



Diamond geezers

Events professionals pulled out all the stops to ensure that the 60th anniversary celebrations of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award were fit for a... James Bond

Expectations were high: Detail was key

Dame Judi Dench, Jane Seymour, Samantha Bond, Joanna Lumley and Sir Roger Moore were just some of the stars of stage and screen to join royalty at the 60th anniversary celebrations of The Duke of Edinburgh's (DofE) Award this summer.

The 007-themed gala dinner held at Buckinghamshire's Stoke Park – itself a star of *Goldfinger* and *Tomorrow Never Dies* – raised vital funds for the charity, which as well as running a youth awards programme, supports young people with their own personal development.

James Bond producers, Michael G Wilson and Barbara Broccoli lent their support to the DofE charity for the fundraising gala, a "Diamonds are Forever" spectacular evening event.

Stoke Park, which was gifted for the event, hosted the red carpet evening, which saw the Buckinghamshire venue's tennis courts transformed into an event space fit for HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. And James Bond.

"Our brief was to deliver an event that Bond himself would attend and it was apparent from an early stage that expectations from stakeholders were very high," said Jeremy Hartley, commercial

director of Entertainment Industries (EI), and former MD of Chinawhite.

"The easy thing to do would have been to book The Dorchester but that would have been boring," he said.

Diamond ideas

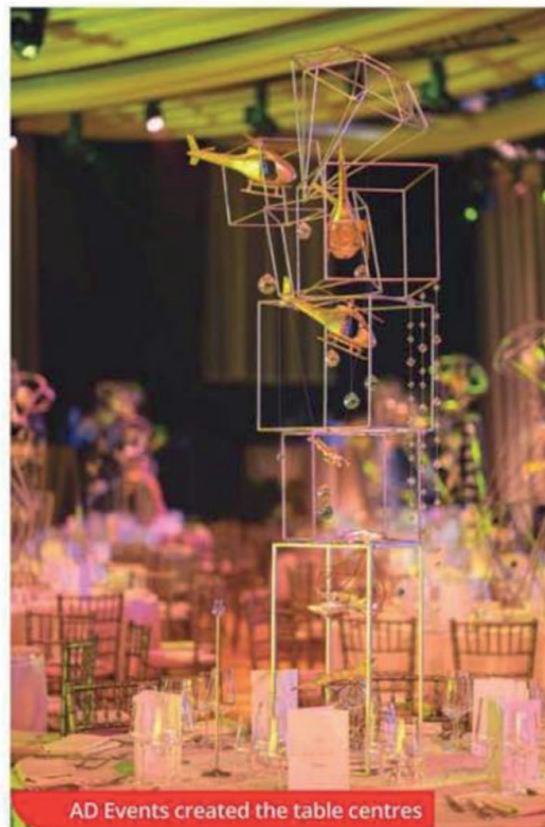
Entertainment Industries was drafted in to produce the event. Its involvement began in November 2014, so Hartley and his team knew about the impending celebrations for some time. Hartley continued: "A couple of years ago, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Women in Business Committee decided to organise the fundraiser to mark the award's diamond anniversary.

"I have known Jackie Stevenson of The Brooklyn Brothers, who sits on the committee, for years. Jackie asked EI to come in and we presented ideas to Prince Edward, the Earl of Wessex and trustee of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award UK, and Barbara [Broccoli] and her team at Buckingham Palace."

Pure generosity

Hartley worked alongside Donna Purcell-Barnett, events manager at The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, who was responsible for the event budget. Purcell-Barnett was

originally brought in to be the link between the Women in Business Committee, which is chaired by the Countess of Wessex, and the many suppliers involved. However, her role soon evolved, bringing the event to



AD Events created the table centres



bookitbee
Take bookings, sell tickets



The event had a James Bond theme

life managing supplier relationships whilst tightly holding the purse strings.

"We had an incredible level of support from the industry," Purcell-Barnett explained. "The support people were willing to give and offer in the summer when it was peak time, especially from the likes of XL and Blackout, was phenomenal."

Together, Purcell-Barnett and Hartley worked on a plan that Hartley eventually led on. "What stood out was how quickly the event came together, and pure generosity stood out," said Purcell-Barnett, who stated that many people knew of the awards but not the charity.

"The aim of the event was to raise the profile of the charity, reminding businesses how The Duke of Edinburgh's Award has evolved, and also fundraising."

Commitment

More than £900,000 was raised on the night, which saw Sir Tom Jones and Laura Mvula perform, David Walliams host and a number of dresses worn in famous Bond films auctioned off for the charity. Their presentation was paramount, and this is where the events industry was called upon to make the evening shine.

Hartley reached out to Nicoline Refsing, founder of Rockart Design, and Kevin Monks, director of Blackout. Very quickly, "the best of the best" were brought together to create the event, continued Hartley, working for nothing or at cost.

"Considering it was the busiest time of the year for everyone," he added, "their generosity in properly committing to the event and in equipment was amazing, and what was pitched was delivered."

Design and infrastructure

Refsing, who creates designs and visual concepts for tours, TV shows and large brands, and Monks, an expert in rigging and draping, were called by Hartley, and in January a site visit was arranged. It was the first time that they could get an idea of the challenges that lay ahead – turning a sports hall and indoor tennis courts into an event space fit for a gala evening.

"Jeremy got us involved from the start because he knew there were so many limitations in the building," Monks told *Stand Out*. "Jeremy was right to get us involved in the rigging right away, so instead of coming to us with a design that was impossible to do, we designed it with the infrastructure in place that we knew we could achieve."

With a complex build in a challenging indoor venue with limited roof loading capabilities, Blackout designed and supplied a James Thomas ground supported super truss grid to fit over the stage plus an additional truss goalpost for hanging the upstage LED screen supplied by PRG XL. In total, Blackout provided more than 50 motors and truss from which to lift and hang stage lighting, set elements and speakers.

Refsing worked closely with Monks to incorporate his rigging advice into the event design and came up with a radiating pattern of swagged organza drapes (1,500 metres), which stemmed from a central cornice crafted from polystyrene and painted gold. Lighting worked hard to light the event through the gaps in the draping.

It was essential that Refsing made the room work; she had to design the look



and feel of the event, working with specific weight loadings. "Even if you create a tour, there are always venues that are less suitable and that don't have the same fly height. This doesn't really frighten me – I just think it's important to get the parameters of which I can design to."

"I thought it was obvious and a good idea to have something central in that space," Refsing continued. "Because of the nature of the event, there's so many people that want to feel connected to what's going on and if you place something in the centre of the room, everybody has more or less the same distance to it. I think it's a lot easier to make a layout work with lots of tables if you have something in the centre of the room. And also I wanted to create a really strong design concept, not bits and pieces put in the corner or something that was half done. The centrepiece with drapes created a space within a space."

Rings and rigging

"The central ring was a problem," Monks added. "From a rigging point of view, when you have a central ring, everything radiates out of it so everything you do bares on that central area and you end up with the two



Gold drapes hung from a central ring

central parts of the roof taking the capacity of the load. That's what we found difficult – we had to concentrate on the central ring then spread everything out a bit.

"Proposals that we suggested regarding lighting, they couldn't work with, and proposals that lighting suggested to us we couldn't work with. So we thrashed it out between us and got to a compromise in the end," Monks added.

Weight loadings

Refsing wished to create an "inclusive experience", an event where everyone felt that they could be part of the show.

"The other big thing was because the Bond elements were already a big part of the evening, I thought do we want to create a big Bond event with a lot of black and aluminium, which didn't particularly have a party feel, or did we want to create an event that Bond would attend."

Working with Refsing's golden colour palette, Blackout sourced the exact fabric with a special shine that would create the right lighting effect and ambiance in the room. Refsing also created sculptural designs of classic Bond girl dresses that Monks and his team provided some intricate rigging for, to make it look as

though they were suspended in the air above black glitter plinths.

Monks and Refsing worked closely with Svend Pedersen, lighting designer, and Malcolm Birkett, technical designer, to ensure the event was perfect.

"We hung quite a lot in the roof," Monks continued. "A lot of lighting and a lot

of projectors. We worked closely with projection and lighting to make sure the equipment fitted into the ceiling because when you have a big ceiling and you've got to light it, the lighting can be impeded by other technical equipment. I think lighting had the most difficulty because we were just so limited with what we could hang.



Guests were entertained on the lawn

DOFE 60TH ANNIVERSARY

"The team worked closely with Svend and Tony Fagan [PRG] to ensure the design was kept within the limited weight loading restrictions, overseen by engineers' Campbell Reith's. It was paramount that our own kits' weight was kept to a minimum to allow flexibility for the addition of extra set elements."

Dream crew

PRG XL Video's Special Events specialist, Steve Greetham, was contacted by Hartley and Refsing to supply video and lighting technology for the event.

Inside the venue, six large arched windows were covered with vinyl by Service Graphics and transformed into shaped projection canvasses. Using six pairs of Panasonic 21k high brightness projectors and with content fed from a Catalyst media server, the shaped windows displayed a precisely mapped projection of graphics and logos from supporters of the charity event.

Upstage PRG XL Video supplied a large 11mm resolution LED screen, which formed the backdrop for the live performances. Downstage, a roller projection screen from Harkness Screens dropped down to show playback content including information films, and house right a further wall projection screen from Blackfriars Scenery mirrored the content.

"We were delighted to be asked to supply technology for this gala event," commented Greetham. "Whilst events of this nature always present some specific challenges, working closely alongside experienced companies like Blackout, make the production run more smoothly. With Jeremy overseeing the event production and with Nicoline's beautiful design, it's no surprise that the evening was a success."



Blackout supplied the organza drapes

Refsing continued: "I'll tell you the truth, this is my dream crew. A lot of the guys, I bought in on the job, and we have worked on jobs since I did the Brit Awards. With people you've worked with forever, you know they are going to deliver and you know they are going to get your ideas. So with this crew, they went out of their way to understand my vision and find the very best solution."

"The secret to good set design is knowing enough of the work flow for all the different departments involved, so that you can make it easy for everyone," Refsing concluded. "I think the whole team worked really well together. I think we could never have achieved such a big transformation on such a low budget, without working really well together and I think that stood out. A lot of really good people, crew and creative gave it their best."

And Hartley concurred, and said: "The Duke of Edinburgh's Award 60th anniversary event was a stirring celebration, and from a production perspective the delivery was seamless."

"As for lessons learned, where would you like me to start?" Hartley laughed.

"Everyone knew what they were getting into when they said 'yes', but they enjoyed every minute and there was never a moment where anyone regretted getting involved. The journey was as expected and the complexity was a challenge, but it was one that was also relished."

SUPPLIERS LIST:

Rigging and drapes - Blackout
Sound - Britannia Row
Lighting, projection and video - PRG XL
Temporary structures - Mar-Key Group
Catering - Payne and Gunter
Crew catering - Eat to the Beat
Table centres - AD Events
Staging and set - Blackfriars Scenery
Power - Aggreko
Crew - Gallowglass
Toilets - Igloos and Loos for Dos
Ground protection - Eve



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