



Into the thick of the battle

GTC student member **Dan Brown** showed the kind of initiative the GTC often recommends to its student members in spotting and securing an opportunity for some great experience operating a radio camera for big screen transmission at the Battle Proms concerts in Lincolnshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Warwickshire. Here's how he got on.

With thanks to JSL Productions for the photographs

Spotting an opportunity

At BVE last year, I was looking around the various exhibition stalls, admiring all the new cameras and equipment, when I came across an advertisement for a big-screen company called Fonix LED, who provide big screen camera feeds for live events around the country.

Fonix employ freelance camera operators to operate their in-house cameras and RF systems, so I decided to contact them to see if they had any opportunities over the summer. I was delighted to receive an email back from one of the producers who confirmed they did indeed need an RF camera operator that weekend for the 'Battle Proms' event in Lincolnshire.

So, I packed up the usual essentials such as waterproofs and suitable footwear, and set off in plenty of time to make sure I would arrive early on site for the rig. The first job was to unload all the equipment for the RF system, as well as cameras and tripods. During the event, we were surrounded by the stage, multiple tents, trees, suspended speakers and LOTS

of people, so the RF system selected was the Boxx Meridian Zero Delay unit, which would guarantee a strong signal. As I hadn't worked with this system before, the producer/director gave me a crash course on how to rig it and we tested it a few times to make sure the signal was rock solid.

Comms/talkback was the other essential element we needed to rely on, as without it I would be working completely on my own capturing shots without a planned sequence.

The daily routine

At each site (the job was four days long) I was responsible for unpacking the camera, tripod, PTZ cameras, RF equipment, V-lock battery charger and putting all the spare batteries on charge. It would take roughly 30 minutes to set everything up and thoroughly test the RF transmitter and receiver for a strong, clean connection. As I was in constant communication with the director, if the RF signal was breaking up, I would move back to a position of reference where I knew the signal

would stay strong. I always carried a spare fully charged battery with me in case of a technical malfunction, but luckily that never happened.

As the director didn't have control over iris I was solely responsible for adjusting this when necessary. It was often difficult to adjust it as I was live the majority of the time, so I had to make the changes very slowly, checking when possible on the big screen to make sure the adjustments were subtle enough not to adversely affect the picture.

I also communicated often with the leader of the Cavalry Display to ensure not only that I could capture the best shots from the best angles but also to make sure that I stayed safe and also didn't present a hazard to the horses. If the horses were spooked by unfamiliar people or equipment this could potentially have created a dangerous situation for anyone in their path.

Since I would be live for long periods of time at a stretch, it was essential to make sure the camera and tripod were in as comfortable a position as possible to allow me to hold my concentration and preserve stamina. I have been told by countless people in the past that when you are so focused on what you are filming, it's all too easy to forget that you might be tired and hungry – and that can affect your ability to complete the job well.

Opportunities to be creative

The four days in total amounted to a very useful 20 hours operating an RF system, communicating with production staff and learning about big-screen work. The varied running order of events consisted of: event rehearsal, a band called the Rockabellas, the Cavalry Display, Cannon fire, the Spitfire display, Proms wrapup with the crowd coming to the front of the stage and community singing.

Halfway through the event came the segment in which a Spitfire plane would fly over the site performing stunts including rotations, barrel rolls, nose-first dives, upside-down flights etc., which of course would get the crowd very excited. Over the three events I filmed the plane from the start of its display until around half-way. It was a challenge not only just to maintain balance when tilting up to the point where the plane was practically overhead, but also keeping the plane nicely in frame and in focus throughout. I was pleased that I achieved this each time though – and I must admit I was pretty proud of that! When the plane went out of sight behind some trees or the stage roof, I would zoom out and wait for it to reappear and then zoom back in smoothly but relatively fast to resume following it. As I wasn't briefed on the plane's course of direction or order of stunts, I was completely



My work was for live transmission on the big screens provided by Fonix LED

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Fully rigged RF receiver

in the dark about what was going to happen next. So, deliberately didn't go in too tight, instead opting for a frame size that would allow me to change direction quickly, without warning, in order to find and follow the plane travelling in its new direction. Again this was challenging but I was pretty satisfied that it went well.

There were a couple of sections in the event when the crowd would get particularly involved. For one of these, the host, Pam Rhodes, would introduce a representative from a charity that raises money for injured and traumatised troops who had fought on the frontline and invite the audience to participate in a press-up challenge to complete

The Spitfire aerial display was challenging to cover



DARREN HARRAR



The spectacular firework finale brought the crowd to its feet

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I would like to thank the director for believing in me and giving me the chance to show my skills and prove I could be a valuable asset to the production team.

a certain number of press-ups in an amount of time, with donations going to the charity. This segment was great fun for me as I would get into a low, underarm position and move through the rows of troops and audience capturing handheld shots.

close-up handheld underarm shots of the audience which were transmitted onto the big screen. It was great fun to see the audience members' thrilled reactions when they caught sight of themselves on the big screen! I also felt proud knowing that my footage was being seen by thousands of people. I would sometimes look up at the screen to compare my framing from the camera viewfinder to the big screen. The director would cut and mix between my RF camera and the other two PTZ cameras on stage. We were limited with camera angles but this enabled me to capture more creative sequences and angles to complement the cut/mix of the orchestra. As the PTZ cameras were covering only the action on stage plus some slow panning shots of the audience, this meant all the rest of the action in the field was my responsibility to capture as creatively as possible, on time and in frame, and all the time without losing the RF signal.

Boxx TV Meridian Zero Delay transmitter



One of my other favourite sections was the finale, when the orchestra would play a medley of famous British anthems such as 'Auld Lang Syne', 'Rule Britannia' and 'Land of Hope & Glory' with the audience moving up close to the stage to join in the singing.

This allowed me to capture more

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Battle Proms community singing

Challenges on the day

It's fair to say I did face a few challenges during the event. Firstly, as I didn't have a tally or return feed to my camera, I couldn't see

Zerb reader competition: Win Battle Proms tickets



Zerb is grateful to JSL Productions for supplying the great images from the Battle Proms printed in this article – and even more so that they have offered three pairs of free tickets for Zerb readers.

To win one of the three pairs of tickets for a Battle Proms picnic concert at your chosen venue (see venues and dates below), email your answer to the three questions below to zerb.production@gtc.org.uk by 1 April.

In the 2016 Battle Proms events:

1. What kind of plane performed the display?
2. Which RF system was used for the big-screen coverage?
3. What was the name of the show's host?

All correct entries received by 1 April 2017 will be entered in a draw and the winners notified by email. Please state which venue you would like tickets for if you are lucky enough to win: Burghley House (8 July), Hatfield House (15 July), Blenheim Palace (22 July), Highclere Castle (5 August) or Ragley Hall (12 August).

See more about the Battle Proms events at: www.battleproms.com

when I was live and therefore couldn't watch to see what the other cameras were doing. The other major challenge was in being fully responsible for the iris control and also other features such as white balance, gain and ND filters, as there was no racking.

Overall though, I found the whole thing to be invaluable in expanding my camerawork experience, while also a great opportunity to learn more about big-screen functionality, RF systems and event production. It provided me with a wealth of RF operating experience which I had been seeking for a long time. It also provided me with a real sense of working over very long days, which not only built my stamina but also tested my concentration, both important attributes for when I start work in the industry full-time. I may be working on the series again in the summer of 2017 but that is yet to be confirmed. I would like to thank the director for believing in me and giving me the chance to show my skills and prove I could be a valuable asset to the production team.

Fact File

GTC member Dan Brown is studying TV Production at Middlesex University and is keen for any freelance opportunities to further develop his skills in ENG, PSC, OB, studio, ped, handheld camerawork as well as an RF operator and camera assistant.

Contact Dan on: dtm_1996@hotmail.co.uk



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Thank you!

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