



# ELECTRIC VIBES FOR CHEMICAL BROTHERS IN MALTA

**THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS ARE WITHOUT DOUBT ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ELECTRONIC ACTS TO COME OUT OF THE UK. WITH A CAREER SPANNING TWO DECADES, MANCHESTER'S TOM ROWLANDS AND ED SIMONS HAVE SEVEN ALBUMS UNDER THEIR BELT AND HAVE PERFORMED ACROSS THE GLOBE - SPURRING A NEW GENERATION OF DANCE FANS. TPI CAUGHT UP WITH THE SUPERSTAR DJS IN MALTA FOR THE LAST GIG OF THEIR SUMMER TOUR.**

Saturday 5 November saw the Chemical Brothers take to the stage at the Malta Fairs and Convention Centre (MFCC), in front of more than 3,000 fans. If there's one thing the Chems can guarantee, it's to get a crowd dancing, and the atmosphere is electric as the pair work their way through a two-hour set, mixing hits with lesser known album tracks from their critically acclaimed repertoire.

The Maltese hunger for electronic music should not be underestimated. The island may only have a population of 400,000 and be 120sq miles, but it is building an enviable reputation on the dance scene, with the MFCC attracting big name dance acts including Fat Boy Slim, David Guetta and Faithless.

The 10,000 capacity MFCC was previously used at Wembley Arena in 2006 as a temporary concert venue during the iconic arena's

refurbishment. Supplied by the Arena Group, the semi-permanent Tensioned Fabric Structure (TFS) was designed and built to Wembley's specifications. The venue had to comply with stringent permanent building regulations in order to deliver a temporary facility with the feel of a permanent venue, which could act as a music arena suitable for large scale productions.

Spotting a unique business opportunity, Maltese entrepreneur Ruben Caruana bought the 7,000m sq structure when Wembley's redevelopment was complete and installed it in Ta' Qali, Malta - creating a venue which has since put the island firmly on the map in the international live events industry. At the time he was researching permanent solutions for a large exhibition, conference and concert venue in Malta.

Caruana, who also owns Maltese event,



Opposite: The Chemical Brothers' two-hour set helped satisfy the Maltese hunger for electronic music. Below: The DJs' last gig of their summer tour took place at the Malta Fairs and Convention Centre in front of 3,000 fans.



exhibition and printing company SignIt among other ventures, explained: "Live events are a huge part of the Maltese economy and I knew when the opportunity to purchase the Wembley structure came up that it was something that could be a big success, as the island had no other large scale venue. Malta may be a small island but I knew that a venue of that size would be well exploited here."

And it certainly has been. The MFCC has held hundreds of conferences and exhibitions and is making a name for itself as a major touring venue for some of the world's biggest headliners.

A TFS brings several advantages as a semi-permanent venue but doesn't always lend itself naturally to the type of productions usually required by big name acts. Upon purchasing the structure, Caruana quickly realised that if it were to reach the potential he envisioned then it would need at least some modifications - and that building truss support systems for every gig to fly the PA and lights was neither practical nor sustainable.

The solution is an ingenious approach. Three 35 tonne steel arches have been built inside. On wheels, with a bespoke removable track system for easy mobility, the arches are 5m wide each and can be moved the length of the structure to provide overhead load bearing capabilities

of over 90 tonnes in any position to suit the incoming production.

The acoustic challenges that often come with tented structures have also been combated through a combination of high tech equipment investment and talented local technicians. Sound Tech, Stefan Farrugia, Fusion Sound Ltd, was in charge of ensuring the Chemical Brothers' block rockin' beats rang clear.

The audio set-up comprised 16 Funktion One RES5T and 16 Funktion One F121 Subs, stacked eight of each per side. Two Funktion One RES2A for front fills, two XTA DP448 speaker management systems, four Funktion One E90 Amplifiers (to power the 21-inch subs and 12-inch in the RES5 Mid High) and four Funktion One E45 Amplifiers (to power the eight and one inch in the RES5) completed the set up.

**"We've been trying to get the Chemical Brothers over here for a few years now and were ecstatic to finally have them play."**

He said: "Typically, in a tented structure the sound bounces back. For most of the MFCC events we use a Funktion One PA, a point source system and uses different technology. It has excellent directional control allowing sound to be focused where it's needed. This is particularly important for acts like the Chemical Brothers, with heavy baselines. The precise sound distribution also means it minimises environmental impact."

Also utilised were two Pioneer CDJ1000, two Technics SL1210 Mk5G complete with two Funktion One RM18 wedge monitors.

The whole PA was ground stacked, although Farrugia enthused that the ability of the aforementioned arches means the venue can cater for even the heaviest requests for flown systems. No console was used at FOH; instead Farrugia controlled sound via an XTA Icore wireless system.

Below: Due to the Chemical Brothers' focus on strong graphics, Lighting Designer, Ismael Portelli, worked closely with the designer of the graphic display, Gerald Agius Ordwa. This allowed them to produce a breathtaking visual experience for the crowd.



All lighting and projections for the night were provided in-house by the MFCC's designers - no mean feat for an act whose fans enjoy slick performances and graphics almost as much as the music itself, with the 2010 album *Further* featuring a bespoke video for every track.

Ismael Portelli designed the lighting display, all of which was improvised on the night bar a few songs - as per the nature of a DJ set. Portelli received the 2011 Excellence Award at the International Prolight and Sound Fair in Germany, an international competition for the Best Lighting Design in Concerts held throughout the world during 2010. The award was recognition for his work on concerts including Sir Elton John and Rod Stewart.

He said: "Chemical Brothers tend to focus more on strong graphics than lighting so I worked closely with Gerald Agius Ordway to create a lighting design that complemented his work."

The lighting kit rivals the best venues in terms of sheer amount and choice available on site and the quality of the equipment.

Chemical Brothers used one Avolite Diamond Four Elite, 12 Clay Paky Alpha Wash 1200's, 12 Clay Paky Alpha Spot 1200 HPE, 18 DTS Flash 4000L (DWE), two Selecon Pacific Profiles, two Zero88 Spice Racks and four Avolites Dmx

Splitters.

Equipment was hung using the arch systems using Chain Master one tonne motors. Portelli concluded: "The arches make a huge difference and allow such freedom when it comes to production design and rigging. A lot of acts and management are surprised at the capabilities of us as both an island and a venue.

"It's when you first start exchanging emails and they see the extensive kit we have here and the engineering modifications and innovations we have made that they go 'oh, OK.' It's a misconception that we are constantly proving wrong, and which is being expelled time and again by big name acts adding the island to their tours."

Alongside the lighting display was an impressive graphic display by Gerald Agius Ordway, MFCC's in-house Graphic Tech.

He said: "Being a DJ set, there was no way of saying what tracks would be played or in what order, which allowed us a huge element of creative freedom. There were certain songs we knew would feature and we prepared graphics accordingly, such as the hit *Hey Boy Hey Girl*. For the rest I drew inspiration from their previous albums and gigs and focused on edgy,

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gritty graphics set to the bass of the music and featuring faces, aliens and body parts etc."

In total, eight screens were used. Four projection screens formed a 14 by eight metre projection surface formed the backdrop to the stage, projected on from behind using four Sanyo 6000 Ansi Lumens projectors, synchronised to project as one image. This big screen utilised one Media Server c / w AMD Eyefinity, and a Black Magic Decklink Extreme and an Arkaos Media Master Pro. The stage

Below: Gerald Agius Ordway created the graphic visual display and Ismael Portelli was responsible for the show's lighting design; Promoter, Noel Magri of Mega Music Management; Fusion Sound Ltd Sound Tech, Stefan Farrugia.



was flanked by two 4m by 3m Sanyo 6000 Ansi Lumens projector screens used primarily to display graphics but also to cut to close ups of the Chemical Brothers in action, filmed from the pit using two cameras; two Samsung 63" plasma screens were also used in front of the DJ booth, showing one image across the two.

Graphics for all outputs used a Media Server c/w AMD Eyefinity, Arkaos Grand VJ Software and AKAI APC40 Midi Controller.

One overriding request from Chemical Brothers' Tour Manager, Alex Nightingale, who has been working with the duo for 15 years, was smoke - and lots of it. He said: "We wanted dark and edgy. Kill the lights and lots of smoke."

The demand was met by MFCC installing four Antari M-10's and two DF-50's along the front of the stage, used throughout the night to create a dark atmosphere, and allowing the lights and graphics to pop.

Nightingale said: "This was a DJ set and nothing compared to the production that goes into the Chemical Brothers live. However, the fact that they played 22 minutes over their

contractual agreement speaks volumes."

When asked about the possibilities of a return trip, Nightingale nods. He said: "The next tour is 2013 - and who knows."

Promoter, Noel Magri of Mega Music Management, concluded: "We've been trying to get the Chemical Brothers over here for a few years now and were ecstatic to finally have them play. There's a real passion for electronic music in Malta and we're really pleased with how the night went. We're honoured to have them here for the last show of their tour.

"There were concerns about the capabilities of such a small island but the feedback has been that the MFCC has actually stuck to the rider better than any number of larger venues elsewhere and the band was really pleased with the gig both on a creative and quality of equipment level."

As for what's next, Caruana is not one to sit still for long. He plans to increase the number of headliner acts visiting the island and wants to work closely with Italian promoters.

He said: "We've changed the culture of the

island. Six years later and the venue is a huge success. Plans for the future include working with Italian promoters to increase the amount of acts visiting both countries. It makes sense."

Following the impressive feedback from the arch system, Caruana is also launching a new staging and temporary structures system, Geo Structures. The innovative modular system can be built into any shape, including full globes with VIP platforms inside, temporary curved roofs for stages and any number of other applications.

He concluded: "There have been a lot of problems with the structural integrity of temporary structures in live events in the last couple of years. We have developed a modular system that will give us a safe, adaptable solution whilst still enabling maximum creativity.

"For me, continual innovation and investment is what's important. The new system is already used in the MFCC and we're also launching it in Europe too. Watch this space."

**TPI**

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