

*A recent phenomenon that has been turning heads in the ever-evolving realm of live events is the groundbreaking use of world-class lighting design to breath new life into the world of stand-up comedy. And **Naveen Deshpande**, a renowned trailblazing lighting designer from India, stands at the forefront of this revolution as he sets out on a mission to redefine the audience experience at comedy shows through his unique lighting design expertise. This endeavour was fruitfully realized through his recent collaboration with India's leading stand-up comedian, **Zakir Khan**, during the latter's immensely successful international tour.*



## Naveen Deshpande Revolutionizes Stand-Up Comedy with Truly Bespoke Lighting Designs

### Inspiration and genesis of a bold vision

The journey began when Naveen and his team were exploring ways to disrupt the traditional lighting setup at comedy shows. Their initial experiment was with Amazon Prime's stand-up special "Bas Kar Bassi," featuring Anubhav Singh Bassi – a beloved artist within the Indian scene today. The experience ignited Naveen's curiosity about blending lighting as an integral part of set design to amplify the show's atmosphere.

"The concept was simple; how do we move away from the conventional set up of just having a curtain at the back and by up lighting it to utilising lights as part of the set design and enhancing the look and feel of the show" quips Naveen, as he reveals that a fateful connection with Ankur Bharadwaj, Zakir Khan's manager, transformed this idea into reality. Hailed as India's most successful and most sought-after comedian; Zakir's ambitious World Tour, with shows scheduled at iconic venues such as the Sydney Opera House and Melbourne Palais Theatre, provided the perfect canvas to showcase Naveen's innovative approach.

Naveen also confirms that since this was the first instance in history that an Indian artist was booked to perform and headline an event at the **Sydney Opera House** and **Melbourne Palais Theatre** respectively; it was absolutely imperative for the entire team to treat the audience to a truly seamless and world-class performance experience.

### Conceptualization and considerations

The journey from concept to execution demanded meticulous planning and understanding. Naveen's first step was immersing himself in Zakir's upcoming show – dissecting the script, anticipating movements,



Zakir Khan creates a joyful ambiance with his stand-up comedy





**A view of Naveen Deshpande's trailblazing visual spectacle at Zakir Khan's stand-up comedy**

and identifying pivotal moments. The challenge then was to seamlessly integrate his lighting vision with the existing architectural structure. "Honestly, this was my first time trying something so unique, and I wasn't really sure what to expect. I was certain about one thing though; that it was imperative for the lighting design to uplift the energy in the room right from the get-go," confesses Naveen.

### Choice of lighting fixtures and technology integration

The success of Naveen's design hinged on the synergy between his vision and the available technological arsenal; with both, the Sydney Opera House, and Melbourne Palais Theatre, thankfully boasting top-tier fixtures from renowned lighting manufacturer Martin; the likes of which included the Mac Viper, Quantum Wash, Quantum Profile, and Rush Blinders. On the other hand, Naveen's floor package relied on the versatile **Mac Aura XB fixtures**, as he informs, "I wanted a good and tight arrangement of zoom washes placed in a semi-circle format as part of my floor package. So, for this I went with the Mac Aura XB fixtures." At the same time, Naveen shares that the multitude of high-performance architectural lighting at the Sydney Opera House helped to add a layer of elegance to the overall design, while also

affirming that the shows at both venues were meticulously orchestrated using the **grandMA3 control system**.

### Overcoming challenges and realizing the vision

Executing a groundbreaking vision like this, within a tight timeframe posed its share of challenges. Naveen, who joined the planning process of the tour relatively late, had to quickly comprehend the available resources and tailor his requirements accordingly.

"These shows came to me while I was already on a tour in Australia with Lucky Ali and we had literally eight days in hand to execute these shows. The promoters and management team had already locked in the lighting packages at the respective venues. So, to have a quick understanding of what is already available and then to specify what we needed additionally based on the show, was quite challenging" reveals Naveen. Thankfully, the professional and cooperative teams at both venues played a pivotal role in aligning their efforts with Naveen's vision.

Having said that, Naveen does confess the Sydney Opera House posed a unique challenge due to a pre-scheduled Sydney Symphony Orchestra show, leaving Naveen's team with a narrow window to set up. "We only had 2 hours 30 mins to load in our gear, rig it based on our plot, program and be show ready before the doors opened," Naveen informs, as he clarifies that careful coordination, and an efficient rigging plan ensured the eventual smooth execution of the entire lighting plan at the venue.

### Inventory List

Lighting Rig At The Melbourne Palais Theatre	Lighting Rig At The Sydney Opera House
12x Martin MAC Aura XB	30 x Robert Juliat ZEP 661SX
1 x Robert Juliat MERLIN Followspot	8 x Martin Encore Performance
16x Martin MAC ERA Performance	4 x High End Systems SolaSpot Pro 1500
23 x ROBE ROBIN LEDWash	16 x High End Systems SolaFrame Studio
4 x SGM Light X-5 White LED Strobes	12 x ETC Lustr II
7 x EK Lights LED Molefay Duet	6 x ETC Lustr III
4 x MARTIN RUSH BLINDER 1 WW	12 x Lumascape Banner fixture
1 x Concept CO2 Hazer (DMX)	10 x ETC Lustr III 19-degree profiles
1 x Variable Chrome Smoke Fan	96 x ETC Pro Multi cell 8 37 degrees
1 x grandMA3 Full Size Lighting Console	6 x Martin Quantum Wash for floor
	6 x Martin Quantum profile
	7x Martin MAC Viper performance
	6 x Martin MAC Viper profile
	11 x Martin Quantum wash (top)
	8 x Martin MAC 101 CT
	2 x Unique Haze
	1 x grandMA2 light
	2 x Robert Juliat MERLIN Followspot

### An innovative approach to create emotional resonance

While working at the Melbourne Palais Theatre and the Sydney Opera House, Naveen was presented with an array of lighting fixtures that would make any lighting designer's heart skip a beat. At the Melbourne Palais Theatre, he had hundreds of fixtures at his disposal; and this number more than doubled at the Sydney Opera House, courtesy of the venue's already impressive in-house rig. "For me it was like being a kid in a candy-store!" exclaims Naveen.

The situation though enticing, demanded Naveen to bring his unmatched expertise and innate understanding of the intricate world of lighting to the fore as he curated the perfect combination of fixtures to elevate the visual appeal of the respective shows. This approach, as Naveen explains, delved deep into the realms of color theory and lighting principles, with a view to captivate the audience on a subliminal level.

For instance, Naveen's strategic thinking came to the forefront when considering follow-spots. At the Melbourne Palais Theatre, he opted for a single follow-spot strategically positioned at the absolute center of the stage, which not only seamlessly harmonized with the venue's dynamics but also ensured the most precise and immersive spotlighting experience. In contrast, the Sydney Opera House demanded

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a nuanced touch, as the team deployed two follow-spots that were thoughtfully rigged on the sides of the stage. This configuration not only offered the optimal spotlight angle but also provided a subtly nuanced experience for the artist himself, thereby further enhancing the visual spectacle.

Naveen's ability to navigate the vast array of lighting fixtures and select the perfect combination showcased not only his technical prowess but also his artistic sensibility.

Diving into the details of it all, Naveen explains that his approach was less about elaborate effects and more about crafting an emotional atmosphere and using lighting to accentuate Zakir's presence and create the right mood. He notes, "Unlike the music shows I do; this show was not about any movements or effects for me, but it was more about the aerial looks and the right colour and mood. I sat on different seats in every area of the room to ensure there was no glare on anybody's eyes. I ran a cue specific during the entry sequence of Zakir with a fade in time with all the floor lights congregating at the focal point where Zakir would eventually come and stand. It was nice to see the cue sit in quite accurately with his walk. I could really feel the audience react when this happened which was an amazing experience. Another idea at Melbourne Palais Theatre which I thought worked well was to play

with the texture of the walls. These walls were built in the 1950's, and obviously had a very royal finesse to them. So, I thought it would be nice to light up some of it using the phenomenal gobos that the **Martin Mac Era 800** performance offered. We also managed to bring in a decent sized video wall where we projected Zakir's logo with a blue background and it was great to have this as a contrast to his jacket colour which was green."

### **A bright future on the horizon**

"It was fantastic. I think everyone in the room, including Zakir, felt a wonderful energy, and it is safe to say that the lighting played a pivotal role in elevating the overall experience for everyone," enthused Naveen. With newfound conviction, he added, "Moreover, I am thrilled that I can now champion the unexplored potential of lighting in the world of stand-up comedy to anyone who questions its feasibility."

However, this groundbreaking initiative extends far beyond the confines of a single tour as Naveen firmly believes that its resounding success not only illuminates the untapped potential of lighting design in stand-up comedy but also ignites a spark of inspiration. "For the Indian industry, this marks the inception of a promising avenue for lighting designers," he affirmed.