



WWE's Wrestlemania XXVIII at Sun Life Stadium in Miami

By Kevin M. Mitchell

# STAGE TOPS USA

## Making Soft Goods Part of the Show

"I've had the honor of working with some of the best live entertainment professionals in the industry," declares Stage Tops USA owner Kevin Greenwood. "I've worked with trussing companies, staging companies, production managers, designers, local hands, and riggers. Some of the stage installations were done at crazy high heights — I've been with clients on top of roofs that have been locked off at 45 feet and up."

Such is the life and times of a successful soft goods provider to the world of increasingly big and complicated live rock 'n' roll events.

Stage Tops supplies classic roof skins, Keder panel roof skins, 73-percent mesh, speaker scrims and backdrops, wind walls, FOH and spot towers and bungees. And their list of clients is impressive: organizations like AEG Live, Atomic Designs, Brown United, Live Nations, PRG, Reed Rigging, Kleeg Industries and Ty-

ler Truss have called them in on projects. They've been part of festivals like the All Good Festival, Bonnaroo, CMA Music Festival and the Tribeca Film Festival, among others. Acts include Big & Rich, Rolling Stones and U2, among others.

"Everything is custom for every

**ORIGINS**

Stage Tops USA (previously World Show International) was founded in Los Angeles in 1996.

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**STAGING PRODUCTS**

Rentals and sales of classic and Keder roof skins, 73% mesh, speaker scrims and backdrops, vinyl wind walls, FOH and spot structure covers, breakaway bungees

**EVENT PRODUCTS**

Digitally printed stage skins, banners, backdrops, speaker scrims, skirts, navbar-logos, custom shaped panels, etc.; custom-shaped vinyl, mesh, solid color or digitally printed materials; worship-specific fabric, light, shapes and digitally printed projection screens.

Setting up Stage Tops products near company headquarters in Tennessee



show, every job is a challenge, and every thing is a rush!" Greenwood says. "If you care about something, then you go over every detail of every job, and there are always challenges."

**The Early Days**

Greenwood has been in the entertainment biz since he was 13 and started out as a roadie for a DJ in England. He became an international DJ himself, touring the world.

He wound up in L.A. in the 1980s and, when he wasn't paying attention, ended up working for an awning company. "I hated it!" he laughs. "I thought, there has to be more than this!" By "sheer accident" he crossed paths with a fellow British expatriate who was involved with a small staging company. "I started to work for them, and felt there was a big loophole in the industry." He saw where he could fit in.

In the early days, Greenwood was a freelancer, and did a lot of work for movies and TV as a set decorator working for shows like *Star Trek*, *Married with Children* and *NYPD*. In the 1990s he saw the writing on the wall: with more TV and movie production moving to Canada, there was less work for him in Hollywood. Along the way, he got himself to an LDI convention. "I walked to the show and talked to people, and that's how it really got started."

In 1991, he founded a slightly different version of his company called World Show International. "Nobody got the original name!" he laughs. "Sometimes you overlook how critical a company name is." He was doing work for display companies in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, and providing big canopies for companies like DirecTV, Hallmark, Sketchers and Nike and, in 1996, changed the name to Stage Tops USA.

A key relationship for Greenwood in the early days was John Brown of Brown United.

"Brown United has more than a 12-year working and personal relationship

with Kevin," says CEO John Brown. "He has been our go-to source."

Brown adds that soft goods can become a critical component of any show — and its overall safety — particularly in less-than-perfect weather. "When the [soft goods] product fails, the event fails." He credits Stage Tops for products that "endure the winds and rains of today's ramped-up weather."

The work kept coming for the renamed company, and Greenwood was on prestigious gigs like the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney and a Super Bowl opening ceremony. But the world changed on Sept. 11, 2001 and, like so many others in the live event business, the tragedy adversely affected business.

"Every show we had was cancelled, and the industry changed a lot. Prior to that, I thought I knew what was coming, but after that, I couldn't tell you!"

**Thriving Once More**

It was a struggle, but Stage Tops survived and, eventually, began to thrive once more. In 2006, he moved the company to Manchester, TN, within an hour from Nashville, to be closer to the increasing number of gigs he was getting that started on the East Coast, along with the rise in country music business. Since his move there, the people of Manchester have expressed their gratitude by presenting him with their "Key to the City" honor.

Joe McMonagle Jr. of Atomic Design Inc. is another business partner giving Greenwood props. "I've been working with Kevin for about four years," says McMonagle. "He has produced large format printed vinyl pieces for us and done it in a crazy [i.e., extremely short] turnaround. He's one of the best at handling that, and that's why we love working with him." McMonagle then laughs, adding: "He requires the least amount of handholding of any vendor we work with! You just give him the specs of an idea and he makes it happen. And if there's every a problem, he jumps on a plane and goes out

and fix it, and that doesn't happen very often."

**Service, Service, Service**

"Kevin Greenwood of Stage Tops USA is just an incredible guy with remarkable attention to detail on every project," says Neil Ryan of the Neil Ryan Group, a live event management and logistics firm. "No matter how large or small the project is Kevin always nails it!"

Ryan first met Greenwood when he was with AEG in Southern California. While working on a project in the middle of the desert, the staging company (Brown United) recommended Stage Tops and "24 hours later, Kevin arrived on site with six perfectly fabricated scrims to be used on a showcase festival. He had all of the rigging ready so the scrims could come down at a moment's notice, should weather blow in, and he provided a header scrim on Keder track that would stand up to the toughest weather environments."

"Today I service everybody in the industry," Greenwood says. "And I pride myself on standing by the customer 110 percent. At the end of the day, it's their ass on the line, and we work hard to make sure they have what they need and the show goes well." Greenwood adds that it pleases him that sometimes customers just call him up for a little advice. "That shows I must be doing something right!" he laughs.

**The Simple Things**

It's the simple things Stage Tops does that allow them to nurture and grow relationships, Greenwood adds. And it's not just the client he likes to spend time with. "I spend a lot of time with the riggers, who are very important. You want to hear from the hands-on people, hear their gripes, and make things more workable to everyone involved."

Stage Tops doesn't just make the material and hand it off, but advises how to hang it and help with any safety issues. "I'm hands on," says Greenwood. "I can look at a drawing and tell what is needed. I've been there and



know how to make something work."

Stage Tops has just expanded their shop in Manchester, doubling its size to 6,000 square feet. There are 10 working for the company including Travis Sapp (sales and support), Ary Maronyan (CAD & graphic design) and Porfirio Lozano (manufacturing crew manager).

**Beyond the USA**

Stage Tops also recently opened up a rental division, and an office in Bulgaria. (They have always done work in Europe, and are doing more in the Middle East lately.)

"I like to get that call that is something different," Greenwood says. "I'm proud of what my guys pull off, and appreciate how my clients have stuck with us as we've stuck with them. We're the only company of our kind that can actually travel with the show, and there are problems, if something gets ripped, we will meet with the tour at the next stop and take care of it."

Ryan says that he's turned to Stage Tops consistently from his current base near New York City. "There are other companies that provide scrims, but there is not one company like Stage Tops. They use the best materials crafted by the best technicians, and he personally is always there to help."

Brown says that if it's a late call on Sunday night, if it's "I gotta have it in two days," if it's "Can you send the shop crew out to fix the problem," Stage Tops will do what it takes to get it done, and "get it done right, and safely." **PLSN**



Supporting a recent Bon Jovi tour in Canada



Kevin Greenwood, owner, Stage Tops USA

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