

CREW CHIEF SERIES...



NICK BARTON
CREW CHIEF

HOW LONG HAVE YOU FREELANCED WITH NEG?

The first tour I did as a freelancer for NEG was about 20 years ago. Which I think was a Darkness Tour, was the first time I really did that.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO NEG EARTH?

I first came across Neg Earth when I was working with Vari-Lite. Back then, Vari-Lite only provided the moving lights, and the conventional lighting companies provided the rest of the equipment like trussing, PAR cans, and mains. Over time, I started noticing Neg Earth more often on the tours I was working on, as they became a major lighting provider. Eventually, I found myself doing tours where Neg Earth was the main lighting provider.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE SHOW?

It's hard to pinpoint just one, but the Darkness tours in the 2000s were a lot of fun. Another highlight was working with Radiohead. Both were great experiences, and both bands were nice to work for.

WHAT HAS YOUR JOURNEY BEEN SO FAR?

I left college early while studying mechanical engineering because I got bored. My dad suggested a job as a voluntary technical manager at a local theater. I had never thought of working in this kind of industry before, but I decided to give it a try while I looked for a "proper" job. I ended up loving it. I was doing everything—fixing seats, handling lighting and sound, and making sets. I really got into lighting, and from there, I realized I enjoyed it and could combine my interest in lighting with music and concerts.

Around 1987 or 1988, I started writing to all the lighting companies I could find. I was lucky enough to get a job with Vari-Lite, a rental company that also manufactured the only real moving lights in the industry at the time. Vari-Lite did most of the major tours, so I got the chance to work on many shows. I started with them in 1988, and my first tour was in 1989. I stayed with them for about 10-12 years before going freelance and started working with companies like Neg Earth.

WHAT ARE YOUR HIGHLIGHTS/FAVOURITE MOMENTS BEING A NEG FREELANCER

The highlights of my time as a freelancer with Neg Earth have been the people I've worked with. Over the years, I've met so many great people. The Darkness tours in the 2000s were a lot of fun, and working with Radiohead was another great experience. It's hard to pinpoint individual moments because it's been such a long journey with so many different projects.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE FOR THE NEXT GENERATION WANTING TO GET INTO TOURING?

Be prepared for the hard times—the tough work, long hours, and the times when you're away from your family. But don't let those moments spoil your view of the job. This industry offers a privileged position: you get paid to travel the world, work with great people, and have fun.

Every tour feels like a new experience, even though technically it's the same job. Each tour brings new people and new faces, which keeps things interesting. Make the most of the good times, and don't let the rough patches cloud your experience. You're not walking into the same office or doing the same commute every day, and that's what makes it exciting.

SOMETHING YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE

One of my most memorable experiences was on the Tina Turner tour back in the '90s. We did around 100 shows over six months, and at the start of each show, part of the lighting rig would lower into a staircase. Tina would get into a lift at the back of the stage, and I would be there holding cables out of the way. On the last show, she screamed, "Take me down!" just as she started to go up. The stage manager brought her down, and she came out, grabbed my cheek, and said, "I've been waiting to do that for six months!" Then she went up again and started the show.

At the end of the tour, everyone got a photo with her. She was lovely, always smiling and friendly. Touring was different back then—good times, indeed.