

THE TECHNICALLY-SAVVY REDHEAD AND
HER BAND MAKE THEIR MARK WITH THEIR
FIRST FULL UK TOURING PRODUCTION.
RACHEL ESSON REPORTS...

LA ROUX GOES FOR GOLD

Since red-quiffed singer Elly Jackson, one half of duo La Roux, stormed to No.1 in the UK charts with the catchy, upbeat electro-pop single 'In For The Kill', she has been hard to ignore.

Waging verbal war on what she believes to be 'boring guitar bands', she has quickly stirred up a young and sometimes fanatic fan base by being at the forefront of a recent wave of '80s influenced synth-heavy electro pop. Her quirky style and flamboyant, flame-red hairdo have also made her an icon.

But she doesn't do it alone. Co-writer and synth maestro Ben Langmaid partners Jackson and although he doesn't appear at the live shows he has also been responsible for creating hits 'Bulletproof' and 'In For The Kill' (for which they won Best Dancefloor Filler at the 2010 NME

Awards). On stage, Jackson performs alongside band members Michael Norris (keyboards & computers), Mickey O'Brien (keyboards & BVs) and William Bowerman on drums.

In their short career they have already achieved over a quarter of a million album sales for self-titled album *La Roux* and 1.5m single sales. Following their sold-out UK tour in November, La Roux launched their first full touring production this Spring, the *Gold Tour*, promoted by Live Nation, which travelled across Academy-sized venues in Europe and the UK, supported by Jamie Woon and I Blame Coco.

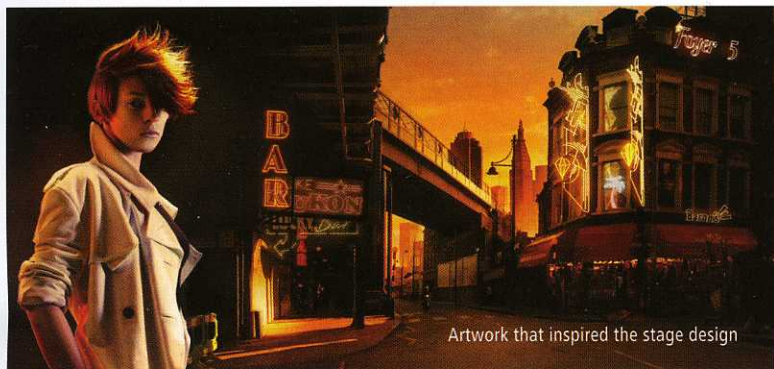
With artist, crew and production stuck in the U.S. due to the volcanic eruption on the day the tour was supposed to begin, things didn't start too smoothly.

Production manager, tour manager and

guitar tech Mark Dempsey, was contacted by the band's manager Tony Beard to take over from Matt Johnson when he had commitments with the Klaxons.

Dempsey explained: "We missed the first Southampton gig and changed Reading into a rehearsal. We flew back on April 24 carrying as much production as we could on the plane, then went into Music Bank for a day to buy and rent bits, and re-build our backline. A lot of it is still in the U.S.!"

The tour eventually began at Brighton Concert Hall on April 28 and proceeded throughout the UK before culminating in Southampton Guildhall on June 13. Initial plans were discussed between Dempsey, stage designer Alexander Brown and Elly Jackson. "Elly is very specific about what she wants and



Artwork that inspired the stage design



Alexander Brown's rendering of the set



she proved to be very good at it. Her idea was for an art deco stage design, combined with interesting touches like the drum riser surround that she came up with and the car seat from her 'Bulletproof' video, which appears half way through," said Dempsey, who runs Leeds-based production company, Maliere Productions.

Brown, who has also directed music videos for bands like the Maccabees and Owl City, commented: "I started working with Elly before she was signed or called La Roux. I'm in charge of design and art direction for the album campaign, and she asked if I was interested in doing the visuals for the tour. It's great to see the same ideas brought alive on stage.

"We wanted to get a sense of the theatrical; something that was a cross between *The Wizard Of Oz*, *Metropolis* and a hotel. Elly wanted it, as closely as possible, to look like it could be a real place. Throughout the artwork campaign, the concept has always been about a futuristic London, taking the present and transforming it into a *Blade Runner*-esque landscape. This was achieved by thinking of the projection screen as a window, looking out on to this world, like she was in a penthouse of an art deco skyscraper, and the different projections reflected moods or times of day."

Using the photographs that inspired Jackson, Brown created sketches and a 3D model of the set, which he supplied to Hangman. Dempsey commented: "Hangman were great. We went down there to look at what we could do and nothing was a problem for them.

"One of the great things that Hangman used was the stripping that you can see on the set, which is made from Electro-LuminX Light Tape, where you can achieve this eerie glow

that's just as bright as stage lights, but glows like fluorescent bulbs. For the drummer's riser in particular, I wanted to have this weird geometric construction that would be lit from inside. It all looked really cool."

The centrepiece for the stage was the window in the back of the drop, whereby Hangman stitched a thinner cloth into the hole, allowing video projection onto the window. There was also a cityscape model in the background that was back projected using a Christie LX650 Projector, adding a real dimension to the set.

"We wanted to create this sense of excitement and mystery to the songs, and I think the projections added a big part to this. We filmed Elly in the gold make-up, lip-synching to the songs, so at moments during the show, this giant head would loom out of the mist and begin shouting at the audience," said Brown.

A THEATRICAL RIG

Lighting supplier Siyan continued its relationship with La Roux which formed when she headlined the *Samsung NME Radar Tour 2009*. For the band's November tour, Siyan's Bryan Leitch was looking for someone to take over the LD reins, and it just so happened that Colin Ross' stint with Manic Street Preachers had just ended.

"I've worked with and for Siyan for a long time and was very happy to work with them again on this tour," said Ross. "They're always really helpful and have a deep understanding of how to make a show work well. The crew they supplied, Andres 'Argy' Atkinson and Leela Otremba, were first class."

The main element of the November tour was a back wall of Martin LC panels, but it had been

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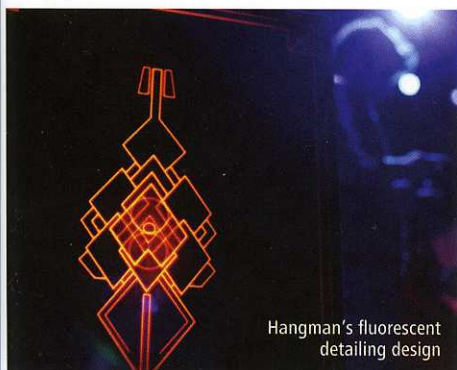
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Hangman's fluorescent detailing design



Below: The Midas Pro6 digital console at FOH.



"For every show we've done on this tour [the Funktion-One system] has outperformed my expectations..." FOH engineer Dave Swallow

stepped up even more for the *Gold Tour*. "For this tour, where we have moved to a full production rig, she wanted something a bit more glamorous and theatrical," explained Ross.

For lighting the set itself, Ross used various 650W Fresnels uplighting key parts, as well as the Electro-LuminX Light Tape product suggested by Hangman for highlighting the stairs and the V-shaped flats.

A flown rear truss carried lighting fixtures, the backdrop and screen, whilst a flown mid truss

held the projector and a tab track (used to hide the set during the support bands).

"I decided not to have a front truss to give a more open theatrical look to the stage. Instead I used two small truss towers at the sides of the stage and two Lycian M2 followspots for the front light I needed," said Ross.

"In the air I kept the Giotto spots and washes [11 SGM Giotto Spot 400s and 10 SGM Giotto Wash 400s] close together in clusters, to give some nice classic fan looks. The four GLP

impressions and Palcos [10 SGM Palco 3 Mobiles and six SGM Palco 3 Statics] were all on the floor.

"The GLP units are a very nice shape too and fit well with the look of the set so they were used in the prime position at the top of the stairs," he said.

Four i-Pix BB4s, eight Martin Atomic Strobes and four 4-lite Molefays completed the lighting rig, which was controlled by an Avolites Diamond 4 Vision console with ART 2000 dimmers.

Ross has used Avo desks all his life and still believes the D4 is "the most intuitive and adaptable control surface" for his needs. "With a Vision especially you have so much control surface that you can very easily access everything you need."

The Avo Diamond 4 Vision was also controlling the Green Hippo Critter media server used to run video.

HIGHLY FUNKTIONAL

When Dempsey met La Roux's FOH sound engineer of one year, Dave Swallow, he asked him which system or supplier he would prefer to work with. When he replied "Funktion-One, Dempsey was delighted and immediately contacted Stef Imhof at Audio Plus.

"I've worked with Audio Plus on the Zutons and I'm a big fan of Funktion-One. I told Stef I wanted to work with Arron Smith [FOH tech] and Gary Sylvester [monitor tech] as I'd worked with them so many times on the Zutons and they're brilliant," said Dempsey.

"I think F1 is more versatile than anything else because with line array you are stuck with the way it lays out and it's not always suitable for the kind of room you've got, whilst with F1 it's just point and shoot. The only time it doesn't sound right is when people don't know how to use it properly," he added.

Swallow agreed: "The great thing about it is that you can point it where it has to go, so you aren't throwing unnecessary sound against any walls, floors or ceilings that you don't need to.

"For every show we've done on this tour it has outperformed my expectations. And it can be flown or ground-stacked. Flying does take time, but the end result far outweighs the extra time it takes

to put it up."

Ten boxes of Funktion-One Resolution 5T were lifted by two CM Lodestar one tonne motors to be flown each side of the stage, with underhangs of five Res 4D. Sub was provided by a total of eight F221As, whilst two Res 2As were used for outfills. The system was powered by two six-way amplifier racks (six MC2 E45s) and processed by four XTA DP448s.

Swallow, who has also worked with Corinne Bailey Rae, Seasick Steve, The Hoosiers and more, said the La Roux duo were heavily involved in working on the live sound, but let him remix the backing tracks to make them more live-friendly.

This task was carried out on a Midas Pro6, a new desk for Swallow that he tried out in a bid to find a better-sounding digital console.

He said: "With the F1 PA you can really hear the floors in other consoles. But the overall sound of this console blew me away. I was so happy to have finally found a console that sounds like it should.

"The EQ section is so precise, and the gain responds like an analogue Midas board. I couldn't wish for a better sounding console, and I'm an analogue junkie, so that's a big thing!

"The scene section is a bit bizarre, in the way that it saves, loads and exports files. But again, the quality of the audio coming out of it far outweighs the problems. I think this is the console of the future and I want one!"

The Pro6 ran 33 inputs from the band and was used in conjunction with a Klark Teknik Helix DN9331 Rapide, a Midas DL371, Midas DL351 and Midas DL451 I/O Box.

Due to the volcano ash crisis, Swallow's beloved outboard rack, containing his Distressor, D2 and M2000, got stuck in America, so he had to use the internal effects in the Pro6 to get the right verbs, flanger, pitch and phaser effects that he uses in the M2000. In the end he had an external D2 and Distressor running over Jackson's vocal.

He commented: "I love mixing this show. Each song is different, and each sample or patch being played sounds different, so I really have to mix the show one song at a time."



Above, clockwise: LD Colin Ross; monitor engineer Ristead Cassidy; FOH sound engineer Dave Swallow; DiGiCo SD8 in monitor world.

Below: Flown Funktion-One rig; a well-packaged system from Audio Plus.

MIXING MONS

Monitor engineer Ristead Cassidy, who provided mixes for the band from a DiGiCo SD8 board with a DiGiCo DiGiRack running 56 inputs and 24 outputs, also approached the set one song at a time.

"Both the in-ear-monitoring and floor mixes change a lot from song to song so the show is all done on snapshots," said Cassidy, who is new to La Roux but has toured with The Thrills, The Zutons, Embrace, Klaxons and The Charlatans in the past.

"Levels, FX, comps and mutes change for each song and for this reason using the SD8 was great. The snapshots are seamless and easy to fire and undo. It would be a nightmare to try and get this gig right on an analogue board."

Driven by MC2 amplification and XTA processing, the monitor system comprised 10 Funktion-One RM18s with a sidefill system of two Resolution 5Ts and two F218s. The band all used Ultimate Ears UE5s run in mono, with the extra wedges to fill in the gaps.

Said Cassidy: "Elly likes a full on mix in her ears as well as a mix of ambience from the crowd through two AKG 414s down the front, so she doesn't feel detached."

"The only other kit was the Sennheiser G3 IEM systems which I used for the first time. I thought they were great; very easy to use and very clean with no drop outs."

The system comprised a Sennheiser G3 500-945 radio mic and a complete G3 eW 300 in-ear system. Swallow commented: "I opted for this particular system because I've always liked the e 935



and e 945 mics. Using the SKM 500-945 on this tour, I found there are some lovely frequencies in the low end and you can really warm vocals up with them."

The band were looked after by bass/keys tech Paul Stoney and their Yamaha endorsement was clearly present on stage. The band's William Bowerman, who famously stands up to perform, used the Yamaha DTX Series in his set up.

He commented: "It was tricky finding a kit that could cater to my needs when playing for La Roux. All the drum and percussion parts are purely electronic, and often there are eight or nine different sounds per song."

"I needed a kit that I could load the original drum sounds from the stems to make custom kits in the drum brain for each song."

"The Yamaha DTXtreme III lets me drag sounds straight on to a memory stick and load them into the brain in a matter of minutes.

With each pad, I can have three sounds, one in the centre of the pad, and two on the rims."

"The framework is flexible, and enabled us to make an original electronic percussion rack with 10 pads on, whilst still looking as sleek and stylish as Yamaha intended."

The band, crew and production were transported by SilverGray and FlyByNite respectively, of which Dempsey said: "I normally chop and change bus companies but SilverGray have



been really good. I've worked with FlyByNite for years and I really like Dave Coombs."

Summing up the tour he said: "It would have been good if it was longer because of the amount of effort that went into building it. It's been amazing what we have managed to achieve with such a small group of people."

TPI

Photography by Chris Taylor
(christaylorphotography.com),
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Stefan Imhof & Joel Perry



Above: Arron Smith of Audio Plus; PM/TM/guitar tech Mark Dempsey.



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