



The Zutons

There's a distinct retro feel in the air for The Zutons' current tour:

Audio Plus has provided the band with a point source PA solution, while a mix of old and new can be found in the lighting rig...

Words & pictures
by Rob Speight



UK - Who Killed The Zutons? Well, nobody in fact, and to prove it, the five-piece from Liverpool were recently seen alive and well at London's Hammersmith Carling Apollo. The musically unusual band played to a packed crowd with a slightly unusual PA system - in as much that the purple clusters look nothing like long, black bananas.

The Funktion One Resolution 5 system, provided by Colchester-based Audio Plus, was the system of choice for front-of-house engineer Martin Mittler: "I didn't fancy doing the tour that we had booked with a line array and I didn't fancy what was being offered to me. I then had a conversation with a friend of mine who works for The Streets, and he suggested Audio Plus. However, we had never heard of Audio Plus before this, so it was good to get a recommendation."

Mittler admitted that working with a point-and-shoot box was a pleasant change to working with the semi-automated setup of a line array and, although he admitted he had always been happy with V-Dosc systems, it was fun to try something different: "I find it a lot easier to understand. Whereas with line array technology, I just put my hands up and let the system tech deal with it."

The 28-day tour, which has taken the band around the country using the Funktion One rig, has played in venues including the Hexagon in Reading and the Corn Exchange in Cambridge, venues that a system like the Resolution 5 is more than happy in: "The boxes definitely make you realise there are things in the mix that you have never noticed before. The thing that comes across most of all for

me when I am doing the soundcheck, is the bass guitar. It really sounds like a guitar, rather than a big, woolly noise - there is real detail in it and there is a lot more clarity in the drums. It's the kind of thing you are always searching for. It's more in your face," Mittler enthused.

Running 28 channels at FOH, Mittler explained an interesting technique he had developed for dealing with snare top and bottom: "I take the two snare channels into a sub-group and then back into another channel. I used to take it into a group and compress it. I would squash it a lot because I like the sound but I find it quite useful taking it back down a channel because I can get a little bit extra EQ," he revealed.

On stage, monitor engineer Baz Barrett had his own tricks up his sleeve: "We are using a large diaphragm microphone as an ambient overhead on the drums because the close mics were doing the drummer's head in," Barrett explained. With the entire band on in-ear monitors, he found it useful to inject more ambience into the mix to ensure the band did not feel isolated from the live environment: "We also have ambient mics behind the amps pointing across the stage. It seems to provide a bit of space around the close mic sounds. It varies on how much each band member takes of it but it gives them a bit of air around the mix," he concluded.

Lighting the air around the band was the responsibility of Jonathan Armstrong, or 'Leggy' as he prefers to be known. The design for the show provided Leggy with an opportunity to combine old and new technology, giving the show an original feel rather than it being just another



Clockwise from top left:

The Zutons in performance;

LD Jonathan 'Leggy' Armstrong;

L-R: House engineer Martin Mittler, Stefan Imhof of Audio Plus, and monitor engineer Baz Barrett.

flash-fest: "The moving lights are a combination of PC Beams and MAC 700s, there are about 20 of each. I am also using a few PixelLine 110ec, but unless you knew, you wouldn't spot them because they are lying on the ground and lighting the cyc and a scrim. We have a bit of 'old school', in as much as we are using a couple of ripple tanks, some Omni Photo Floods, 10 Par cans and a few Source Fours. Also, for the big London show, we've got in a few mirror balls," he laughed.

Controlling this *Back To The Future* rig (supplied by Neg Earth), Armstrong utilised his trusty Wholehog IPC running Hog 2 OS: "I haven't got my head around version 3 yet and I want someone to prove to me that it is stable. I have had a little look at it. I went to a cross over day with High End Systems . . . the syntax is slightly different, so instead of saying 'move this to here' it's more like 'this moves to here'. Nothing major, but at the moment I am quite happy with version 2," he explained.

The laid-back nature of the band had also made Armstrong's time with them equally mellow - with no specific requests about the look of the show

he was able to devise a feel and present it directly to them: "They are the kind of band you can just go down the pub with and have a chat. I came up with the design and it happened to coincide with the one thing they wanted, which was a backdrop, but they didn't want it there all the time. That is why we are using the gauze so we can light it from the back and make the artwork disappear. Their music is kind of old school, so we have lots of drapes and it tends to make it look old-school-theatre-style. Even though we have quite a lot of high-tech stuff up there I really think we achieve the look," Armstrong said.

Yet, unusually for an LD, Armstrong acknowledged that the PA also made the look of the show come together: "The point source PA looks wicked and suits the look of the stage perfectly. I am really glad we have that. Line array is brilliant and all that but it is nice to have the PA looking a bit more rock and roll. I have no idea what it sounds like but it looks great," Armstrong laughed.

So, who'd have thought - 2006 and everyone seems to be going retro. Only time will tell how far life will imitate art . . .