

The finest drape in all the land.



Sam's Town

THE KILLERS

LIVE AND 'LOW-TECH'

Tin Pan Sally's at it again. This time she headed off to see what kind of a show The Killers put together at Sydney Entertainment Centre.

Staging a rock show that looks like a Western produces an interesting result. Under instruction from the band, The Killers' lighting, set and even sound crews have effectively hidden all technology on stage. This means there are no keyboards and no guitar amps. There are no LEDs and very little video.

The only video used in this show is an opening roll projected by a Barco at front of house onto a kabuki drape. The video technician's job is effectively over before the band takes to the stage. This person is toured nationally. The DVD in question tours internationally in lighting designer and operator Steven Douglas' drawers cabinet. Steven says he is often asked about the media server he uses, and this question he cheekily replies "It's a DVD player."


This should not give the impression that the show is low on production values. Pride of the set is a \$20 000

black silk ruffled drape, the second of its kind and the replacement for the first \$20 000 black silk ruffled drape which returned from the Mexican leg of the tour with a nasty rip down one side. The drape gives the whole set an old western saloon feel.

Everything else in the set is dressed up in the same way. The foldback wedges are encased in wooden boxes ("It gives the band something else to jump on" Steven says). The saloon piano is really just a keyboard inside a wooden frame. The guitar amps and bass guitar amps are cunningly hidden behind a web of fairy lights plugged into hot power. Even the backline techs are hidden. They are not on the ground beside the stage but tucked away in the wings with the monitors engineer so that the look from front of house is clean and technology-free. The entire stage floor is a wooden dancefloor brought in as part

of the set.

The band is lit by a combination of Mac 2000 and VL 3000s, which are used mainly to create static looks. The light show is very much about lighting the set and complimenting the Western theme. As such, there are few visible fixtures on stage. The set includes three Mac 2000s per side as side lighting and a ground row of Macs tucked away behind the band risers. These are frequently used to light up the silk drape, which picks up colour remarkably well for a black fabric and looks great lit up in red and orange.

To complete the set, festoons are slung across the truss and the words "Sam's Town" are lit up on the black drape, outlined by tiny theatre bulbs. This makes the words unintelligible and nearly impossible to read from the pit. "That's okay" says Steven, "All the kids tonight will know what it says. It's on the album." 

WHAT? NO VISUALS?

The question: Is it OK to run a concert in a 10,000 seat venue without screens?

If you'd asked me twenty years ago, I would have said "Yeah, why not" (actually, I would more likely have said "Big screens? What are you talking about?"). At that time, there was no such thing as big screen visuals, no imag, no led walls – none of it. And those who went to concerts in big venues knew what they were getting and expected to have very little to look at. Ticket prices frequently made allowance for it as well, with the seats way up the back being cheaper.

Sometime in the very late 80s or early 90s, vision technology became capable of dealing with a bit of imag, and some people started putting it in on big shows. Consumer expectations being what they are, 'some people' rapidly became 'everybody'.

So here we are now, and it's safe to say that big vision is a standard expectation of the ticket buying public. There are no cheap seats any more, because everybody has good sightlines, and people don't mind paying the price because they know they'll at least be able to see the screens. Unless they turn up to a show and find that there are no screens.

Cliff Richard got hammered for not using screens a few years back, and the Killers should too. Not providing screens is fine when nobody expects them, but when the ticket buyers are accustomed to being able to see and have coughed up accordingly for tickets – it's just not good enough.

I'm happy with the band's artistic decision to go low-tech, but not happy with the way they let the punters down. Stick a couple of imag screens up high so the people up the back can see, put the show in smaller venues, whatever – but do something about the people in the cheap seats.

Which aren't cheap anymore.

Because of the way we use vision in concerts.

No. It's not OK. - AM



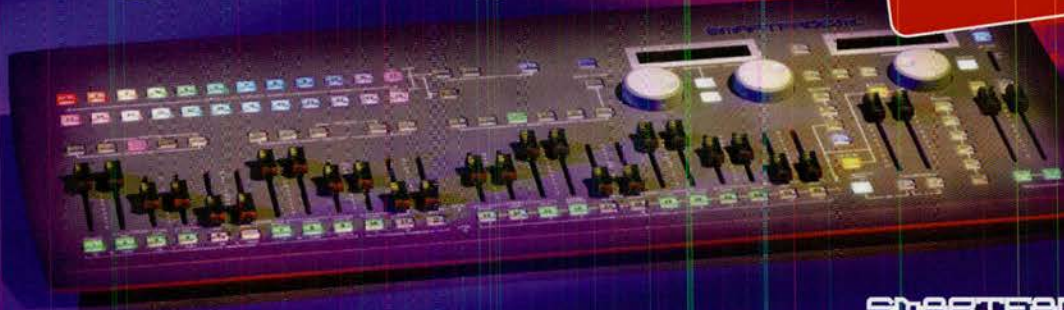
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