. "We ended up with 23 guys in the lighting crew, and my argument to management was that we couldn't exactly count on having qualified stagehands in Agra, India. So we ended up with the full crew."

The designers also ended up with a full rehearsal period, although this too was changed at the last minute. Regular show dates had been booked into the Foxwoods Casinos in early March, and the crew was supposed to program for the special event shows there as well. Instead, Kaniski went and did those shows and production rehearsals actually took place in Culver City, CA. "The room was 35' [11m] tall, so we could trim the rig out pretty close to what we would have in India to do programming," Rose explains. "The front-of-house of the spots were half as far, but they were also half as low. So the angles as far as what the look would be for the key light and followspots was pretty close."

"I knew this was going to be an insane project, especially considering where we were going," Rose says.

"Then they decided they wanted to look at it on camera for a few days at the end of rehearsals, so they brought in the new National Digital Television Center's truck with all the digital cameras for the last few days of rehearsals," Rose continues. "We taped the rehearsals. We got two days of on-camera shot-setting and blocking, and one day of actually running through the show. We used that videotape for programming when we were tweaking the programming in India because we had the stage layout and the lights more or less as they would be; the only thing we were envisioning was the Taj. When we got to India we used that tape to play back. Gurn and I would look at the videotape and do our tweaks to the cues we wrote at Sony Studios."

Those cues were also difficult to finalize because Yanni changed the set list quite a few times. "But by the time we were loaded in for Sony we had a fairly locked-in set list," Rose says. "We certainly had a limited amount of time to spend on the songs, but Gurn

knows the material inside out. He'd been listening to the new material as it developed, so he even knew how those songs broke down."

For Kaniski, the personal design challenge was lighting all of the old songs again. "I've done them again and again—and for video. It's a real artistic challenge, because you have to search to come up with a different concept," Kaniski says. "Plus, artists get used to the cueing; they like to see it. It's almost part of them. And so do the audiences. There is a cue where Yanni reaches out and his backlights come on in gold. But for the last tour I changed it to a steel blue. And a fan actually wrote me and said, 'Your show was beautiful, but when he does that pose, it really needs to be gold.' People get used to seeing that music lit that way, and since it's thematic music anyway, you can argue that that's the best approach. Obviously you want the song to be lit with the correct feel and look—the difficult part is to keep the theme but change the look. Of course, that happens anyway when you redesign a set or a lighting rig, because you'll certainly have different angles."

"To me, Yanni's music is very visual; when you hear it, you feel something," the LD continues. "Plus, having the orchestra there is obviously a major element. A song that might sound wishy-washy on tape can be a really strong song by the time the orchestral arrangements are set up in a live situation."

During this process, it was Rose's job to make sure the lighting cues worked for video. "We talked about general concepts for a look of a particular song based on the tone of the music, and then made sure that the cues we put together were within that dynamic range for television," Rose says. "Gurn likes really artsy looks where it's very high contrast; the darks are very dark, the brights are very bright. But of course, that approach doesn't work really well on television."

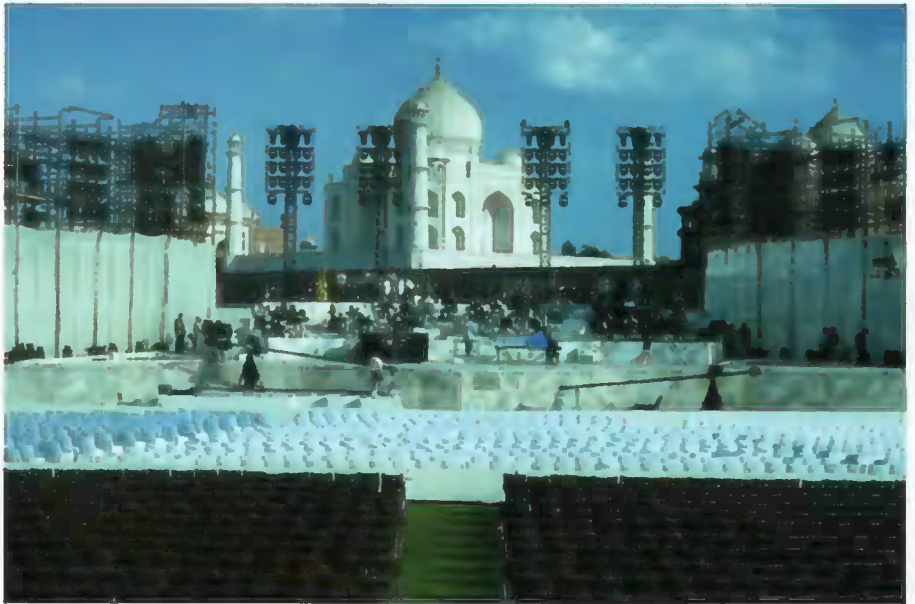
"We both came up with ideas about what we wanted to do on different parts of the songs, and having two brains working on it allowed us to get through it faster," Rose continues. "Plus, our crew, especially Matt and Warwick, came up with really good looks. It was very much a collaborative process in the designing of the cues. The final decision about whether something would work for tele-

vision fell into my lap, but everybody put their two cents in."

All of the crews' efforts will be available for viewing once the shows are edited together. "The India show was live, or live-to-tape on the Indian television station, Dardashdi. And China Cable TV took the Chinese show off of tape, so it ran in China and India," Rose says. "It's now being edited along with some behind-the-scenes footage that was shot on 16mm for two television specials.

"There was another camera crew that shot 35mm film on show days because I understand that Yanni is trying to do a theatrical trailer for the project," Rose continues. "So, in November there might be something at the movie theatres, which will be really cool. I'm really looking forward to seeing that footage, because I'm sure on 35mm film it looked great. Then it's going to be on PBS in December for part of their pledge breaks. After that it will be a home video, where they'll try to recoup some of these costs. This whole project was an expensive proposition, to put it mildly.

"It was probably one of the most challenging projects I've ever worked on—it took over my life for an entire year. The China show was so much easier than India, because we were on concrete, and there were restaurants around. Beijing is



The Taj Mahal site by day with the lighting towers Total Fabrications engineered to carry up to 1,700lb (765kg) on a single face. Resistance to lateral wind force was provided by a series of guy wires that connected the tower members to the truss base members as well as the water ballast positions constructed in the ends of the truss outrigger members.

a major city, so you could go out and get things that we couldn't in Agra."

Maybe they wouldn't want to do it again, but it's safe to say that most of the crew will never forget the experience. "I really can't say enough good things about the way the crew handled everything, because our timeline kept being

twisted every time we turned around, and everybody just dealt with it." Kaniski says. "It was great to be able to say that you were putting together a huge, professional production in a developing country like India, but that you were smiling just because your crew was making all the camels work!" □



Lee Rose and David "Gurn" Kaniski were honored for their contribution to the Yanni concerts by Lighting Dimensions magazine and were awarded "Entertainment Lighting Designers of the Year" at the LDI convention in Las Vegas in November of 1997.

For more information, please contact Denise Miranda-Costa at Ocean, Rose & Associates, (213) 860-3500 Phone, (213) 860-3505 Fax, email: ora@ocean-rose.com

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