



JIM WEBB, PRODUCTION/STAGE MANAGER

With the great and the good of the record industry looking on, Stage Manager Jim Webb was charged with making sure Missy Elliott's performance at the Warner Music Post-Grammys Party went off without a hitch...

It's show day and, having spent the last week with her during dance rehearsals, I've learned Missy is a real professional. She turns up on time and is engaged with every aspect of the creative process - staying for the whole day to make sure it's right.

It's refreshing for me to see this, as my experience with some artists has been a last-minute arrival, after everyone else has been rehearsing for days, causing us to work late into the night to create some form of performance readiness.

Production Manager Joe Sanchez and I were asked to come in and run the production on this, and our friend Hi Hat Ruffin, and her team, were in charge of creative and choreography. We have worked with them before on Rihanna tours and performances, so I knew I would be surrounded by good people.

I arrive at the Milk Studios in Hollywood early morning, to make sure video, playback, DJ setup, and so on are all in good shape for the 12pm rehearsal. It's the first time Missy, her hype man, DJ, and dancers will be on the show stage along with lights, lasers, and Co2. They only have a two-hour window to get things right before the evening performance.

Rehearsals go well, at which point performers and entourage head off back to their hotels to begin the glamming process for the show. It's that 'calm before the storm' period - techs are fine-tuning in their worlds and local venue production people are organising dressing rooms.

By 7pm, the dancers begin to roll in, followed by management and entourage.

After about the 15th time the local production ladies ask me if Missy will arrive on time, I begin to ignore the questions. She does arrive as scheduled, which means local production can now repeatedly ask me if she will start her performance on time.

I've always found it funny that any local production thinks a performer's stage or production manager has some secret power to get their artist to start when we want them to. The

reality is they will start when they want to, so I answer with my standard reply of, "It should all be fine".

As it turns out, the locals started the evening 20 minutes late of their own schedule!

Now the entourage have arrived, this is a time one must avoid random people who look to you for guidance about things you have nothing to do with.

Just then one of Missy's assistants asks me how she should get out to the DJ booth situated in the middle of the audience. I'm wondering if she thinks I dug a tunnel out to it, since she walked out there earlier today during rehearsals. Instead I tell her she can approach it the same way as she did earlier, except she will need to negotiate the audience. Naturally my instinct is to be more sarcastic than this, but as she had complemented my 'lovely British accent' earlier in the day, I had a bit of a soft spot for her. I didn't have the heart to tell her that I'm in fact from New Zealand, as I felt it would spoil the moment.

It's 20 minutes before show, at which point one of the local production ladies informs me they have made up 10 minutes, I can tell Missy she should start 10 minutes earlier.

I ask her, what her reply to her boyfriend would be if he said to her they were leaving 10 minutes earlier for a night out, while she was in front of the make up mirror, followed by - "I won't be passing that message on". She looked at me knowingly, and didn't push that any further.

Missy appeared, only slightly later than schedule, and seemed a bit nervous. I get her to the monitor guy while we do final adjustments on her belt pack volume.

I start the show Missy nails the performance. She's got the audience eating out of her hand. At the end of the show I escort her off stage, as far as I'm concerned it went really well, I start to think maybe I read it wrong when Missy breaks away in an emotional state, and heads into the female dancer dressing room.

Hi Hat is handy, so I ask her to go in and check things out. Minutes later she reappears to tell me, they were tears of joy, and Missy is delighted. Looks like I'll get paid after all - another satisfied customer.

Jim Webb