

CASE STUDY

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT



OPPORTUNITY

The String Cheese Incident recently performed at Red Rocks Amphitheater, a challenging venue for lighting designers due to the steep seating that places most of the audience above the stage.



SOLUTION

PHNTM Labs deployed an advanced lighting rig featuring Martin VDO Atomic Dot and MAC Axiom Hybrid fixtures to deliver a dynamic and impactful light show for the whole audience.

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THE STRING CHEESE INCIDENT, COLORADO

Colorado-based jam band The String Cheese Incident returned to the iconic Red Rocks Amphitheater for the 45th time this past July to kick off their 2021 tour, marking the first full-capacity events at the venue in over a year. Red Rocks' iconic geological architecture and storied history make performing there a major career milestone for many artists, with legendary performers from The Beatles to Vulfpeck gracing the stage over the past 80 years. Because the venue's steep seating arrangement means a majority of the audience is seated above the stage roof, Red Rocks has historically posed a unique challenge to lighting designers. However, the venue received a new stage and roof area in 2020 for easier installation and greater production potential.

To give audiences an unforgettable experience, The String Cheese Incident requested a dynamic light show that kept up the excitement throughout their multi-hour improvisational sets and reached every audience member with impactful and immersive visuals. To deliver a truly memorable light show, PHNTM Labs deployed an advanced lighting rig featuring Martin VDO Atomic Dot and MAC Axiom Hybrid fixtures.

“The String Cheese Incident generally do multi-night runs at Red Rocks every year,” said Michael Smalley, Creative Director, Production Designer and Lighting Designer, PHNTM Labs. “Doing lighting there is incredibly tough because 77 percent of the audience is above the roof of the venue. Luckily, Red Rocks happened to get a new roof structure last year that made it a lot easier to rig all kinds of stuff. We wanted to play with the roof's architecture and be some of the first people to put lights up there. The Atomic Dots, being lightweight enough and at a price point where we could get a lot of them, allowed us to really expand and use the whole width of the roof.”

PHNTM Labs deployed VDO Atomic Dot WRM fixtures on the ground for a warm-looking strobe effect that felt organic to Red Rocks' natural red-orange hue. The roof featured 40 VDO Atomic Dot CLD fixtures in lines following the roof's arc to create psychedelic,





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UFO-like visuals and emphasize the Denver skyline behind the stage. Combining a pixel-controlled Aura backlight and an LED dot, the Martin VDO Atomic Dot is a highly versatile fixture capable of powerful beams, vibrant color washes, intense strobes and more. Its compact design allows for easy installation in a variety of quantities and patterns, from simple rows to elaborate grid patterns. The WRM variant features a color temperature of 2700K, while the CLD model provides cooler illumination at 5700K.

“With the Dots on the ground, it was a nice fill of color in the haze zone, directly upstage of the band,” said Smalley. “It lit the smoke up when it was there and gave us a nice kind of vibe for everything else to cut through. We needed to make sure we used something that was lightweight on the roof, so the Dots were great for that. It was a low-intensity installation to have what in my opinion was probably the best aesthetic of the whole rig. The Dots traced the roofline in a really pretty way and made the whole stage look like it was a UFO touching down.”

Martin MAC Axiom Hybrid beam/spot fixtures with diffused wash functionality rounded out the setup upstage and on the roof. Equipped with the MAC Viper CMY color palette and high-precision optical system for a robust range of applications, the Axioms complemented the Atomic Dots with saturated washes, a wide field of coverage and beams that easily reached audience members in the highest and furthest rows.

Finally, Martin's P3 visual control interface added additional simplicity and ease of use during the installation and operation process. With optimized processing power and an ergonomic user interface, the P3 makes programming shows, syncing different elements and even switching out fixtures simple and efficient.

“One of the Dots on the roof dimmed during rehearsals, as lights sometimes do,” said Chris Ruppel, Associate Designer, Associate Director and Technical Director, PHNTM Labs. “The P3 made it really easy to swap it out, remotely readdress and get it back into the rig in its proper spot.”

The String Cheese Incident played a rollicking three nights at Red Rocks to much acclaim and many audience members specifically noting the visuals provided by the Atomic Dots. In August, CBS Sunday Morning featured clips of the band performing and the Martin fixtures in action during a segment on Red Rocks' 80th anniversary.

“We added tons of stuff when the show's capacity was increased, like LED strips to light up walls,” said Smalley. “Out of all of it, the biggest impact and the most important addition we made to the show, and the part that most people cared about, were the Atomic Dots.”



"We really wanted to highlight the shape of the roof to show off this whole new era of Red Rocks," added Ruppel. "The Atomic Dots looked great for people up close and they read incredibly well for people at the back. Row 80 to 90 are really far away from the stage, and it looked just as good back there as it did to people at front-of-house and the front of the stage. They were a really solid choice of fixtures."

PRODUCTS USED

MARTIN MAC AXIOM HYBRID FIXTURES

MARTIN P3 VISUAL CONTROL INTERFACE

MARTIN VDO ATOMIC DOT (WRM AND CLD) FIXTURES



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