



**Entertaining**  
the Entertainers

Sleepless nights and some unique challenges confronted the local events industry during the Dubai International Film Festival. Patrick Elligett reports.



AYA and Circo De Bakuza teamed up to provide creative performances at DIFF.



**W**ith more than 1500 guests including some of Hollywood, Bollywood and Arab cinema's finest in town for the launch of the 2008 Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF), organisers kicked the week-long event off in style with a night of fire breathing and acrobatics, on top of the usual opening night celebrity appearances and red carpet arrivals.

The local events industry was put to the ultimate test during the festival, setting up large productions at three different locations, two of which were staged on the opening night alone.

The conclusion of the festival was marked by a major event at Bab Al Shams Desert Resort, located on the outskirts of Dubai.

While, the venue provided an impressive backdrop for the event, it also presented the production crew with a unique set of challenges.

For the opening night events, an abundance of challenges confronted the production team, mainly relating to the intricately directed, creative performances.

Time constraints and spatial restrictions also proved significant challenges.

Several local technical experts and equipment providers came together to collaborate on the Madinat Arena open-

ing gala and the subsequent Mina A' Salam beach party event.

Gearhouse Staging Connections, Re-deye Events Services, Protec and Delta Dubai were among the major providers of sound, lighting and rigging for entertainment during the opening night festivities.

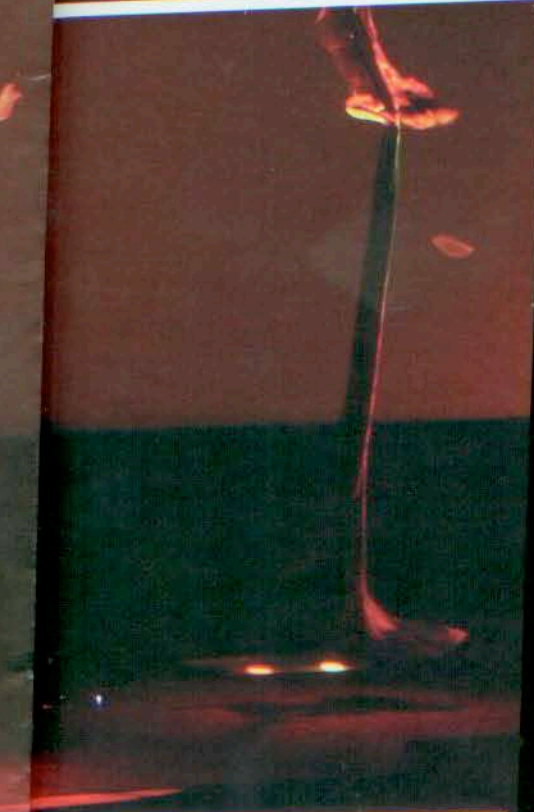
Meanwhile, other local players, including Artes Middle East, provided sound, lighting and projection equipment for the various film screening locations established throughout the city for the week-long festival.

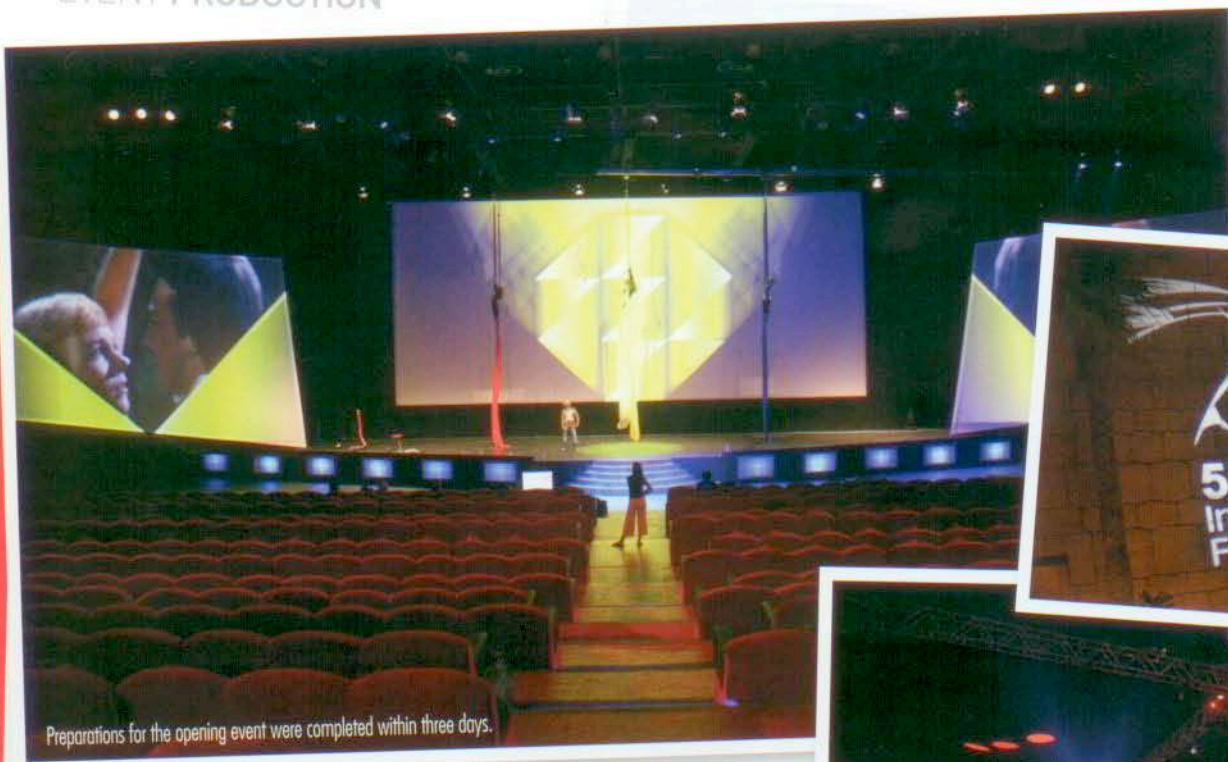
Creative event production company AYA, which coordinated the entertainment segments in conjunction with fellow Montreal-based event management firm Circo de Bakuza, has been attempting to solidify its position in the Middle East recently, and its involvement in this year's DIFF event went along way to achieving this.

AYA management admits that the DIFF project was the biggest undertaking in which the company has participated to date in the Middle East.

"The setup we had at the beach party was just phenomenal," explains Micha Grundman, managing director of AYA. "We combined technology and human performance in a very unique way.

"We wanted to ensure the installation remained discreet, so as not to detract from the performance. As a result, we





Preparations for the opening event were completed within three days.

built a circular platform and created an immersive environment with custom-fabricated projection screens which represented sails," says Grundman.

"Each screen had three, seven metre high poles with projectors located at the top of each one, which enabled the team to project a series of scans resulting in an amazing effects-laden presentation."

For all three of the major productions staged during the festival, Christie projectors were employed to provide de-

**"The producers of the show were quite specific from outset and requested lots of small changes along the way." - Richard Estridge.**

tails and layers on the mostly custom-fabricated screens. Eight 25,000 lumen projectors were used during the closing event, complemented by two 16,000 lumen Christie Roadsters.

The Madinat Arena event utilised several low-intensity projectors, while the Mina A Salam beach event relied on four Christie LX55's to provide projection and a single 25,000 lumen projector used in conjunction with each of the eight screens. To ensure the technology in-

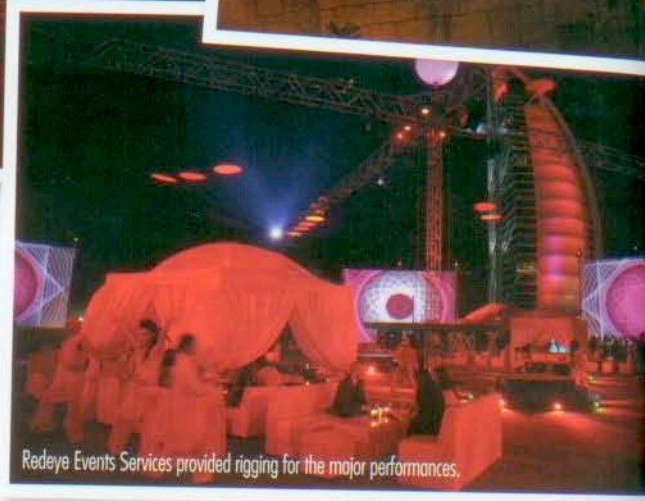
stallation at the beachside event remained discreet, organisers turned to shovels and bobcats to hide anything that was able to be buried.

"We dug up the beach and buried all the cables and hid all the ballasts for the rigging," explains Grundman. "Along with the time constraints we faced, this made the preparation for the event very challenging. But it was all worthwhile in the end."

"In the arena we only had three days to prepare rigging, reversals and programming, so that was very tight, but on the beach we had about a week," he says.

"The beach venue was under preparation for about two weeks before we arrived so the size of the venue could be extended and then we put the stage down and allocated a week for set up."

Redeye Events was charged with supplying the complex rigging setup for the beach soirée, the Madinat Arena event and the closing event at Bab Al Shams Resort. Despite a multitude of obstacles, the company managed to accommodate for high-flying acrobats and countless pieces of sound, lighting and projection equip-



Redeye Events Services provided rigging for the major performances.

ment as well as artistic props.

The company's crew worked tirelessly throughout the lead-up to the opening night of DIFF, in order to create the closest, safest and most covert trussing and rigging systems possible, to adhere with the specific and meticulous creative demands of the performers.

Designed by Montreal-based creative director Tony Babinsky, the beachside performance was intricately designed, precisely choreographed, and complemented by a stunning backdrop, which included picturesque views of the world-famous Burj Al Arab.

"The producers of the show were quite specific about what they needed for the performances from the outset and requested lots of small changes along the way, so we tried our best to accommodate them and be as flexible as we could," says Richard Estridge, system de-

signer for Redeye Events Services.

"Whenever you have flying performers, the rigging has to be made very specific and extremely precise," comments Estridge. "Trying to get someone to go through the air from point A to point B at the right speed and the exact angle can sometimes be difficult, but it is definitely possible."

The stage for the Mina Al Salam beach event was 50 metres in diameter and surrounded by a series of inwardly facing projector screens placed around the perimeter of the stage.

Estridge says that safety and precision were key factors in the rigging design of the Redeye set-up, as they are with any aerial performance.

Safety requirements were also addressed by the producers, due to the potential for mishaps associated with some aspects of the performances, such as the inclusion of fire and horses.

"We could have put the rigging up on 3mm steel wire, but we decided to double it up to increase the safe working load," explains Estridge.

"We always conscious of ensuring the minimum weight load for a performer involved in a dynamic aerial act is two hundred and fifty kilograms."

To create the illusion of floating, various pieces of equipment were hung from 5mm steel wire rather than trussing, which would usually be expected for the specialised lighting equipment that was utilised at the beach event.

Twenty-eight light-reflective disks, approximately four feet in diameter were cunningly hung from the wire in such a way that the audience found it difficult to identify that they were actually attached to rigging given the dark sky and colourful scenic backdrop.

At all three events, the organisers and the companies involved went to great lengths to ensure that the presence of production technology was provided maximum impact, while remaining barely visible to the audience.

Although the final product was up to standard on all three occasions, those involved behind-the-scenes had to overcome some considerable hurdles in order to achieve their goals within the limited preparation time available at the opening event. Some toes were inevitably stepped on during the Madinat Arena event as multiple providers raced to get their support structures in place. But despite the potential for the many cooks to spoil the broth, the end result pleased everybody involved in the production.

Delta Dubai provided L-Acoustics sound gear for the Mina A Salam beach-front party under the guidance of co-producers AYA. The company also provided equipment for the Bab Al Shams closing event which included its brand new DiGiCo D5 audio desk.

"We put in a surround sound system

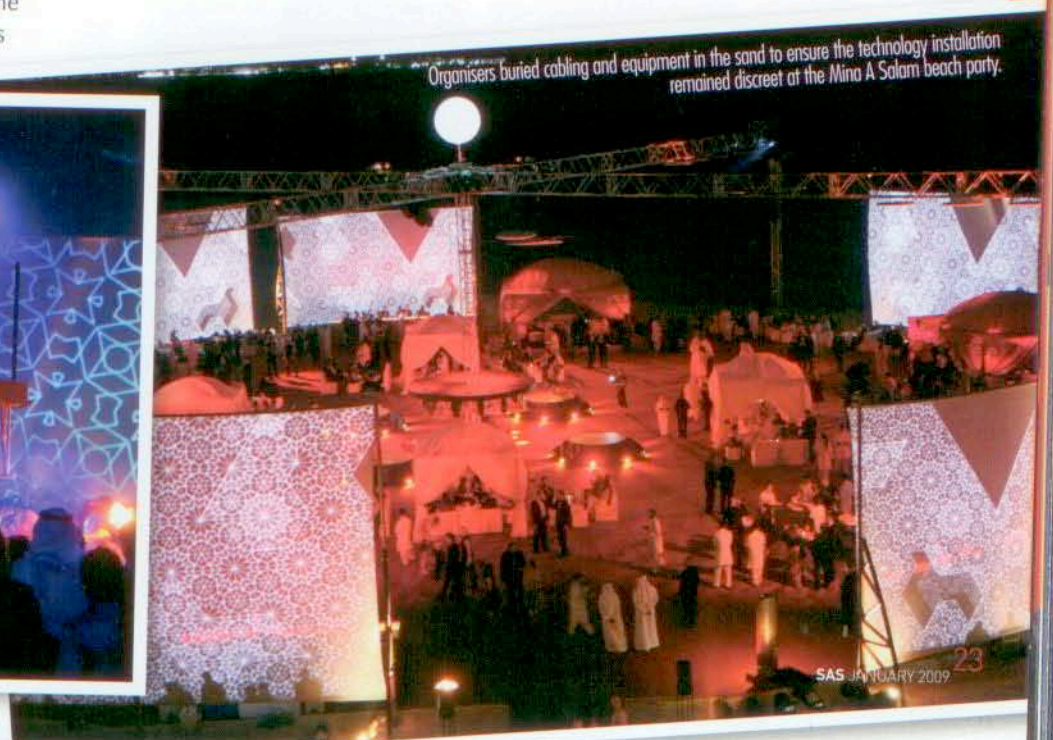
with a central focus at the beach party for the musicians and the background music system for the DJ," says Andy Jackson, director of Delta Dubai.

"We provided 24 DV Dosc's, some SB21 subs and eight 108s, all the gear we use is L-Acoustics. In terms of control it was all run through a Yamaha PM5D and we had a whole bunch of radio microphones for all the different instruments that were roaming around.

"The set-up can prove a more laborious task when you have a greater variety of instruments involved, and there are a range of performances occurring at the same time" he adds.

Everyone involved in the productions surrounding the festival faced some difficult challenges in one way or another. Some of these challenges were related to time constraints, some were purely technical and others involved what can only be called miscommunication between the various companies providing services at DIFF events.

But in spite of the multitude of technical, logistical and communication issues faced by all companies involved in the week-long festival, the three major productions went ahead smoothly, providing the Dubai audience with a fresh dose of some unique and creative French Canadian-style entertainment. §§



Organisers buried cabling and equipment in the sand to ensure the technology installation remained discreet at the Mina A Salam beach party.