

H2O Times Two:

Stefan Beese Designs a Pair of Festivals

Architect/production designer Stefan Beese, who in recent years has specialized in holistic designs for New Orleans-based cultural events such as Essence Festival and Voodoo Music Experience, took on a new challenge this year: H2O Music Festival. Held in Dallas and Los Angeles this past summer, H2O targets the young Hispanic market with a variety of artists, including Maná, Tiësto, Juanes, Weezer, Snoop Dogg, and Damian Marley.

The Dallas edition, held in the Cotton Bowl, was a big affair with an 80'-wide stage that held a 60'-diameter turntable. (An additional stage, a Stageline SL320, was located in the plaza outside the stadium.) "We had six weeks to design the festival," Beese says, adding that because the event was entirely new, "there wasn't anything like a template in place. In one week, we had a 100-page design document." He also pulled together his vendors and collaborators, including staging supplier Brown United (of Duarte, California), lighting supplier Gemini Stage Lighting (of Dallas), and video supplier GoVision, based in Argyle, Texas. The latter supplied Daktronics PST-12HD modular LED displays, which, Beese says, "are super-readable and bright. They could compete with the bright sunlight of Dallas." The screens had a vertical configuration, which, he says, "gave the images more scale and created a much nicer look." Combining IMAG with content—a mix of imagery supplied by the acts and created by Beese and his team—the designer says he was able to add extra excitement to the show. "If you just use IMAG, it makes the show boring," he says, noting that, with an act like Tiësto, "I saw Matt Webb really cutting imagery to the beat—a closeup of him DJing with a graphic element, then a graphic element, making an interesting

collage. With these really good products from GoVision, suddenly there's a show in the show."

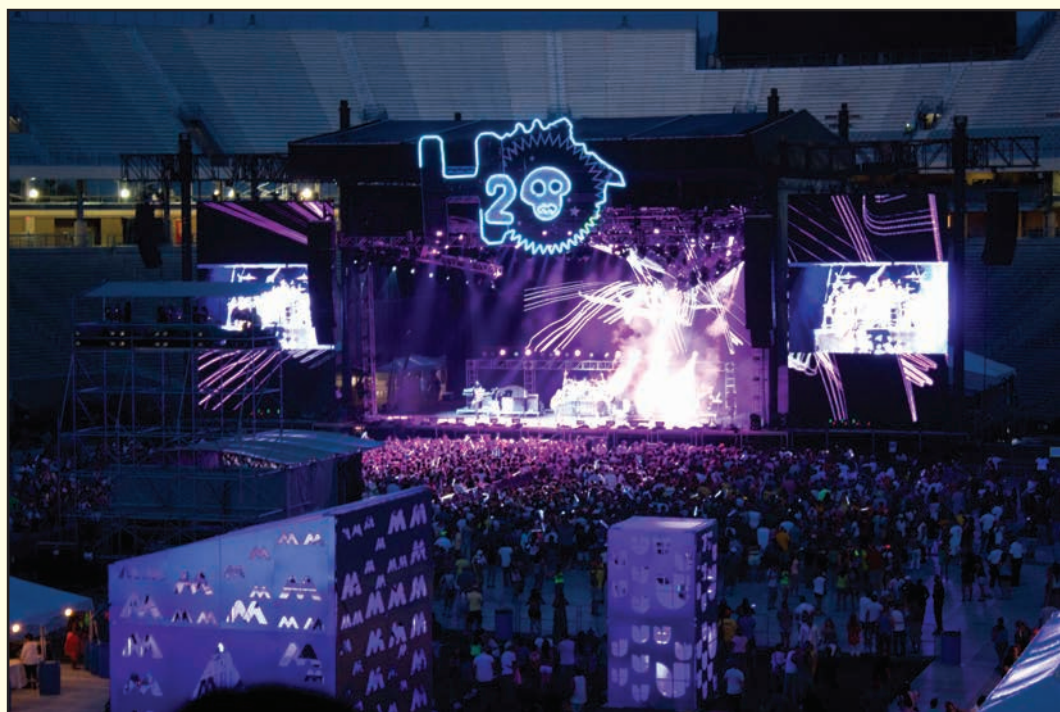
The audience area was marked by a series of light towers, metal structures featuring cutout versions of the festival's name, the host brand Univision Radio, and MiO, the maker of liquid water enhancers. "The light towers build a nice city of monoliths," Beese says. "Also, they added sidelighting possibilities and visual stimulation, and they provided branding for the sponsors." The towers were built by [New Orleans-based] Event Producers.

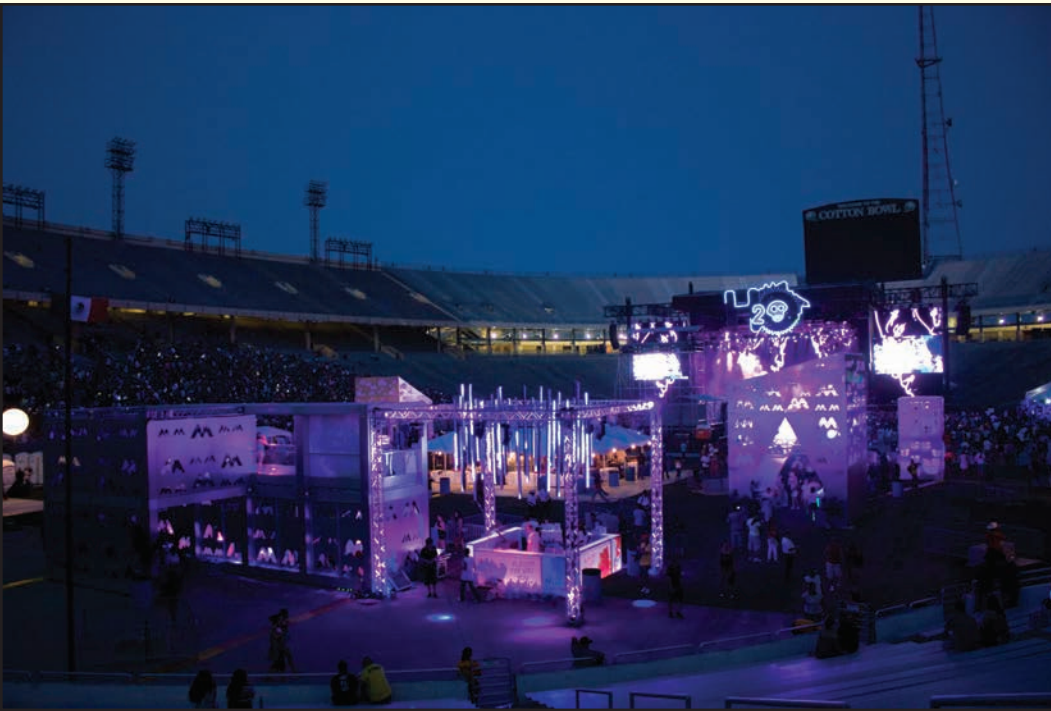
"The towers were like Swiss Army knives—they had multiple functions," Beese says. "Some of them had charging stations; in LA, we branded some for Metro PCS, which was a sponsor. Others were seating areas with misters, and others created MiO bar and beverage stations." They also introduced sponsor branding without

having to resort to banner materials. "MiO was a main sponsor and needed to be presented in the right format and programming for the festival," Beese says. "They asked for an integration that made sense for the brand and festival."

He notes that, rather than using cargo containers for the structures, as he has done in the past, his team used truss with CNC-milled facades, allowing them to ship in the panels they designed. The team also went through sun studies to generate visuals that represented the shade where people could hang out, a welcome side effect.

Beese's layout was also cunningly conceived to keep the party going. "In Dallas," he says, "when an act finished on the main stage, a DJ would take over at the MiO pavilion, and the crowd would be redirected to him." Also, the video displays added to the pace of the event. "Most of the bands wanted to bring in signage," Beese says. "I said, 'You have a full digital backdrop to play with. Why not use it? We can bring someone who will take, say, the Weezer logo, and create different animations with it, which will





make your performance much more dynamic than a static logo.’ This way, we didn’t have to deal with set changes, and it made the show more dynamic over the course of the day.”

The event in Los Angeles State Historic Park required a slightly different approach. “There were lots of hills along with the LA skyline,” Beese says. “We went through vignettes or elements, trying to create a city landscape that would have blended in with Los Angeles. We had a slightly smaller stage than in Dallas, placed in a valley, and another, smaller stage to the left of it. Next to them were the MiO pavilion and the others. It was about trying to blend into the natural landscape.”

The main stage was smaller than in Dallas and located in an open field. “For the main stage screen, we had VuePix MC7 LED mesh screen, which was 18’ by 32’, and, on the sides, were 26’ by 16.5’. For the second stage, we had an MC15 screen, which was 9’ x 16’. These helped us with issues of wind and weight load, because, in LA, we used a different stage provided by Kleege Industries. We chose a different stage, made of aluminum trussing, which could be

built using manual labor. It’s a quicker and more efficient setup when dealing with a historic park where you want to avoid damage to the ground due to heavy equipment. On the other hand, it doesn’t hold as much weight. We also installed a scrim behind each video screen for better readability.”

The lighting in Dallas, designed by Patrick Theriot, included Megalight BrightStripes, GLP Volkslichts, Martin Professional MAC 250 Beams, Mac 250 Kryptons, Elation Opti Tri 30s, Chauvet COLORado 11s, controlled by an Avolites Tiger Touch console. The towers were lit using more Elation Opti Tri Pars, controlled via City Theatrical ShowDMX wireless system. Video was delivered by PRG MBox media servers, controlled by an MA Lighting grandMA light console.

In Los Angeles, the lighting, supplied by Visions Lighting, included Strong Entertainment Lighting Super Troupers, ETC Source Four Lekos, Philips Vari*Lite VL3500s, Clay Paky Sharpys, Martin Atomic strobes, Robe ROBIN 300LEDwash units, Elation 1200c Profiles, Elation Platinum Beam 5Rs, and Elation 260 Q-Wash units, controlled by a grandMA console. 📶