

Article category: PROJECT PARADE

## THE 3 TENORS

### The **BIGGEST** challenge? Hoping it wouldn't rain



*By Lene Ecoignard*

*Since 1990, the Three Tenors, Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and José Carreras have performed in 10 different countries on four continents. After their spectacular performance on 10 July 1998, at the Champ-de-Mars in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris – a concert watched by millions world-wide, the Three Tenors "Bravo Africa" concert in Pretoria promised to be the most spectacular and ambitious event ever staged in South Africa. Who was ensuring that this promise was kept?*

Before the show, ProjectPro interviewed Mark Ransom, Technical Project Manager for Showtime International, to find out how the production was being managed. Contingency plans were in place for almost every possible mishap, but what about the possibility of rain!

Yes, rain. This was Ransom's biggest concern because being a natural occurrence, it is beyond man's control. The team studied weather patterns and predictions for that time of the year, but there was still a 30% chance of rain on 18 April 1999.

Asked if he followed Project Management principles in his job, Ransom was quick to elaborate. In his opinion, it would be impossible to pull something like this off without following the basic project management principles. Although he had not had any project management training, his experience with the design and construction of large entertainment complexes such as The Lost City, qualified him for the task.

#### **What was the project scope?**

Basically, this project involved setting up a stage (110m wide x 40m deep x 32m high) that could accommodate the three performers (Domingo, Carreras and Pavarotti), the 120-piece National Symphony Orchestra and a 300-strong choir. Although the stage was obviously a crucial factor, the back-stage facilities were equally important. Components such as hospitality marquees and other facilities for artists also had to be taken into account.

The project furthermore included public areas such as the grandstands, three kilometres of rubber turf, 70 hospitality marquees and 700 toilets for an expected audience of 40 000 people. Sound, lighting and video systems had to be rigged through trees (one very famous Kareeboom had to be carefully pruned) and grass, without disturbing the people who worked in the Union Buildings too much and under stringent security measures. All this in 17 days? With careful planning and each event mapped out meticulously, it was possible. Dismantling everything was achieved in seven days.

Planning for this huge endeavour started 13 months before the event, when Ransom was shown a contract for the concert. The area around the Union Buildings was surveyed to map every tree and to plan the placement of grandstands and stage. Nothing was left to chance. Assembly of the venue started on 1 April 1999, and within 17 days the stage was set.

### **What if.... ?**

What if something went wrong, we asked. "Then, we fix it", said Ransom. "We have planned for almost every possible misfortune and, as far as possible, prepared ourselves for any eventuality (on the night, 3 000 people had to be moved when one of the grandstands became unstable – R1m was refunded by the production company). But, of course there are some things that we cannot plan for. If one of the artists fell ill, it would be a judgement call – two tenors, instead of three..."

Unlike the Aida Show (Loftus Versfeld), Showtime International used tried and tested sound equipment to ensure crystal clear sound. Several huge screens reflecting the event from different camera angles through closed-circuit television, were erected to ensure that every member of the audience would have the best possible view of the concert.

To measure the success of the project, Showtime International had to rely on comments and complaints from the public. If everyone was comfortable and could hear and see well, the project would be considered a success.

Although the government was initially thrilled with the idea of hosting such a concert in the grounds of the Union Buildings, obtaining the necessary permissions from "Red Tape City" did not prove to be an easy task, admitted Ransom. However, he felt confident that once everything was up and running – and a huge success – the attitude would improve dramatically.

### **And after the Three Tenors?**

We asked Ransom if he would undertake a project of this magnitude again. "Not likely", was his reaction, "unless Hazel Feldman (CEO of Showtime International) asks of course". After the Bravo Africa concert, Ransom devoted his time to the design and construction of the new Caesar's Gauteng Casino complex near the Johannesburg International Airport. And this is what he actually does – being an entertainment and leisure consultant.

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