

Send in the Clones

Eric Kuglin chronicles FOH engineer Robert Scovill's bid to be in two places at one time.

As our wild world rockets into the new millennium it would seem that most of us would benefit from having the ability to be in two places at once. Although it's not physically possible, we all give it a good try through the use of cell phones, laptops, video conferencing, the internet and any other means at our disposal. Translate this desire to the wish list of a live touring engineer and it becomes even more problematic. On the road you're tied to a lot of equipment, a road crew, trucks, busses and planes not to mention your touring schedule. This summer, FOH engineer Robert Scovill is achieving the near impossible task of splitting himself between two popular tours by taking on matchbox twenty and Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers at the same time.

Scovill is no stranger to multi-tasking. His usual "relaxed" schedule includes working in his own recording studio, The MusiCanvas, heading his own record label, Eldon's Boy Records, being a dad and husband, writing magazine articles, giving lectures and not least of all, being a first call live touring engineer. Scovill has been on the last few matchbox tours and most recently has been working the aptly named Mad Season tour. It started in January 2001 but has been going since March 2000. As for Tom Petty, his touring schedule hasn't been as busy, but to be able to use Scovill; he scheduled his tour around the Mad Season.

Split Personality

Early on, Scovill worked out the difficulties of using the same front of house and PA system for both bands. The first shift from matchbox to Petty started by moving the entire PA from one country to another. After the matchbox show in Kelowna British Columbia, the entire rig headed 650 miles south to Corvallis Oregon for the opening date of the Petty tour. Scovill explained: "The first thing we did was to figure out the drive time from Kelowna to Corvallis. In a perfect world the gear would show up no earlier than 12:00 p.m. on the day of the show. The paperwork necessary for a border crossing from Canada to the U.S. could easily tack another hour and a half to two hours onto the trip." Given this time constraint the decision was made to attempt to get only the front of house system to Corvallis for the first show of the Petty tour and have

ProMix provide a duplicate PA system. This would take the pressure off of the matchbox twenty PA making it to Oregon in time to be rigged and flown without making the show late, or even worse putting it at risk of being postponed. When it arrived in Corvallis, the matchbox FOH control rig needed to be interfaced with a new snake and monitor system and the system thoroughly checked. The integration went well resulting in the sound check and proceeding show coming off without a hitch.

Scovill decided to use a V-DOSC PA system and a Midas XL4 for both acts. This way he was able to have the basics dialed in for the system from the driveline all the way down to the arrays. Scovill explained, "the input stages of the two acts are very similar and in fact was the impetus for the idea of doing this. Both bands have the same size drum kit, piano, organ and keys, same number of guitar players. This allowed me to unplug the snake from one act and into the other, making any re-patch virtually non-existent. All effects programming is, well, programmable and given that I had done the last two Tom Petty tours, I was able to pre-program the Midas XL-4 console for the songs while on tour with matchbox twenty."

The Midas XL-4 was loaded with the full compliment of 16 stereo modules. In addition, the auxiliary returns had the mic input retrofit on them. This turns a 48-channel frame into a 72-input console. There are also 12 channels of XL42 preamps that take additional mic inputs into the line inputs of given channels so that a module can do double duty via a program change. All tolled, it is roughly 80 active inputs. As far as how he uses the console, Scovill explained: "I route everything through the groups but mix mostly on the VCAs. The Midas is cool (and rare) in that it allows you to assign sub groups to the VCAs as well creating group VCAs as well. In my case I have a master VCA called "band" and a master VCA called "lead vocal" that allows me to re-balance the audio groups. This is very handy for immediately changing the balance of music to vocal without disturbing input buss gain structure."

Scovill is sold on the V-DOSC line-array PA system and it has made him rethink many of his concepts of how systems should be installed and used in the concert world. Scovill: "Since I've started using V-DOSC I've stopped using center-fills, the system offers the best phantom image I have heard in a PA system. I attribute this to the great overall phase of the system. Having said that though, I would love to do LCR in a concert

setting. Indeed I think the two acts I am currently working for warrant it. My problem has been finding a console that I feel is comprehensive enough in terms of I/O architecture, yet offers a true LCR buss for the main output stage. This seems to be a rare beast at the moment."

With V-DOSC or any line-array system, positioning in the venue is critical. Although qualified and well practiced at flying a V-DOSC rig, Scovill has been relying on his system engineers to survey the system for a particular venue. Scovill: "I currently have a transplanted Japanese counterpart named Son Nishimura who is fantastic at doing system designs for a given venue. If he has questions he will certainly consult me, but I give him full reign to put it up as he sees fit and he has been doing a superior job at it."

On to the Continent

After this first leg of the Petty tour, all the FOH control will make the trip to Europe to support more dates for both groups. matchbox will be doing a series of stadium shows where they will be supporting Bon Jovi, then there will be another 4 to 5 week run of the Petty tour and then again back for the final leg of the Mad Season tour. Needless to say, the gear will be heading into the shop for some well-needed maintenance after this travel schedule. As for being in two places at once, be careful what you wish for – It almost gives you jet lag just reading about it.