Production Designer Alex Craig's Extraordinary Creative Vision

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English production designer Alex Craig is one of the leading proponents of his craft. Well known to UK television audiences through a sterling roster of credits, from his contributions to the avidly watched *BBC National Lottery* and *A Question of Sport* and runaway reality smash *This Time Next*

Year, Craig has perfected a mixture of bold creativity and context sensitive design that's made him one of the most in-demand talents in the business.

Craig arrived at his position through a somewhat circuitous route; he initially studied fine arts at a series of prestigious schools when fate intervened. "A good friend at art school was training to direct film in the Media Studies department," Craig said. "And he told me about the role of the art director in film and TV and that immediately interested me. My initial experience was working on music videos and fashion shows, which I loved, so it just grew from there and I became hooked. A Fine Art degree isn't the most obvious route into production design, but in my case, it was."

In short order, Craig established himself as a reliably creative professional with a peerless instinct for creating solid, appealing design

"Throughout my career, I've been lucky enough to have worked on a wide range of interesting and well known UK and international productions," Craig said. "Many of these required a variety of studio and location work in the UK, China and Spain Large scale entertainment shows are definitely a favorite of mine, and I'm a big music fan, so l welcome the opportunity to get involved in designing tours for bands and solo artists. As a personal project, I'd also like to experiment with some of the LED technology that is commonplace in studio design and apply it to create innovative bespoke pieces for interiors. Variety definitely keeps my designs fresh."

One of Craig's biggest and most challenging assignments has been as lead production designer for BBC1 TV's long-running, start-studded annual fundraising spectacular *Children in Need* for almost a full decade. Since its 1980 launch, *CIN* has raised 600 million British pounds for disabled children and young people, established itself as a prominent staple of British pop culture and featured many of world's most famous entertainers—from Taylor Swift and Madonna to Rod Stewart and One Direction.

"The show producers approached me in 2006," Craig said. "They wanted to bring the *CIN* set up to date—it was beginning to look a bit old fashioned. They were impressed by my designs, as I'd been production designer on a number of high-profile BBC shows, and they thought it would be a good fit. I jumped at the opportunity."

It was formidable job. "The telethon is a live, 7 hour primetime broadcast," Craig said. "It features numerous 'A list' acts from the worlds of pop, musicals, comedy, dance, plus surprise performances. For the most part, these take place on a very large, impressive main stage. But the set also requires areas for presenters, surprise guests and more intimate performances so the set design also includes additional stages, a catwalk, multiple entrance options, several huge LED screens, plus a large studio audience. "

As a fully live, in-the-moment theatrical presentation, Craig has to not only anticipate myriad potential complications, he must be prepared to confront any issue head on. "The set also has to be flexible enough to get specific 'performance sets' required by any given artist, onto and off the main stage at high speed. It's a technically complex event, which requires a mixture of creativity, logistics and a calm nature—especially when there's less than a minute to go till the next spot and I can see an incomplete performance set still being put together on the stage. Back in 2006 there was also a large orchestra to accommodate, and although the orchestra is now gone, the amount of technology has increased which brings its own challenges."

"There's a creative pressure to design a set that is going to have the style and presence to work as an appropriate backing for a diverse mix of some of the world's biggest stars,' Craig said. "The fact that it is live requires a lot of quick turnaround scenic setting, striking and re-setting throughout the 7 hours that we're live on air. Backstage can become extremely cramped, with props, scenery and band equipment stacked everywhere you look. The set also incorporates a huge amount of LED technology which has to be integrated into the scenery as the set is installed. This can sometimes slow us down if there's any kind of fault or glitch."

Few have the drive, vision and skill to take on such monumental task, year after year, but Craig wouldn't have it any other way. Nor would the BBC: "Alex designed the main studio set for 9 *Children in Need* shows, which is an outstanding achievement in itself," executive producer Clare Pizey said. "He is an innovative and extremely talented Production Designer who has managed to give the show a visual identity which sets the tone for the night. And he is always pushing to move the look of the set to the next level, which both uplifts and inspires the audience. This is much of the reason why *Children in Need* has become so special to British culture as a whole."

Craig's long stint with *CIN* is one of the crown jewels in his already glittering resume, and it holds a special place in the designer's affections.

"I love designing this show and am proud of what it stands for," Craig said. "It has become a very special annual event in my work diary and a career highlight for me. It's an honor to have contributed to such a good cause for so many years. The show has raised record amounts of money even during recession years, and that always spurs me on to dream up new ways of presenting a fresher, more innovative design."

For more information on Alex Craig, visit alexcraig.com (http://www.alexcraig.com/)