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"I've always seen a lot of gigs.

There's a lot of music in my family," says Nicoline Refsing, by way of explaining her natural affinity with the presentation of music shows.

As a student in Spatial Design at

The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Design, she specialised in production design. "There was a teacher who'd studied under Val Strazovec [a Czech-born, Emmy Award-winning artist and designer], so they were very much into production design," she explains. "I became submerged in it. Everything I did was about how to compose space."

Driven by this passion for

production design, Refsing took every opportunity to learn more: "I was very lucky," she says. "In my first year I met some people who were working on a big show for Scandinavian Airlines; I started doing the set design . . . I did another show for them and was introduced to some rock and roll crew at the venue. They took me under their wing and introduced me to lighting courses and other aspects of production . . . I spent a lot of time at events with them, watching and learning."

Refsing refers to this extra work, carried out alongside her five-year Masters course, as 'bonus'

Lee Baldock talks to production designer, creative director and principal of Rockart Design, **Nicoline Refsing** . . .

experience. "But the biggest turning point for me," she recalls, "was when I saw the *Bridges to Babylon* set in Copenhagen. I remember walking into the stadium . . . I thought, 'this is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life'." She quickly discovered that this was the work of one Mark Fisher. "I started to study everything he'd done; I learned about Pink Floyd and U2 and all those shows."

One of the first projects she took

on after graduating was the design of a touring set for Copenhagen's Philharmonic Orchestra, complete with new branding, new logo and website. "They said, 'we've seen your graduation project and we know you can visualise rock music, do you think you can visualise classical music?' I said, 'well, I presume so!' So we just dived into that, but it's the same method - finding out what they want to communicate, understanding their vision." This holistic, meticulously detailed approach to a client's presentation - creative direction rather than just set design - was something she was drawn to. But next, London was calling: "I got some grants to go over to the UK, and worked with Mark for half a year as an apprentice."

That was a quite remarkable

achievement: Refsing's work and dedication had secured her the best possible apprenticeship in set design, learning directly from a man considered to be the absolute master of his art. Six months later, Refsing joined the Stufish payroll, becoming their third designer alongside Fisher himself and Ray Winkler. Over the next six years she designed for shows including the BRIT Awards, MTV's EMAs, the National Television Awards and Pink's Funhouse tour. She says: "Working as a part of that team was very collaborative, everybody would chip in - we would all give our best to the projects . . . I was very privileged."

Of Fisher she says: "He was

really very kind to me. Obviously, it was a fantastic opportunity, being exposed to that level and complexity of work - that whole world was just amazing."

Refsing worked with production

manager Mick Kluczynski on several BRITs shows. "I just loved Mick," she says. "It was easy to work with him, he would just shout out exactly what he wanted! It was a cultural thing, learning what the English say when they don't say anything, and what they mean when they do say something! But Mick was like a storm of fresh air, just shouting it out! I thought, 'Ah! I get it!' she laughs. "I learned so much from him, how he managed a crew and made sure that everybody delivered their best. He was a fantastic man."

Learning the skills of effective

communication in production was an important step. "Still a lot of people in this industry don't talk enough in productions, but I enjoy getting everyone to talk and plan what we're going to do - rather than working from different angles and fighting over the last piece of pie. Communication is a great key to success - and when we send out drawings and renders to them all, it's a great help to the crew: they get it, they can see where it's all going, and why, and they can see their own part in delivering the big picture."

On the BRITs too she managed

to hone her skill in support of specific artists, including Amy Winehouse, Take That and Rihanna. She says: "My main focus is how can I 'amplify' the artist - the music, the lyrics, their brand - how can I visualise that and make that as strong as what they are trying to say with their heart?"

Refsing would further develop

this focus on the core message of the persona or 'brand', in subsequent projects. Of Pink's *Funhouse* tour, one of the highest-grossing tours of the decade, she says: "I thought she was so strong, with so many ideas, so much to say. I wanted the design concept to be strong too, her, so strong that she couldn't fall outside of it, if that makes sense."

In 2011, she left Stufish and set

up her own studio, Rockart Design. "I felt that the time was right," she says. "I felt there was an opening for doing more creative direction,

getting that wider input to productions, to guide the brand. At the same time, there seemed to be a shift in work being more architectural . . . it was always the shows that were my main interest."

Of course that interest extends to

technology. She says: "I like to work with everybody on the production, I like to know how things work, what's new in screens, how to get the best from the projectors . . . I'll ask the crew that I've been working with for many years: 'What's this new product? What's your experience with it?'"

The creative director role was

one she grasped for Copenhagen's *Eurovision Song Contest* production in May this year (see LSI June 2014), where she oversaw the content creation for the set's vast screens for all of the artists' performances.

Where will Rockart take her in

future? "I'm very open to where this may go," she says. "I love working with the artists, I love the music side, and what comes with that is the whole process of loading something in in a very short space of time, and loading it all out again. I love that challenge - producing all of the parts, working out what's possible. And also with TV shows, where load-in times have become so reduced. There's an art to doing the big live music television shows, to create the live event, but also to make sure that the TV gets what it needs - it has to work for each."

Although a highly intuitive

designer, Refsing always backs up her intuition with exhaustive research. She says: "I have to make sure that it's the right idea before I progress with it. I try to be very aligned with the artist, with their brand and their message . . . I'm not brave enough just to follow my intuition alone - I need that research to back up my decisions. I can't remember if I've been completely wrong, but I've made a lot of adjustments through that process, just to make sure that I'm completely tuned in. If you're not tuned in, it's not relevant."

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