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MIDDLE EAST

sound & stage

ENTERTAINMENT TECHNOLOGY AND PRODUCTION

BLAZING A TRAIL

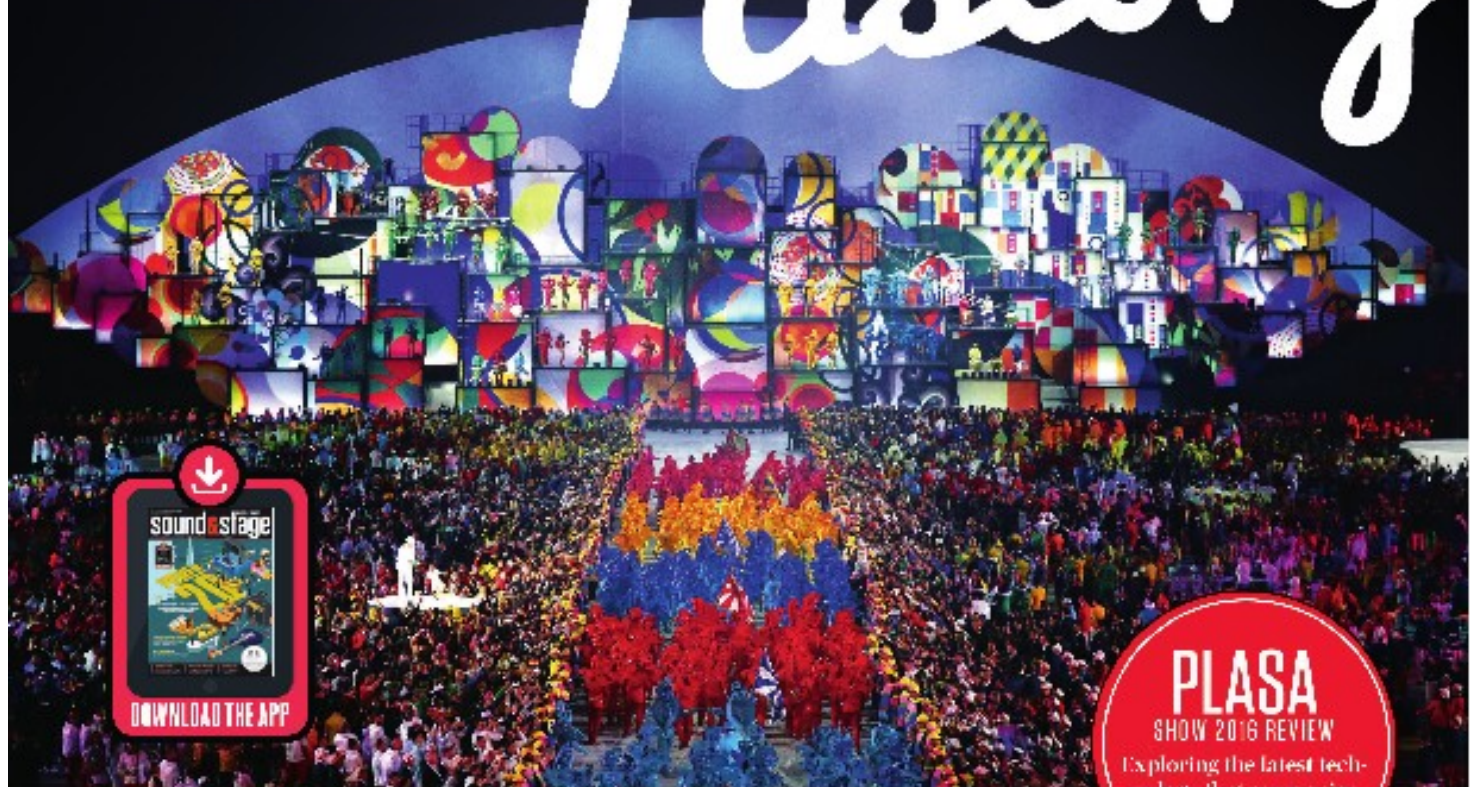
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MARCO BALICH RELIVES HIS JOURNEY AS AN OLYMPIC PRODUCER



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Davina Munro of Sound & Stage Middle East caught up with Marco Balich, president of Balich Worldwide Shows to learn more about his journey as an Olympic producer.

S&S Tell us a little about the work that you've done as a mega-events producer and what inspired you to choose this profession?

I started out as a law student but I have always been in love with sound, stages and lights. The excitement and adrenalin of this industry has always attracted me, so I started as a promoter and then went into small and medium events.

Finally in 2002, I was part of the team that worked on the closing ceremony of the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics and it was then that I decided that this is what I want to do. I've now got five Olympics under my belt and I still believe that the Olympics ceremonies are the most beautiful shows in the world.

S&S In your opinion, how has the events industry evolved over the last few years and what are your thoughts on the industry in the Middle East?

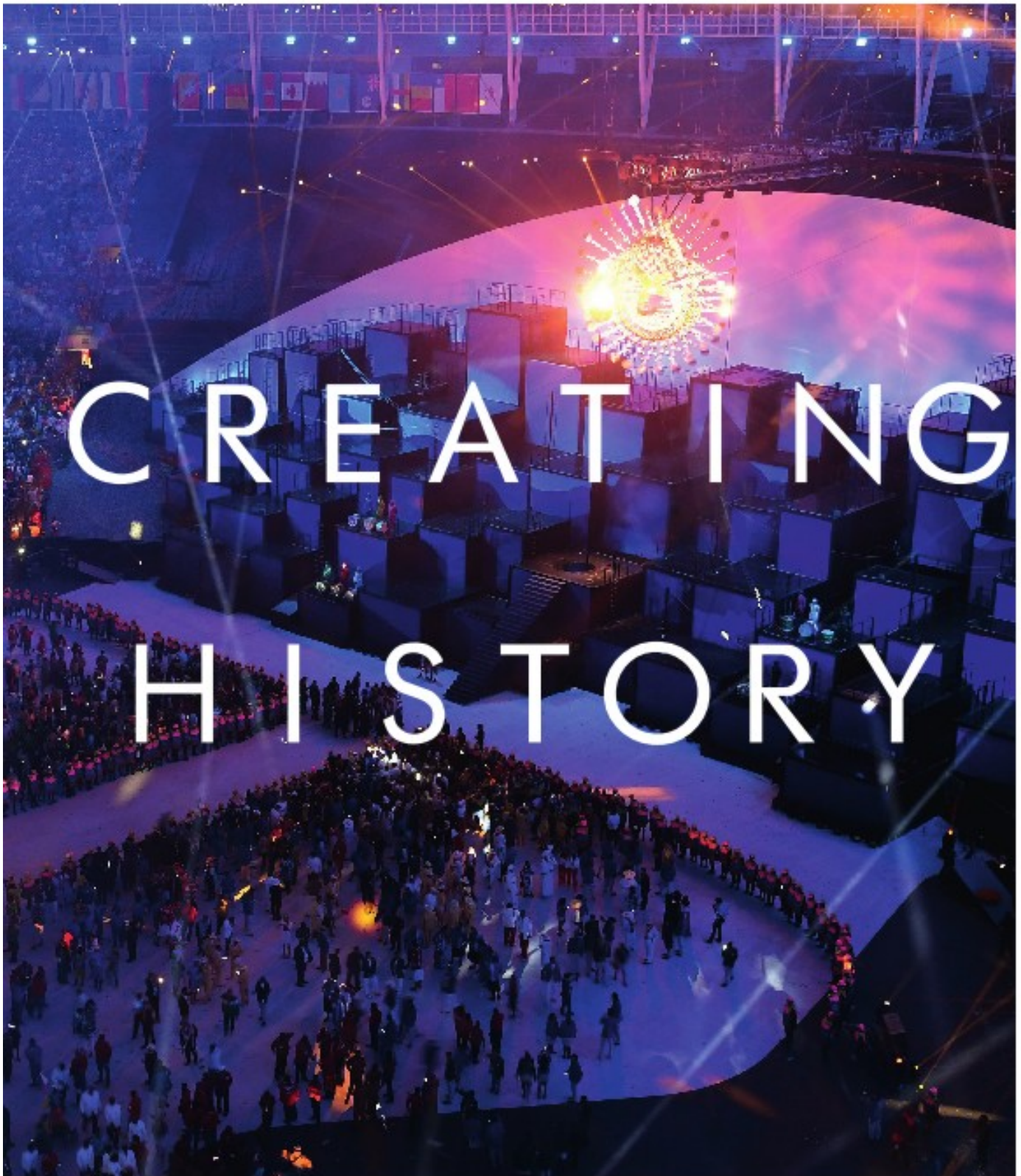
I think events production is a very contemporary art. This is one of the few industries that is truly in touch with the latest technology that is available these days.

When it comes to the Middle East and the Gulf region, I admire the vision that has been put in place and the amazing statements that are being created for places like Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

Despite the cultural differences that exist between the Middle East and places like North America, South America and Europe, people here are persevering and are constantly trying to raise the bar. They are always keen to try something new and interesting.



Marco Balich, president of Balich Worldwide Shows



CREATING HISTORY



Pyrotechnics is seeing new developments with people trying to make it more silent

and this is a very stimulating factor especially for an industry like ours.

S&S As an Olympic producer you've worked on a number of opening and closing ceremonies, including the Rio Olympics 2016. Can you tell us about the thought process that you go through while envisioning the various elements of these ceremonies?

I think I learnt a lot about discipline while doing Rock 'n' Roll shows in the 80s. There were always a number of things that had to be executed within a given time frame. For example, at 8pm you had to have the band, stage, power, security, lights, ticketing and the audience all ready and working smoothly.

This is the kind of discipline that we ensure in events even today, but naturally everything is on a much larger scale especially when it comes to Olympic ceremonies.

What makes our world very special is that you have to be curious all the time. You can't just say that you know something and then keep replicating it for three or four years at a stretch because then you become less interesting and irrelevant.

To stay relevant, you have to be inquisitive, flexible and positive, and you always have to add value to everything you do. You cannot just approach a task from a service perspective because it's not just about providing lights and a stage. You have to be more daring because that is what the job requires and that's how you add value to your work.

S&S How do you go about integrating various cultural elements into a show?

I'm very curious as a person and I like learning about different cultures, so whenever we win a bid, the first thing I do is read up as much as I can about the place, and when something inspires me, I try to convey that

message creatively when I produce a show.

I believe before you work on any project, you need to be well-versed with the topic. Being well informed allows you to be flexible while working, but if you think you know it all then you end up being stale and stagnant.

Considering that the events industry is a

"To stay relevant, you have to be inquisitive, flexible and positive, and you always have to add value to everything you do. You also have to be more daring because that is what the job requires."



Coordination and sharing the same vision across all teams is key when executing a ceremony as large as the Olympics

very competitive market, being willing to learn new things is the only way you can take things to the next level every year.

S&S Tell us about the role that technology plays in the scheme of things?

Technology can only be considered truly effective when it is used in a way to absorb and captivate the viewer with a certain emotion. As a creative director, I use technology to service the emotions that I want to create so you could say that I've never been in love with technology by itself. I believe in using it to convey beauty, emotions and the element of surprise.

Having said that, we see new technology constantly emerging. In fact, we're seeing some really interesting things being developed such as the follow spot operated from on-ground by PRG Gearhouse. Even pyrotechnics, which is a 2,000-year-old discipline, is seeing new developments with people trying to make them silent. Audio and staging has also seen tremendous progress as well.

S&S Pulling off a ceremony as big as the Olympics requires extensive order and coordination between teams. What systems do you usually put in place to ensure that everything runs smoothly?

Well you have to start early on, chase everyone and exercise a ruthless editorial authority. You also have to respect the experience people have but at the same time, ensure that your ideas are taken into consideration.

MARCO BALICH

Marco Balich is one of the co-founders of Balich Worldwide Shows, founded in 2013. With more than 20 ceremonies across five continents, he is renowned around the world for large-scale mega-events in arenas and stadiums among

other venues. His event portfolio spreads across a broad range from weddings and private parties to corporate events and tournament ceremonies. Balich's most recent work includes the opening and closing ceremonies at the Rio Olympics this year.



With this combination, I've been able to work with the best people and obtain the best from them without frustrating them, and this plays a crucial role in creating and keeping the vision of a show together.

S&S What were some of the challenges you faced while working on the Rio Olympics ceremonies and how did you overcome that?

Rio was a beautiful experience but it was also very complicated at the same time because of budget restrictions and other restric-

tive factors. Despite these issues, I think we pulled off a ceremony that was not only interesting but very humble and very emotional.

Everyone did a fantastic job including Durham Marengi, who took care of the lighting and with the technical direction of James Lee. I am very proud of the effort that everyone on the team put into these ceremonies. Most importantly, apart from the spectacular shows that we put on, we also delivered a sustainability message which made our experience even more meaningful.

S&S Give us a peak into the upcoming shows that you're working on and what you would like to work on going forward?

I think what we want to do in our future shows is bring art, especially more European art, to life so we're figuring out how to use things like acrobats and technology to accomplish this. I think that is my next goal. **S&S**

"I use technology to service the emotions that I want to create, so you could say that I have never been in love with it by itself."