

## On the Road with the Chris Isaak Concert Tour

*Chris Isaak is an American Rock & Roll icon. During more than 20 years in the music business, Chris and his band Silvertone have recorded nine albums, just released #10 (a "Best of Chris Isaak" disc), starred in their own cable television show and entertained tens of thousands of fans in concerts around the world. Known for his self-deprecating wit and boyish charm, this "American Boy" performer has recently launched the 2006-2007 version of the Chris Isaak Tour, which will take him and his band to nearly 100 cities on three continents.*

*This season's tour will find him in venues ranging from arenas, amphitheaters and concert halls, to wineries, botanic gardens and clubs, including night spots such as House of Blues and Hard Rock Café. With rarely more than one night at each venue, it's a grueling, months-long schedule of move-in, set-up, perform, tear-down, and move-on. Nonetheless, through lighting a sterile stage is turned into an exciting setting where avid fans can enjoy the baritone-and-falsetto melodies of one of Rock's troubadour icons. **Lighting Designer Paul Guthrie and Lighting Director Lane Hirsch** tell us how it was done...*

### Painting With Light

As lighting designer, my first objective was to give the show a new look for this year. While his fan base keeps growing, Chris has a loyal following of people who return to his concerts year after year, so it's important to give them a sense that they are seeing the show for the first time. Therefore it's imperative that we have a new visual look for each tour as well as a system that is easy to set-up and take down.

Each year we create a new design for the concert. Fortunately, Chris is a super-creative guy, great to bounce ideas off of, and a lot of what you *see* on stage, as well as hear, has his stamp on it. He's got amazing energy and puts on a fabulous show – he's just an awesome entertainer – so the design for the tour had to reflect and support that.

Chris often performs in venues that provide just two straight, overhead trusses which results in a look that tends to be very similar and utilitarian. I tried to get away from that by adding moving lights in different positions and hanging at different heights to break up the similarity. I specified a house plot that hangs the par bars at 90° to the truss in an attempt to get away from the standard 60 par double-hung truss because we want Chris's audience to feel that the Chris Isaak show is something special and different.

The Chris Isaak show is all about Chris, the band and the music. The focus is on the music and the performers; the setting and visual effects are all achieved through lighting. I had to incorporate a simple scenic element to give the stage some definition and make the most out of as few lights as possible; we have gone through a lot of different backdrops and gags over the past years.

The scenic element this year is five sets of pillow-wall modules from Atomic Design hanging at different heights. Chris is not into asymmetric designs so Atomic made aircraft cable lines to facilitate the staggered heights, giving us five columns of panels at three different heights. The panels take light beautifully from the floor or the rig, back or front, and have a great texture when side lit. They are beautifully built but still a very simple and clean look.

I had seen a lot of tours in Europe going out with the smaller Martin lights and wanted to try the MAC 250 Washes as the only flown moving head for this year. I designed a very hard-edged beam and gobo-heavy show for last year's tour and wanted to deliberately get away from that look for this year's run.

Entertainment Lighting Services (ELS), our lighting vendor, purchased brand new MAC 250 washes for the tour and I was amazed at how bright yet compact they were – perfect for a run of this size. I wanted to hang them in groups of three, so ELS made some great custom brackets that enable the three MACs to hang underneath each other and staggered so they can move freely. The vertical element ties in with the set and gives an interesting layered look from the wash sources, and the small size of the units give more of a cluster feel with the sources very close to each other.

Last year, ELS provided us Color Kinetics ColorBlaze 72s, so I incorporated six more this year to uplight the pillow wall. The LED source and primary color rendering make the metallic weave in the drop really pop and give the show a great source that is low profile and low on current draw. Having patched the battens as individual cells, I am also able to shift colors horizontally along the drops for some great cross-fade shifts, including a flame effect in one song.

I put four MAC 2000 Performances on vertical towers for some medium high-side light. These are the only hard-edge lights in the show and provide shuttered looks on the band, as well as gobo and texture painting on the stage. The animation wheel provides some beautiful dynamic looks on the backdrop to give the show another layer.

There are also four MAC 2000 washes on the floor upstage. The extra kick from the 1.2k sources and the wide spread from the lenses mean that the four lights are all that is needed to backlight the drop, layer the backline or light the upstage black curtain. I have always loved the “cannon” narrow beam in the MAC 2000s and we get to use that too.

Due to budget and truck space, 20 moving lights and 6 LED battens is the biggest system the tour can sustain so it was fun to be challenged with a small rig again. I have lit Chris's songs many times so it was also fun to have a different palette to start with as well as a different set of instruments to enable the songs to be re-invented visually. Tyson Palmisano from ELS was instrumental in bringing the custom elements of the design together with some new fixtures and packaging the entire system in a clean and compact rig perfectly suited to this tour.

## On The Road

I've been on the road as Lighting Director with Chris Isaak for 11 years, and this is one of our biggest tours yet, and the best-looking design that we've carried in quite a while. We're touring nine weeks over the summer and fall, a couple of weeks in Europe, and five or so weeks in Australia. In between tour engagements, we do corporate shows, too. Like every touring concert, we have limited time to get in, set up, break down and move on to the next venue, so portability and rapid set-up capability are key to getting this show on the road from city to city.

To make this work, this year's show relies on the latest lighting technology, some custom rigging and an overall crate-to-stage system design. Accustomed to staging mega events and movie premieres, our vendor ELS has not only the latest gear, but the know-how to put a compact road system together.

For this tour, we created a modular system that breaks down into manageable crates, aiding the set-up and tear-down. The vertical trusses, for example, are left on their bases and drop right into their crates, and the cables are loomed together and tied, making them easy to load out fast.

But it all begins with the lights. The new Martin MAC 250s, for example, are tiny but extremely powerful wash lighting units. They allow us to create some amazing visual effects, and yet they can be handled by one person without compromising our ability to stage a terrific show. In all, we have 20 moving lights and six LEDs, giving us more unusual lighting effects, while being smaller, more powerful, more power efficient and faster to install than anything we've used before.

The complete lighting inventory for this year's tour includes:

- 4 Martin MAC 2000 Performance Spots
- 4 Martin MAC 2000 Washes
- 12 Martin MAC 250 Washes
- 6 Color Kinetics ColorBlaze 72 LED Lights
- 1 High End Whole Hog II Control Console, with Expansion Wing
- 4 8' GP 12"x12" Trusses
- 4 Truss Bases
- 4 Custom Pipes for MAC 250s
- 1 Reel EFX DF-50 Diffusion Hazer

With our fast-in/fast-out staging, and I can rig, power and check the focus preset much more quickly. Then it's show time, and I'm ready to run the lights from the back of the house. Tear-down is equally efficient. The small, modular lighting system creates a great effect on stage, yet allows us to breakdown, crate up and move on to the next venue quickly. And with nearly 100 cities on our tour, that's a real benefit.

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*Australian-born Paul Guthrie of Toss Film & Design Inc. has served as lighting and video/projection designer for a variety of concert performers including Sheryl Crow, Crowded House, kd Lang, Billy Idol and Fleetwood Mac. ([www.tossfad.com](http://www.tossfad.com))*

*With 28 years in the business, Lighting Director Lane Hirsch has spent a lifetime on the road with some of music's most famous acts, including Pat Benetar, Fionna Apple, Ringo Starr's All Stars and Robin Trower, among others.*

*Los Angeles area-based Entertainment Lighting Services is one of the nation's leading entertainment, exhibit and event lighting suppliers and production services companies ([www.elslights.com](http://www.elslights.com)).*