

CALLING... JOHN PROBYN



Promoter Live Nation presides over the summer entertainment season at Hyde Park, which production director John Probyn describes as the "toughest venue in the UK". Being Royal property, operated by the Royal Parks and located in Westminster where some of the most wealthy and influential residents in the UK are neighbours, negotiating events requires immense skills of tolerance and diplomacy.

Said Probyn: "The Royal Parks were always exempt from needing an entertainment licence, but that's no longer the case. So this year marks the first time that we've run licenced events. It hasn't made that much difference because they were so tough on the regulations anyway, but we've ended up dealing with different people and that's been the difficult part."

The Hard Rock Cafe-sponsored *Hyde Park Calling* weekend was the third event in this year's diary, following an 85,000-capacity Foo Fighters show and the *02 Wireless Festival*.

"The idea was to attract a young audience for *Wireless* while *Hyde Park Calling* was designed more for the hardened, older rock fans. It seems to have worked very well — we've done about 40,000 tickets per day," commented Probyn.

"The Hyde Park format works very well if you have a high quality headliner, and the line-up for *Hyde Park Calling* is as good as it gets, with Texas, Starsailor, Razorlight, The Zutons, Squeeze's Chris Difford, Primal Scream and other great acts playing support to Roger Waters and The Who over the weekend.

"We're under a lot of pressure from the growing choice of good festivals [which, ironically, are mostly owned by Live Nation! — Ed.], so our artist bookers have a difficult job, but we appear to have struck an interesting balance that's attracted healthy ticket sales. Even when *Glastonbury* returns next year, I still think that there's an opportunity for *Wireless* and *Hyde Park Calling* to grow."

It's important that because of their familiarity with such a difficult site, Live Nation retains its core production suppliers — including Britannia Row, Star Events Group, PRG Europe, CT and Templine.

"We also brought Steve Allen in as production manager because of his experience of the park and his association with The Who," said Probyn. "We had two days to reduce an 85,000 capacity site for the Foo Fighters down to a 40,000 festival site with a fun fair and additional stages, and without the experience of our suppliers it could have been very problematic.

"Noise is a major problem here because of the influence of the residents. Our agreement is to have a 10.15pm curfew and if we go a minute over that, the phone goes bonkers. Fortunately, Bryan Grant at Brit Row and John Staunton at Vanguardia Consulting have done exceptionally well at containing the audio levels, along with delivering a high standard of sound to the audience."



Top row: Roger Waters with manager Mark Fenwick and tour director/agent Andrew Zweck of Sensible Events; LD Vince Foster at his Hog Ill console. **Middle row:** Trip Khalaf captured in deep concentration at FOH; Brit Row's John Gibbon and Bryan Grant; John Staunton of acoustics consultancy Vanguardia. **Bottom row:** Alan & Chrissie Chesters of Hangman; Chris Saunders & Nick Fry; Star Events' Tez Sheals-Barrett.

installed extra structures. We also provided two additional disabled platforms, three additional FOH platforms, the main wheelchair user platforms and about 19 camera platforms around the site. All this in just three days and with only 16 crew!

"We also put in six Vertech delay towers for the Foo Fighters that were covered with lights, as well as additional laser towers. The towers came out for *Wireless*, but went back in for Roger Waters. They wanted a 'diamond quad' set up for Roger's surround sound system, so we put in normal delay towers with two Vertech towers behind them and a further five distributed around the outside of the arena."

LIGHTING

It was at this January's TPI Awards that Vince Foster was first approached about taking on the lighting design for Waters' tour. He was recommended by advance production manager Mark Ward and various other people including the previous LD Andy Gibb, who was busy with other commitments.

Foster openly admits that he spent three years as a depressed, morose teenager obsessed with Pink Floyd, and so jumped at the opportunity of actually working with a musician he so greatly respected!

Originally, the European section of the tour was scheduled to run for three weeks, slotting in perfectly with Foster's busy timetable which includes the upcoming George Michael world tour, so he agreed to go out and operate this section of the tour. When it extended to the US, he planned from the outset that he would leave and Andy Hurst take over as

operator/director.

Foster initially sat down with Andrew Zweck who outlined Waters' views and approach to lighting before they went into eight days of rehearsals at Bray. Here, the time pressure was such that Waters and Foster only spent a minimum amount of time together working on the show, which was just enough for a few fundamental creative differences to manifest themselves.

Foster envisioned lighting the *Dark Side* section of the show with big, classical, anthemic Pink Floyd looks... but as it turned out, Waters wanted it lit very simplistically. "I'd only ever seen Floyd's music being produced live to spectacular levels — even in the [non-Waters] '80s — and so I just thought that's what I should be doing," he admitted. "In reality, 12 Source Fours and a couple of Vari*Lite would have done it!"

He said the learning curve of working with Waters, conforming to his incredibly tight and specific lighting brief, has been a complete experience — none of which he regrets. "The majority of the time, I'm hired for my creative ideas and input, but in this case, the creatives were 95% Roger's," he explained.

To some extent the stripped down nature of the lighting enabled video to remain the primary visual focus. The playback video is the only element of the show that is being fully toured, with the majority of the lighting production sourced locally at each show.

The elements that did tour with them — supplied by PRG — were 16 Martin MAC 2000 Washes flanking the perimeter of an eight metre diameter circular projection screen used for *Dark Side*; a vertical wall of 96 (doubled up) PixelLines