



CASE STUDY:

NICK WHITEHOUSE
LOS ANGELES, CA (USA)



LIGHTING FOR MUSIC ROYALTY

While the names Justin Timberlake, Jay Z, Coldplay, Beyoncé, and Britney Spears conjure up images of incredible concert experiences, the lighting designers behind such great shows are often an afterthought. But that's just how Nick Whitehouse likes it. "I want people to enjoy the music and the artists, to walk away saying 'wow, that was a great show,' not 'wow, what great lights,'" he says.

“Regular concert goers never know how much goes into our designs because they blend seamlessly with the music, but people in the industry are always stumped at how we do it.”

It's true that world-renowned lighting designer Whitehouse creates awe-inspiring light shows for some of the biggest names in music, but his current prominence within the industry belies his humble beginnings. He worked as a stage-tech while attending Notre Dame College in Leeds before pursuing a career in sound technology. Programming primarily at small venues, he made connections with as many people as he could. Eventually, one of these friendships led to an opportunity to work with lighting, and Whitehouse jumped at the chance, later building enough experience to garner the attention of major acts. His first touring experience was in 2000 with Britpop band Starsailor, which was, at the time, a rival of the British rock band Coldplay. Starsailor didn't have the same meteoric success as their contemporary, but Coldplay took notice of their competition's lighting designs and invited Whitehouse to join them for what would become eight years of touring.

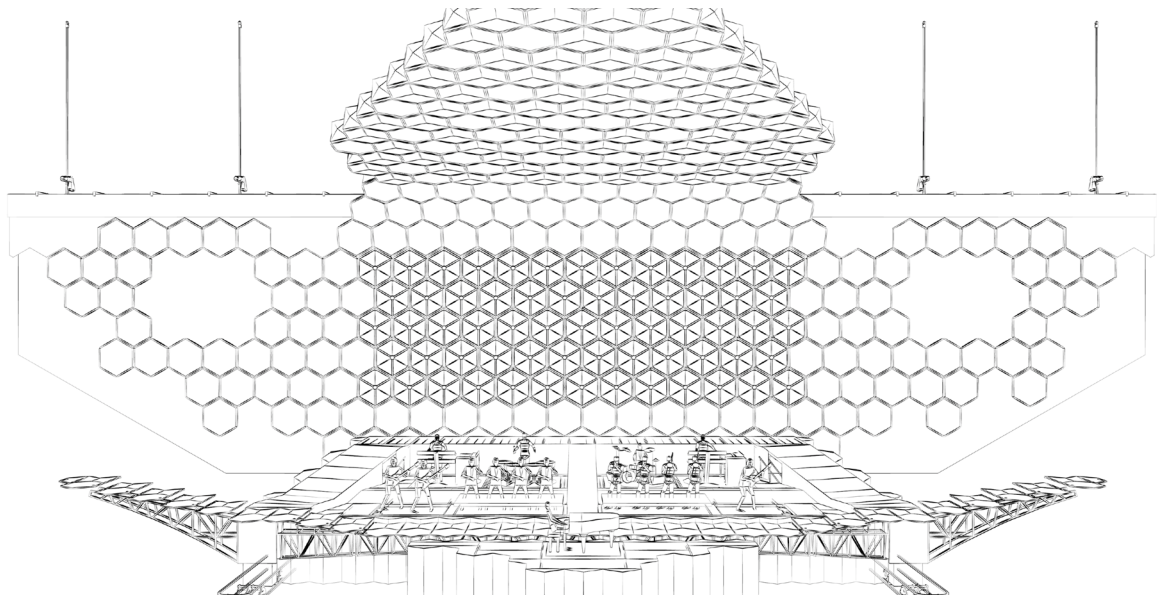
Coldplay's success took Whitehouse around the world, and it was during one of the band's shows in Tokyo, Japan that he landed one of his biggest opportunities. American singer and songwriter Justin Timberlake was in the audience one night and was so impressed with the show that he offered Whitehouse a job on the spot. But because Whitehouse was committed to Coldplay, he turned Timberlake down. For the remaining four months of Coldplay's tour, Whitehouse thought he'd made the biggest mistake of his life. Luckily, he received a call from Timberlake's manager two days after the tour ended, asking if he was still interested in lighting Timberlake's arena tour of the *FutureSex/LoveShow*. "Obviously, I got on a plane right away," Whitehouse says.

Whitehouse and Timberlake subsequently developed a collaborative relationship that allowed the duo to explore new lighting techniques and test various set options. For example, when Timberlake's *20/20 Experience* tour kicked off in 2014, it incorporated a moving bridge, new laser systems, as well as integrated video projection. During one part of the show, Whitehouse made it appear as if holes were opening up along the back wall of the stage. The effect was so realistic that many people asked him how he coordinated the feat, to which Whitehouse could only respond that it was an illusion. In reality, this visual treat functioned like a large art installation that revolved around a 150-foot wide by 60-foot high hexagon wall and overhead hexagon ceiling, which combined to provide a giant projection surface for video content.

The tour also challenged Whitehouse to reconfigure his design to fit varying arena sizes. "Between all of the promo shows and the tour dates, we did over 140 shows," says Whitehouse. "Most of them had different stage sizes and shapes, so every night we needed a different look and a different design. It kept me very busy. When I finished the tour, I think I'd only been home a total of 10 days the whole year."

AN ALMOST-MISSED OPPORTUNITY





EVERY LIGHT SHOULD BE AN INSTRUMENT

His dedication positions Whitehouse as a sought-after lighting designer. "I'm there to interpret what artists want. It's their show." Understanding a client's needs is the trickiest part about his work, so Whitehouse strives to match his lighting to an artist's unique style, even when lighting for multiple artists in one show. He recalls that designing Jay Z and Justin Timberlake's joint *Legends of the Summer* tour was challenging because Jay Z wanted a stark look while Justin sought a visual element to correspond to every beat in his songs, as if the lights played the music, which required 12,000-15,000 lighting cues per show.

To achieve these diverse, visual looks, Whitehouse engages in a dialogue with his clients to ensure that they're satisfied with the general aesthetic of the lighting design. "I start drawing rough ideas on paper, and then I bring everything into Vectorworks® Spotlight software as symbols to make sure it all fits. This is where the software is very useful because you can maneuver things to fit in different venues, from large arenas like Madison Square Garden to the small stage on television's 'The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon,' while accommodating things like fire exits, jumbotrons, and seating configurations."

He adds that being able to work in 2D and 3D environments with hybrid symbols means he can very quickly see what works in terms of space and create a very nice looking plot at the same time. “Labeling and keeping track of fixture types, quantities, and focus positions is also a breeze with the comprehensive Spotlight tools. I can then position Renderworks® cameras in different seating blocks or camera positions and guide promoters through exactly what the sight lines to the stage will be from any seat in the house and tweak the design to help them maximize sellable seats in every venue.”

Once the sizing is correct, Whitehouse uses the software to generate quick 3D renderings and get general feedback from an artist. After the client signs off on the 3D model, he dives into the technical process, exchanging information with set designers and construction companies through file exchanges to create the final light plots, which he then exports into a grandMA2 lighting console using a plug-in created by MA Lighting for Vectorworks software.

“ I’m there to interpret what artists want. It’s their show.”



ILLUMINATING THE FUTURE

Even though Whitehouse has a large repertoire of technical skills and a practiced, collaborative workflow, his design philosophy revolves around the idea that less is more. “When designers compete to be the brightest in every show, people’s eyes get tired,” he says. “You have to take a step back and let the artist shine.”

Focusing on the artist is Whitehouse’s favorite part of the job. “Music is central to what I do, and I love that what I contribute helps people enjoy a band or artist that they’re seeing even more.” And just like the artists, Whitehouse gets nervous every time he tries something new. “I’ve done so many shows that I understand the pressure performers are under. Sometimes when I try something new, I’ll stand in the back of the room with my eyes closed and my fingers crossed,” he jokes. “You can rehearse all you want, but the real testing ground is the show itself. Sometimes new bits of technology don’t work, but if you never try, you’ll never know.”

Whitehouse’s combination of exceptional timing and a passion for music ensures his clients get artful, visual elements that portray the feeling behind the music. And he’s always willing to experiment with new design elements, which will similarly ensure his continued success.

BE INSPIRED

Read about more designers who transform the world with Vectorworks Spotlight software at vectorworks.net/success-stories.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Profiled Firm

Nick Whitehouse
Illuminate Entertainment Inc.
1150 W. Olympic Blvd., Suite 1020
Los Angeles, CA 90064 USA
514.632.4790
info@illuminate-ent.com
illuminate-ent.com

Images

Justin Timberlake *20/20 Experience*, and Justin Timberlake and Jay-Z *Legends of the Summer* tour photos courtesy of Ralph Larmann.
All other images courtesy of Nick Whitehouse.

Original Text and Publication

Vectorworks, Inc.
7150 Riverwood Drive
Columbia, MD 21046 USA
410.290.5114
casestudy@vectorworks.net

Find Your Distributor

For sales information and to identify your local distributor, visit vectorworks.net/international.



VECTORWORKS[®]
A NEMETSCHEK COMPANY

© 2015 Vectorworks, Inc.
Vectorworks and Renderworks are registered trademarks of Vectorworks, Inc.
All rights reserved.