

Welcome Europe

May 2004

Large Public Events

The Projection Studio's Ross Ashton designed a stunning large format projection show for Malta's "Welcome Europe" event, the biggest of the recent celebrations to commemorate 10 new member states joining the EU. Ashton's 15 minute work transformed the historic landmark of Malta's Fort St Angelo in Valetta Harbour into a dramatic canvass of colour, movement and visual interaction

The projection project involved The Projection Studio PIGI 6 KW projectors with double rotating DDRA scrollers, and several technical firsts for The Projection Studio. These included projecting onto the water from the cliffs high above the Fort, radio data linking three of the projectors back to the control point 200 metres across the harbour and overlaying the images projected from the 8 machines beaming onto the Fort for maximum brightness. This was instead of the traditional soft-edging method to form the image. Ashton was commissioned to produce the show by Ruben Caruana of Sign-It, who was also production co-ordinator for the event. Sign It is one of the members of the Malta Welcome Europe Consortium consisting of four different companies, each with representatives who joined forces to ensure that Malta's event was the most spectacular. He spent three months researching and compiling the material to be integrated into the popular projection show, which was storyboarded by the Welcome Malta Consortium.

The show featured a brief précis of Malta's history, giant images of Malta's 'people of the moment' including Eurovision Song Contest hopefuls Julie & Ludwig, and included the national flags of all 25 EU member states. The projection artwork was created from a combination of photographs, archive material and specially originated images. The result was over 100 images, 33 metres of film in each projector, and a show containing over 600 cues. Good forward planning and good film-mounting practise was the key. This was programmed by Karen Monid using PIGI's OnlyCue control platform and triggered by timecode from the audio track. The incredibly tight timescale – a Monday get in for a Friday show – saw Monid engaging in 2 days pre-programming before they left the UK.

The eight projectors beaming onto the fort were located at the Old Customs House on the quayside opposite, about 150 metres away. The fort projection coverage was divided into two halves, with four machines covering each half, The PIGI's were using special 150 cm Barco long throw lenses. Effects included scrolling cross-fades, achieved by dropping one image out, moving to the next image and then moving the other back into the picture. The water projections were produced from three PIGIs perched on scaffolding towers, high up on the cliffs above the Fort, flooding down into the harbour waters.

It was witnessed live by up to 120,000 people on the streets of Valetta –approx. a third of Malta's population - and 1.2 billion TV viewers as the show was broadcast live and syndicated worldwide by EBU (European Broadcasting Union).

Prime Minister Dr Lawrence Gonzi commented that they were delighted to have internationally renowned artists like Ross Ashton and Gert Hof working with them on the event, and that the idea all along was to "Create a really historical event for Malta". At the end of a long night of partying and revelling for the Island, there was no doubt that they had achieved their goal.

The throngs of spectators lining the cliff side roads and buildings overlooking the harbour had a great view of these, but the most commanding view was from the Upper Barrakka - stunning ornamental gardens at the summit of the hill overlooking the Fort.

Photos Ross Ashton / Louise Stickland