

Counting Crows find Sweet Spot with Robe

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Lighting designer Conner Ostrowski of Wide Open Productions was excited to join the Counting Crows creative team earlier in 2025, bringing fresh ideas and energy to the stage aesthetics as the legendary Bay Area rockers hit the road with their *Butter Miracle, The Complete Sweets* album and world tour.



(Above): By Nicolas LeTellier @nicklphoto / @aliveco (Shot at The Pinnacle Nashville)

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Conner chose to work with Robe moving lights - 10 x iFORTE LTXs, 16 x iPointe65s and 32 x Spiiders - at the core of an eye-catching lighting design, delighting the band and their diverse fan base as they kicked off a lengthy US tour with lighting equipment supplied by Upstaging.

With no video elements onstage, all the visual emphasis was on lighting to support the band's latest musical venture.

Upstaging - with whom Conner has worked on previous projects, including for electro duo Chromeo - has a large inventory of Robe, but it was at Tennessee-based Pulse Lighting, owned and run by Preston and Paul Hoffman, where he initially "met and fell in love with Robe" products early on in his career.

Conner still uses the pre-viz facilities at Pulse for much of his visualization work.

Wide Open Productions - Conner's creative design studio - is renowned for producing inventive and appropriate visual designs; "Design with purpose" is their mantra, Conner explained. "We don't necessarily pick the newest or trendiest fixtures just because we can or because they are available! Each design project is individually assessed and its creative treatment carefully thought through, with a mix of the right lighting products chosen to attain the best results."

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Ahead of this tour, he received a brief from Counting Crows lead singer Adam Duritz, who likes theatrical contrasts and subtleties as well as being able to see the lights himself and feel their impact on the fans.

For Conner, who was born into the theater and grew up with it surrounding him, it was music to his ears to have a rock band that appreciated the drama, tension, and anticipation that theatrical-style lighting moments can bring to a performance.

He specifically wanted to use iFORTES for key lighting and also for shooting out into the crowd and creating those big, sumptuous, beamy 'rock-looks' and WOW moments, pulling all in the room meaningfully into the energy onstage.

So, iFORTES were a key fixture on the rig, with four rigged on the mid truss and six on the downstage truss.

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He knew there would be no issues with intensity when using iFORTES – in fact, there were times during the set when he had to tweak the brightness down!

He also picked iFORTE because of reliability and good gobos, which were fundamental to the design, together with the animation wheels and color, all of which helped to paint the stage fluidly with lighting and illumination to support the music.

“There is no other fixture currently on the market where an animation wheel can be used fully zoomed out and the effect still has so much presence! The punch and zoom ratios for creating these effects work brilliantly there and they kill it every time.”

In the song “Colorblind” he works elegantly and strategically on manipulating the dark and negative spaces onstage by teasing particles of light into them, remarking that the LTXs remain extraordinarily bright and visible even with gobos in!

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The iPointes were rigged on 8 ft horizontal truss sections that were also mirrored up in the roof, enabling the fixtures to assist with stage coverage and low-level back light from all directions, immersing the band in lumens.

Conner thinks that the iPointe and iFORTE gobos align exceptionally well.

The whole overhead rig was raked, wrapping the stage to give it an additional edge, and the iPointes in the center of each pod could be used to keep the band immersed in light as they migrated around the stage, which was one of the many theatrical flourishes of the show lighting.



(Above): By Demian Becerra @theholymountain / @aliveco (Shot at YouTube Theater LA).

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These needed to be IP rated, as the US tour played a mix of indoor and outdoor gigs.

All the iFORTE LTXs and iPointes were connected to a remote follow spotting system and could be selected for follow duties at any time.

The Spiiders were rigged on 16 pods – nine in the air and seven on the floor – all of which also contained an iPointe, effectively surrounding the band members and giving Conner a formidable toolbox to create layered, atmospheric scenes and big, bold, breathtaking looks to accent more poignant moments with fine details.

The Spiiders were used in a truly multifunctional fashion. The pixelation and Flower Effects offered two additional texturing treatments, which Conner could maximize, and he could also use them as standard wash lights.

Conner is a “huge fan” of Robe’s colors and color mixing systems and the way that the RGBW chips are engineered to produce impressive colour gradients that can be shaped into stunning looks.

The Spiiders were invaluable for building the complex layers of drama required during songs like “Under the Aurora” and “Rain King”.

A set list was not available before the lighting programming started. Conner was told at that stage to prepare for any song they had ever recorded ... running into hundreds of tracks, which as the set evolved, was honed down to 53 songs worth of diligently crafted lighting cues, replete with plenty of ‘ooh’ and ‘ahhhh’ interactive moments for fans.

He and his two programmers, Mike Gionfriddo and Scott Huggins, along with the other creative team members, evolved a very special show that was “as much fun as it was a challenge.” It really illustrated their imaginative talents as much as it did the flexibility and scope of the fixtures, allowing them to keep it contemporary and clean-looking.

The Upstaging crew chief was Paul Mundrick, and lighting techs were Emil Vuorijarvi, Kendall Clark, and Hannah-Grace Harper. “They were fantastic – and I cannot thank them enough for the great support, knowledge and fun we all had working together,” Conner stated. Hannah also managed the remote follow spotting system.

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(Above): By Demian Becerra @theholymountain / @aliveco (Shot at YouTube Theater LA).

Conner also appreciated the “excellent” assistance from the team at Robe North America, and Upstaging, where he worked closely with account handler John Bahnick, project manager Josh Wagner and special projects / Follow Me programmer, John Weston, with additional Follow Me support from Chris Lose.

Keeping everything organised and running smoothly on the road for Counting Crows is their production manager, Shawn London, and tour manager Tom Mullally.

For the subsequent 7-week European leg of the tour, Conner ran lighting from an Avolites D9-330 console – they had two on the tour supplied by Neg Earth. Working with a variety of control systems, he cut his programming / operating teeth on Avo, and in Europe, where the rigs were changing daily, he felt it was “exactly the right control platform for the job.”