



"I understood the complexity of progressive music - different time signatures, multi-layering of instruments and how to transition on soloists from every point."

Canadian-born lighting designer, director and programmer, Benoit Richard, has dedicated 30 years of his life to light. His touring credits include rock bands Metallica, Yes, April Wine, Dream Theater, Matchbox Twenty and George Michael; his film credits Marvel's *The Avengers*, *Star Trek Into Darkness*, *Iron Man 3* and *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*.

Richard's lighting career began in 1986 at the Collège de Montréal where he performed as a magician, before coming off stage to run the lights on a vintage dimmer board. At Collège Jean-De-Brebeuf he became technical director of the in-house concert hall, but eschewed university, choosing instead his first taste of life on the road, in 1990, with Toronto-based Genesis tribute band, Over the Garden Wall.

A five-year relationship with the band developed which allowed him to master his craft and develop his own style. The self-confessed 'prog rock nutcase and frustrated musician' found he could satisfy his musical craving by playing lights instead. "I studied all the Genesis songs and modelled my work on that of the Genesis LD, Alan Owen," says Richard. "I understood the complexity of progressive music - different time signatures, multi-layering of instruments and how to transition on soloists from every point.

Julie Harper talks to lighting designer & programmer **Benoit Richard** . . .

I taught myself how to use colour to emote different parts of a song, when to use the special effects within a fixture, the self-control to keep some tricks in the bag for later, and when to unveil the 'big white number'. It was very rewarding to be playing with the band, and it set my foundation for how I would approach every band in the future."

In 1992, aged 23, Richard became LD for Canadian rock icons, April Wine. While touring in Texas, a broken console brought him into contact with High End Systems, where he was invited to create a light show audition with a soundtrack of his own choice. He impressed them with his visual interpretation of a Yes/Genesis medley and joined the programming department in 1994.

Five years spent travelling the world as a High End programmer gave Richard a break from design and helped him 'escape' the smaller Canadian market. Significantly, it also put him in touch with Metallica's lighting designer, John Broderick, who needed a programmer/operator to control 106 High End Studio Color fixtures on Metallica's 1996 *Load* tour.

"It was such a complex build, we programmed the rig using the first version of WYSIWYG, complete with wire frame rendering! We produced a fabulous show and in the end John wouldn't let me leave the tour." It was the start of five-years with Broderick and Metallica for Richard. "John reaffirmed my early lighting philosophies including the use of CAD and pre-vis design, how to make every song of a show look totally different and how to call followspots. He's been my #1 mentor and I am so grateful to have worked with him."

Through Broderick, Richard was brought into the Yes family, where he answered Jon Anderson's very demanding visual requirements for the 1997 *Open Your Eyes* tour by charting over 50 songs ahead of production rehearsals. "I had an unfair advantage of knowing their music so well! To work with Yes was a dream come true. It opened doors for me and I stayed with the band for seven years."

Richard's affiliation with Metallica and Yes put him in the path of Dream Theater's original drummer, Mike Portnoy, who invited him to design the *Six Degrees of Inner Turbulence* tour in 2002. Dream Theater's huge musical repertoire and habit of customising set lists from previous shows meant Richard needed 60/70 songs programmed into a Hog II desk, ready to pull up at short notice. "Saving and loading the show files on two floppy disks was always a nerve-wracking experience!"

Dream Theater's 2003 *Train of Thought* tour put Richard at the forefront of the collision between video and lighting. He collaborated with Creative Technology to develop a system that enabled video playback and camera control from the Hog II desk. "I was able to trigger two DoReMi systems, and send up to four camera feeds to three video screens behind the band. I am very proud of that tour, which happened just before the release of the first media server, Catalyst. It was fun to have full control of the whole visual experience."

Richard explored this further with American rock band, Matchbox Twenty, from 2001-2003, working alongside LD Marc Brickman. 2005 and 2010 saw Richard design solo tours for MB20 frontman Rob Thomas, and in 2008, he was back with MB20, this time as lighting designer in his own right at the behest of band manager, Michael Lippman.

Through Lippman, Richard was introduced to George Michael, whose *25Live* world tour (2006-2008) was to prove the ultimate test. "George is a multi-talented producer and is his own lighting designer. I understood his theory of light and we eventually explored the use of time-code triggering to perfectly 'time align' the lighting and video experience at the mid-point of an arena or stadium."

Richard returned to work with Michael on his *Symphonica* European tour in 2011-2012 (see *LSi December 2011*). "About this time I paused for thought. I realised I had got on the tour bus at the age of 19 and, what seemed like the next day, got off aged 43! I'd been

married for ten years with no children - it was clearly time to take stock.

"As a kid, I'd always wanted to work on huge movies and decided the time was right to become a professional lighting console programmer in the film industry." In 2011, Richard earned his membership to IATSE Local 728 in Hollywood, in less than four months and has worked with some of the best cinematographers like Claudio Miranda (*Tomorrowland*), John Toll (*Iron Man 3*) and Dion Beebe (*Green Lantern, Gangster Squad*). Richard is an active union member teaching the Hog4 platform to Local 728 members.

"I would like to see the formation of a similar union for touring technicians. It's high time road crews negotiated better work conditions and increased stability and security. Crew databases such as www.RoadieJobs.com and www.TourReady.com suggest that, with a little pushing, a level of organisation could be possible. This would enable professional touring technicians to dedicate their lives to the business they love with the knowledge they have something to show for it at the end of their careers." It's an issue that is obviously close to his heart, and perhaps it is not a coincidence that he and his wife now have a 14-month old daughter.

Since 2013 Richard has been the theatrical LD for NBC's Emmy-winning *Sunday Night Football*, starring Carrie Underwood, and has showcased the latest lighting technology every season.

So, would he ever be tempted back to life on the road? "My wife and I have what we call 'the George Michael Rule': if George decided to do another live project, it would be an honour to be a part of his creative team from the get-go!"

Benoit Richard is represented by Michael Wright at Rooftop Management.

(Photograph: Benoit Richard during George Michael rehearsals at Wembley Arena, 2012: Credit: Caroline True)