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Storytime on the mountainside



James Cooke tells the tale of the time InteRise assisted Shades Mountain Baptist Church by providing video and lighting solutions during a worship centre renovation

STORYTELLING FORMS AN INTEGRAL

part of the experience at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and video plays a big part in telling those stories. So, when the church's worship centre underwent a complete renovation, taking place over the course of almost eight months, new video and lighting systems were high on the agenda.

InteRise, formerly known as Morris Integration, an AV integration firm based approximately 200 miles away in Nashville, Tennessee, was hired by Myrick Gurosky + Associates (MG+A), a managing design and construction company that specialises in church facilities, to design and install the new video and lighting systems for Shades Mountain. 'We've worked on a couple of smaller projects with Shades Mountain over the last couple of years,' reveals Wade Russell, assistant general manager at InteRise. 'We've met a number of AVL needs around their campus. I've



Wade Russell and Paul Holst from InteRise with Shades Mountain director of technology, Rob Searcy (centre)

actually known the church's director of technology, Rob Searcy, for quite some time, as he used to be my boss at Bell Shoals Baptist Church in Brandon, Florida.'

While it was the worship centre's turn to undergo refurbishment, it forms the final phase of a much larger, longer-term renovation process that MG+A

has managed for nearly 20 years. Since completing the initial master plan in 2001, most of the campus has been renovated, one room at a time. The final and most complex stage of the master plan was an extensive renovation of the sanctuary, which had remained largely untouched with the same original finishes and

systems from the 1980s. The worship centre was essentially stripped back to the original structure to allow for a completely new finish, including seating, flooring, ceiling and acoustic treatment, as well as the replacement of major mechanical, electrical and fire suppression systems.

'The worship centre is large and rather unique,' says Russell. 'The building is kind of on a mountain, so the ground floor is on what should be the third floor and the lower part of the balcony is on the fourth, the upper part of the decking is on the fifth floor and then there's a catwalk system that's essentially on the sixth.'

'The idea behind the renovation was to remove the concrete choir loft and replace it with a portable solution, which adds some flexibility to their staging. So, now, their stage is flat but they can bring in risers for the choir when needed. Without the fixed choir loft, they could move the front of the stage back by about 25 feet and add



The church's new lobby area

some extra seating up front, which meant they could then take out the under-balcony seats, building a wall at the face of the balcony and creating a lobby space behind it.'

The addition of a new wall at the rear of the sanctuary and further seating at the front are not the only immediately obvious changes congregants notice. A pair of SquareV Vi3 28-foot x 16-foot 3.9mm pixel pitch LED videowalls dominate the wall at the rear of the stage. 'They're both on chain motors, so they can be moved in and out for maintenance,' explains Russell. 'They can also be lowered if the church wants a different look onstage.'

The large screens aren't all that InteRise installed on CM Lodestar D8+ chain motors. 'All of the upstage lightbars are on motors, which provides a little flexibility,' Russell adds. 'Flexibility was one of the main goals of the entire project, in addition to updating the look and feel of the worship centre, and was discussed with us during the design process.'

The added flexibility of the new systems should ensure that Shades Mountain gains extra mileage from its new setup. The chain motors are controlled using a system from Motion Labs. A range of Eurotruss and ModTruss trussing systems were also deployed.

Although arguably the primary function of the videowalls is to support IMAG during services, they are also used for video playback and displaying graphics. In addition, video feeds are streamed to other areas of the campus and to those watching at home or elsewhere online.

'In their video suite, they have a pair of computers towards the back,' recalls Russell. 'One is for the live stream and the other is for a live response, which will have somebody sat at it to reply to comments that

might be made on YouTube or Facebook during a service. Then they have two more computers: Graphics One and Graphics Two. Graphics One is used for producing full-screen graphics and video playback, and Graphics Two is used for lower thirds.'

The backbone of the video setup, following the refurbishment, is a Ross Video Ultrix-FR5 routing and AV processing platform. 'It's a very high-end router,' notes Russell. 'It allows a lot of flexibility as well as expandability. We didn't expect the church to be operating at 100% on day one. We wanted a system that they'd be able to add to over the years. As ministry and its needs change, Shades Mountain can shift with that and add to their system.'

The Ultrix router is accompanied in the video setup by a Carbonite Ultra 2ME production switcher, also from Ross Video. Russell adds: 'We were able to reuse and repurpose some pre-existing cameras that they already had. In the next few years, though, when the church invests in newer cameras, they'll be able to add those

to the system as the infrastructure is in place.'

With a future-proof setup in place, Shades Mountain's video team includes two full-time members of staff. In the time between services, they're kept busy producing a variety of edited video content, all with the purpose of telling stories.



A Ross Video Ultrix-FR5 routing and AV processing platform forms the backbone of the video setup



The master control room

'They produce a lot of testimonial videos,' confirms Russell. 'These can take the form of video interviews with some of the people involved in the church or a testimony to inspire the rest of the congregation. One example was last year when the church produced a Christmas movie, which I believe was shown on local television. They shoot their content at such a high quality using Red cameras and they have an extremely professional setup including a dedicated editing room, so the quality of the image being portrayed onscreen is therefore highly important given the time and effort and investment put in. The SquareV

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PROJECTS

LED walls have helped inside the worship centre as they look stunning and the church has been super excited about that.'

As much of the video content that Shades Mountain produces emanates from the worship centre, and because the church places such importance on how its video content looks, it was paramount that the venue look equally impressive in person, and lighting goes a long way in achieving that. To provide the church with added control over its lighting rig, InteRise installed a grandMA3 light console from MA Lighting. The 'light' model in the fairly new, flagship grandMA3 range, it provides 60 physical playbacks, 16 assignable x-keys and a dedicated master playback section. 'Shades Mountain will occasionally rent supplemental lights for special events, such as at Christmas or Easter,' reasons Russell. 'So, they



A grandMA3 light console provides 60 physical playbacks



Q-Sys control is offered via touchscreens

needed a console to handle a large lighting rig without maxing out.'

The InteRise team also repurposed the conventional lighting fixtures already in the church's possession, although there are plans to upgrade these in the near future when budgets permit.

'You only have so much money to spend on a renovation project of this magnitude,' explains Russell. 'We therefore tried to engineer our solutions so the church can easily add to the setup later without so much of a labour cost. The lighting is a good example of that, as it's an easy swap, especially as they have a catwalk system, when it comes to replacing the fixtures down the line. And when it comes to swapping out or upgrading the cameras, that will be just as easy because the infrastructure is already there – it's plug and play.'

A significant amount of the overall budget was also used for reconfiguring the building to create the new lobby area. It was here

that Russell and the team installed a 70V distributed audio system, as well as video displays. 'The lobby is effectively three storeys and we installed a lot of QSC ceiling speakers to enhance those common spaces. We put all of those on a Q-Sys DSP system with a customised control interface that allows the church to control each zone individually. Then, we also put in a handful of Christie Access Series displays in the lobby and we connected those to the Q-Sys system too, which means nobody has to walk around each screen to turn them all on and off; instead, they can access them all via the touchscreens installed in various locations.'

After eight months, the worship centre renovation was complete, marking the final building to be refreshed under MG+A's master plan. The results are more than noticeable upon entering the facility.

'When you walked into the old worship centre, you were greeted by green pews and big marble



Two SquareV LED videowalls were installed at the back of the stage

walls, and it was rather drab,' says Russell. 'So, walking into the space now, it feels like a place that's well taken care of as it's so aesthetically clean.'

Below the surface, the building's infrastructure has had a complete uplift, ensuring it meets current standards, and, in terms of functionality, the space is now much more in line with how Shades Mountain currently conducts its services. 'They couldn't do what they wanted to with how the room was set up,' Russell explains. 'For example, they still have a large choir, but it's not a part of every service anymore. Sometimes, they need the space onstage for other things during special events.'

Interestingly, church technical production director Searcy has heard plenty of comments picking out the video system as the most noticeable part of the renovation. 'The most complimented feature of our new design is most definitely the two huge SquareV LED

walls,' he says. 'Congregants are constantly commenting on the improved sightlines in the room and how the LED walls bring a new life to video content and a more personal connection to the live elements onstage.'

And it's not only members of the congregation who appreciate the upgrades to the video infrastructure. 'For our production team,' Searcy continues, 'the routing and video infrastructure that was designed and installed with the Ross Ultrix router has been a game-changer in how we can support the many areas of our campus with content from the master control room.'

With a strong backbone supporting video production, Shades Mountain Baptist Church can continue to tell stories in new and unique ways.

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