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Crew Takes Tom Petty Project to a Variety of Venues

FROM LEFT, AT FOH: ROBERT SCOVILL AND ANDREW DOWLING. PHOTO BY STEVE JENNINGS

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PRODUCTIONPROFILE



MUDCRUTCH

crushes it on the road

Tom Petty's Return to Smaller Venues Offers Challenges, Rewards

By Kevin M. Mitchell

Embacing the bar band mentality of his 1970s band, Mudcrutch, Tom Petty brought his Heartbreakers' audio team along for the Mudcrutch tour this summer. "Mudcrutch, and Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers, are two different things," monitor engineer Greg Looper explains. "Tom put it best: The Heartbreakers are like a Ferrari, a finely tuned machine built for speed and performance. Mudcrutch is like an old pickup truck, fun to cruise around in once in a while."

Mudcrutch made a go of it from 1970 to 1975. It was formed by Petty and Tom Leadon (whose brother Bernie was in the Eagles at the time), and included Randall "Randy" Marsh on drums, and future Heartbreakers keyboardist Benmont Tench and guitarist Mike Campbell. The recent tour, which wrapped up a few weeks ago, supported the band's second post-reunion album, *Mudcrutch 2*. Along the way, both in the studio and on this tour, they added the gifted guitarist/singer Herb Pedersen.

Looper has been with the TP&HB family in various capacities since 2005, and on monitors since 2009, including this tour. Parnelli Award winning FOH engineer Robert Scovill has been mixing for TP&HB since 1994. "I'm just so fortunate to be able to hang around with a bunch of musicians and creators of this caliber and personality," he says. "There's a certain integrity and humility to Tom and The Heartbreakers that is really infectious, and it really shines when he takes on something like the Mudcrutch project. You really see the purity of his vision on projects like this. Our relationship seemingly grows and gets a little deeper every time we work together."

There are similarities for the audio team — including stage footprint. Guitarist Mike Campbell still has an arsenal of guitars. But the two biggest differences include what Petty is playing (bass) and where they are playing. "The

scale of venues on this tour is quite different — we're not playing arenas and stadiums and all that goes with that in terms of production expectation," Scovill explains. "Yet the expectation of excellence is exactly the same. It's a little bit of study in contrast, and it shouldn't be lost on anyone that you have three guys, Benmont, Mike, and Tom, who have all had storied, Hall of Fame careers while Randall and Tom [Leadon] have not, and frankly, it adds certain charm to the whole project and the presentation for the live show. Throw a player and singer of the caliber and reputation of Herb Pedersen to the mix, and you've got the makings of something really fun and special for a small venue." Typical venues are 1,500 seats or smaller.

There was additional gear shifting for the audio team going from TP&HB to this group. All but Pedersen share lead vocal responsibilities. "It makes for a level of fun and engagement at the show that you rarely see anymore for this genre," Scovill says. Secondly, Petty sings differently when playing the bass. "I don't know that I can accurately characterize it in words, but his phrasing is slightly different, and very cool. I think being grounded to the rhythm of the song by being tied to the bass lines drives him to a different place, vocally, and it totally works. I think his singing on this tour may be as good as I've heard him."

» Avid S6L

Scovill "moonlights" as senior market specialist for Avid, so it's no surprise that he's out with the new S6L console. "It's been a lengthy process developing the S6L, and I'm very excited to see it get out into the world," he says, adding, "it will have its growing pains just as every digital product in every market goes through." He points out that no company, deep pockets or not, can release a digital product in today's world fully featured and bug-free. But

he adds that the world just needs to have faith that Avid has the will and resources to properly manage it and move it forward at a reasonable pace to protect and ensure the outcomes of the shows it's used on. Comparing the S6L to Avid's VENUE predecessors, he says the S6L is a considerable step forward with regard to 32-bit/floating-point mix engine, 96 kHz sample rate and some groundbreaking functionality. "I can't wait for more people to experience it. It raises your game considerably in terms of what you can accomplish, functionally and sonically, for a live event."

"I love it!" says Looper of the SL6 at monitorworld. "Give it an update or two and more AAX plug-ins, and it will be the new standard. I used to think the D-Show/Profile was a deep rabbit hole, but compared to the S6L, that was only a scratch on the surface. My workflow is 11 years old on D-Show/Profile, so I'm having to break some old habits." Confirming Scovill's observation, he had a learning curve with it. Investing some time was the solution, and once a new workflow was developed, Looper says he became faster on the S6L than he was on the Profile. "I still have to stop and think about how am I going to do something, but that is less and less these days. Gain sharing is totally cool, 128-track AVB recording over Cat-5 is amazing. And there are a lot of new features I'm not even using yet."

» The System

While the last outing with TP&HB featured an EAW Anya system, it was left in the warehouse for this tour. "Even though I would love to have Anya or Anna out with us, budgets dictated that we use the P.A. *du jour* in all of the places we're playing, and it's been a long time since I've done that," he says. But he reports the state of these P.A. systems has improved dramatically since his last time out using house

boxes. "We have not augmented a single P.A. system on this tour, with the exception of adding front fill from time to time, and one small gig where the line source needed some help with horizontal coverage in some under-balcony and side upper-balcony positions."

Sound Image is supplying consoles, mic package and crew. With a seasoned team working downsized venues, the load-ins have been "very smooth," Scovill says. "We're carrying essentially the same amount of backline that we would carry with The Heartbreakers for their arena tours. Mike has his usual array of amps and guitars and Benmont is carrying his Steinway grand piano, B3, Wuritzer and other keyboards as usual." Petty on bass takes a smaller footprint, and he left his cache of guitars at home, sticking only to his Hofner Club bass. "Tom Leadon and Herb Pedersen's guitar and amp complement is very reasonable, which is also a big asset. We're also helped by the fact that we regularly do these kinds of venues during The Heartbreakers arena tours as kind of a break from the arena grind, so the backline guys are well versed in how to adapt and best tackle it. That said, some places are a real challenge to get into, with steep, long flights of stairs being the only access, and then, in turn, trying to shoehorn in the on and off stage gear to make it not only usable but conducive to playing live." Otherwise, the majority of the day is spent evaluating and adjusting the local P.A. systems.

» Plug-ins & Processors

Scovill notes that working with AAX DSP plug-ins "has been fantastic with regard to sound quality and some of the processing that is available," specifically from McDSP, Sonnox, Brainworx, Cranesong and Flux. "Between those manufacturers and the Avid plug-ins, I can handle nearly everything I need to do with



FOH engineer Robert Scovill (left) and systems engineer Andrew Dowling.

Sound Company: Sound Image
P.A.: Locally-supplied racks & stacks

AUDIO CREW

FOH Engineer: Robert Scovill
Systems Engineer: Andrew Dowling
Monitor Engineer: Greg Looper
Stage Tech/Monitor Assistant: Fumi Okazaki

FOH GEAR

Console: Avid S6L-32D; Avid S3 Control Surface (for opening act)
Outboard: (2) Eventide H3000SE; dbx 160A
House/Ambience Mics: DPA 5100 5.1 Microphone; (2) Neumann TLM103
Room Analysis Tools: Lectrosonics RA400 wireless; ISEMcon EMX-7150 analysis mics; ISEMcon SC-1 Microphone Calibrator; Rational Acoustics Smaart 8; Flux Pure Analyzer
System Control: (2) Lab.gruppen Lake LM44 with Lenovo ThinkPad laptop
Recording: Avid Pro Tools 12.4; (2) Apple Mac

Minis with Sonnet Rack mounting system
Misc: Radial USB-Pro direct box; Shure SRH840 headphones; SPL Phonitor headphone amp; Punchlite USB SMPTE displays

MONITOR GEAR

Console: Avid S6L
Additional Processing: Rupert Neve Portico II Channel; Crane Song Phoenix II plug-in; Dorrough 20A racked meters
Recording: Avid Pro Tools 12.4; Mac Mini AVB recording via Ethernet; (2) AVID MADI HD interfaces; Mac tower for redundant recording via MADI
Monitor Speakers: (12) Electrotec PD1 wedges, Crown amplification
IEM Drive: (8) Shure PSM 900; Professional Wireless combiner
IEMs: Future Sonic
Microphones: Telefunken M80s; Shure SM57s, 91, 52; AKG 414s; Audix SCX25s; Sennheiser 609s; Neumann TLM103s, KM184s



Stage tech/monitor asst. Fumi Okazaki (left) and monitor engineer Greg Looper.



Benmont Tench's keys setup puts a lot of gear on a small stage.



A whole lotta SM57s were used on guitar amps.



Randy Marsh's kit gets a big sound from a straightforward approach to miking.

them. The only things that are really missing from the AAX DSP catalog right now are creative delay and pitch change choices. I actually use some [outboard] Eventide H3000SE's to handle some of those duties until those choices come online. I also have a dbx160A that record producer Ryan Ulyate has made use of on the recordings that I use on certain songs. But I've been able to replicate a lot of what is being done with it with the Avid Sub-Harmonic plug-in, which is very capable." A pair of Lake LM44s handle some of the system EQ and time alignment needs. "Short of that, it's rack mounted Lectrosonics wireless and ISEMcon mics for system analysis."

The only processing Looper has in his outboard rack other than the Shure IEMs is a Rupert Neve Channel on Tom's IEM vocal. "I split his vocal for different gain structure and eq. I have three Petty vocal channels. One through the Neve for his vocal sent to IEMs, one for wedge mixes and the third is for the Pro Tools recording. All other processing is plug-ins. I'm still looking for a good multi-band compressor, like a Waves C6 and a good version of the Universal Audio 1176. The only other plug I can't live without is the Crane Song Phoenix. The plug-ins will come!"

Mic-wise, not surprisingly, "We're all wired, all the time," Scovill smiles. Petty sings on his Telefunken M-80. The amps go straightforward, with an SM57 on each cabinet — no EQ. "With a straightforward kit and Randall being a very straightforward player, I use the power of the S6L to swing back and forth between a loose roadhouse band drum sound to a more polished and produced sound." That package includes a Beta52/SM91 combo on kick; SM57 and KM184 on snare, KM184s on hi-hat and ride, Sennheiser 609s on toms and AKG 414s as overheads. For Petty's bass, he takes a DI

directly and then uses an amp simulator for the primary bass sound, making use of the Eleven plug in for the amp simulation in conjunction with McDSP AE400 dynamic EQ with S6L onboard compression. "Tom is playing flat wounds on a vintage Hofner Club bass throughout the night, and I will just add varying degrees of clean versus distortion as the given songs demand."

» Monitor World

All the stage and IEM mixes are the same, "I'm just changing a few names," Looper says. "Sonically, there is a big difference." As for Petty and that Hofner: "He is an amazing bass player," Looper adds. "I remember while recording one of the more recent TP&HB albums, he got a new Rickenbacker 4001 bass, and we recorded this kick-ass totally distorted bass line that Tom had in his head. Nothing became of the recording, but the sound of that Rick combined with Tom's playing was jaw-dropping. It was just one of those moments."

Looper says that Campbell's rig sounds different with every guitar as usual. "Mike is all about getting the right guitar sound for each song. And every guitar will not work in every song. Mike has guitars just for certain songs. There is something that comes out of the two, a different player through the same gear will sound completely different. He is truly one of the most underrated guitarists. He knows when not to play. Now, that's class."

The monitor world footprint is the same as it is for TP&HB. "The biggest challenge is my placement," Looper explains. "Tom is used to me being downstage, and in arenas and sheds that's easy because there is lots of space. But on this tour I had quite a few days where I'm behind the band. I felt like a backline guy some days," Petty, Leadon and Benmont all have one

IEM and one wedge each. The rest of the band is wedges only. Looper says that his stage tech/monitor assistant, Fumi Okazaki, "is one of if not the best audio techs today. Everything about him is top notch even his Daisy Duke shorts. I wish kids of today would take note and be more like Fumi. It's a pure pleasure having him on the deck. A true unsung hero of rock 'n' roll."

» The Big Picture

The type of venue can create a challenge in building consistency night over night. "My approach has always been built around being very consistent on what the console is outputting, but then getting the P.A. and the room to present that consistently night to night," Scovill says. "It's not an easy task when you're facing new and different speaker systems and

dramatic room geometry changes every day. Honestly, having virtual sound check at your disposal, along with a great band, is the secret weapon for achieving it."

One unexpected result from playing these smaller settings is that "it's fun. Tom and the band are so good in these smaller places. Couple that with playing new material they haven't been playing for the last 30 years, and you have the makings of a really fun night. This is probably the most relaxed and engaged with the audience that I've seen these guys, especially Tom, in quite some time. That part of it has been a real joy to take part in."

For more, Scovill posted short video blogs every show day, including some of his tips and tricks on mixing and some S6L specifics. Catch these at fohonline.me/MudcrutchBlog. **F&H**

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