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When stars align

Mike Clark reports on a vivid projection-mapping show that celebrated the rich cultural heritage of the Italian city of Ferrara . . .

[Italy] Visitors to museums and historic buildings are being treated to increasingly elaborate forms of entertainment in this age of technological abundance. A notable trend in recent years is for artists to come up with ambitious immersive experiences, from elaborate gallery exhibitions to large-scale projects that utilise historic buildings as a blank canvas to, quite literally, take the art of projection mapping to new heights.

The latter describes the work that was recently undertaken by Ravenna-based visual artist Andrea Bernabini, who conceived and directed *Ex Astris (From the Stars)*, an astrologically-themed art projection on the façade and oldest tower of the UNESCO-protected St. Michael's Castle in Ferrara. Projection content was inspired by famous paintings on show at the city's recently re-opened Schifanoia Museum, and the outdoor installation also deployed a line-array audio system.

PAINTING WITH LIGHT

The creative team, led by Bernabini, comprised 3D artist Sara Calliumi and music designer Davide Lavia, both long-time collaborators. Bernabini takes up the story: "The most important aspect from the point of view of hardware was handling the dimensions of the façade and tower and their various shapes, with parts that protruded several metres. At the technical planning stage, we had to find the solutions to ensure the best result in terms of lumen output (at least 120lm/1sq.m) and resolution. From a creative point of view, once we got each subject into perspective, we analysed its contents, history and documentation in depth. For this, I also had the assistance of the museum's director, Giovanni Sassu."

Video projectors were installed on a building opposite the castle, positioned obliquely to the castle façade, at



a distance of between 30m-68m. In addition to the six Christie Roadster HD20K-J 3DLP units, there were two Panasonic PT-RQ32K 3-Chip DLP Solid Shine Laser 4K projectors chosen for their high power and excellent dynamic contrast, which were utilised for the large tower. Meanwhile, the audio system featured a stack of eight Outline Eidos 265 LA line array elements and three K-array KS7 subwoofers at either end of the castle, to cover the area where crowds would gather to watch the show.

At its heart, the video content featured images of famous paintings shown at the museum. To capture high-resolution photos of them, Bernabini used a Canon EOS R6 camera and two lenses, a 70-200mm f2.8 and a TS E45 f2.8 tilt-shift; he also used a Sony Alfa A7 MkIII camera with a Sony E 16-55mm f2.8 lens. "The artwork was reproduced with a very high resolution, then post-produced, processed with the addition of effects, and cropped to be englobed in animations or to add textures to the 3D models."



MODUS OPERANDI

Around 70% of the video was realised by Caliumi in 3D and traditional animation using software such as Maxon Cinema 4D, Adobe After Effects, Apple Final Cut Pro and Adobe Photoshop. Caliumi has worked with Bernabini for many years, from the conceptual phase to the executive stage of his projects.

Regarding the team's *modus operandi*, Caliumi says: "Andrea shares all the creative phases with me, firstly finding the location and the possible topics to cover in-depth and photographing the contents that fascinate him. Then we share them and, often with the support of an expert such as an art historian or museum curator, start work on a first creative draft. This is when we share ideas and establish a 'plot', a sequence of creative scenes, after which I start to put the project together, a step-by-step

process I share closely with Andrea. This exchange of ideas also involves musician Davide Lavia, who's responsible for the sound design."

STARS AND SYMBOLS

"The substantial difference from other previous projects was the conceptual element on which we worked in the museum's Hall of Months," continues Bernabini. "It took us into the fantastic world of stars and astrology - dream-like and full of alchemical symbology. Our visuals therefore featured astral mythology and personification of the constellations of the zodiac. Far-off echoes and stars took spectators on a journey through time and across continents, from Europe through the Middle East to Asia, to understand the influence stars have on our lives." In particular, the project highlighted the importance of astrology in the 15th century,

featuring footage that represented the sacred nature of the cosmic order, the stars and their connections with the Earth.

To add an aural dimension to this, the music composed for the show was initially abstract, with pad atmospheres and melodic, up-tempo rhythmic patterns that Lavia modified spatially. He says: "I made considerable use of the Omnisphere v2.5 suite and the percussion library of Native Instruments Komplete 13 Ultimate Collector's Editor, such as West Africa, Symphony Series Percussion and Action Strike Themes with treated piano and a 'particles engine' such as the NI library of Noire piano, and the Una Corda library for the softer timbres. I often combined open atmospheres with patches such as Omnisphere's Frozen Quasar and Majestic 8 bit-universe with string section sounds such as

Symphony series String Ensemble, Stradivari Cello and Stradivari Violin."

All this material was played via a Nord Stage 3 keyboard for the parts that required weighted keys, and a Komplete Kontrol S49 Mk2 smart keyboard controller for the remainder. For the show's last two scenes, Lavia collaborated with guitarist Michele Mercardo, who added melodic nuances with a Charvel Pro Dk2 and a Gibson Les Paul Custom Black Beauty through an AXE Fx III processor. The music also featured three pieces from the latest album of composer Bruno Contini.

After the event, Bernabini enthused: "The show lasted 16 minutes - a considerable length for projection mapping of such high quality. I am particularly proud of this project, as it was the 10th UNESCO monument I have produced a projection-mapping show for." ✕



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