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CIRCUS Afterhours

Putting Montreal On The Nightlife Map

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PRODUCTS AND PROFILES FOR THE AUDIO PROFESSIONAL

CIRCUS AFTERHOURS HD

PUTTING MONTREAL ON THE NIGHTLIFE MAP

By Andrew King

In the Canadian club scene, sound quality can often be forfeited in favour of convenience or cost savings – seemingly an afterthought to architecture and design. There are, however, some who simply refuse to compromise.

Over the last several years, Montreal's Circus Afterhours has climbed the ranks of elitism in the nightclub scene – first in its home city and now on a global scale. In recent years, the club has welcomed high-profile patrons and top DJs including international names like Tiësto, Benny Benassi, and Felix Da Housecat, and homegrown talent in resident DJs Franco Fabi, King Louis, and Domenic Pandolfo.

For 2011, it was ranked number 21 on *DJmag's* Top 100 Clubs, rising from the 79th position in 2009 and number 60 in 2010 – and this was before administration decided to completely revamp its décor and sound, lighting, and video technology in hopes of further increasing its international profile.

Setting a huge priority on its patrons' aural experience, the club set out on a search for a system that would deliver as lavish and intense an experience as that for which Circus has become so well-known.

No Sideshow

While also upgrading its décor and lighting to compete on a level with the international club elite, it was made clear by administration from the offset that the sound system would be a priority above all else. While the administration, taking advice from Technical Director Louis L'Ecuyer, did indeed research and enter discussions with several poten-

tial suppliers, the decision was made relatively early on that the reinforcement system would primarily comprise FUNKTION-ONE speakers.

Though the brand's profile is still budding here in Canada, Circus' administrators were familiar with the company and its global reputation, with the company providing the pumping sounds for clubs including Armani Club in Dubai, Lisbon's LUX, Cielo in Chicago, Marquee in Las Vegas, and several highly-regarded others.

Circus Afterhours' technical and management team met with Eric Lasnier of Audio Distributors International (ADI), the exclusive distributor of FUNKTION-ONE products in Canada. The meeting was a success and plans were put in motion to incorporate a significant package into the club's main dance room. Plans were drawn up to maximize the system's impact, though they would require significant modifications to the room's physical layout. One wall and one of the club's three bars in the main room were removed, as were performer platforms that would potentially obstruct sound.

Certain construction materials were implemented to eliminate reflections and maximize sound absorption while the reconfigured room allowed for optimum speaker positioning and coverage. The system selected for Circus was a FUNKTION-ONE Dance Stack system, arranged in a four-corner, crossed-stereo configuration. L'Ecuyer reports that the DS boxes, because of their custom-designed matched components, boast a naturally flat-voiced enclosure, meaning minimal processing would be needed.



LEFT: One of Circus' four FUNKTION-ONE Dance Stacks.



Welcome to Circus Afterhours.

The Dance Stack system is modular and can thus be configured in a number of different formats. For Circus' system, the format chosen was 4-way active, incorporating 11 components per stack: two 1" high-frequency compression drivers and two 10" high-mid speakers in a single DS210; a single DS15 low-mid cabinet with a 15" horn-loaded midrange cone; and three F218mk2 bass/sub-bass cabinets, each boasting dual 18" woofers.

For the DJ monitor set-up, almost as vital as the house system's performance considering the calibre of entertainers coming through Circus on a regular basis, a pair of FUNKTION-ONE 3-way Resolution 2 boxes were chosen.

Not sparing any expense on a single aspect of the rig – for the main or DJ monitoring set-up – the club ensured that all amplification, crossovers, and cabling would keep signal quality at a premium. The team selected UK-made MC2 amplifiers and XTA loudspeaker management systems to run the rig, also coming through ADI.

Having outlined a system they believed capable of producing the desired

Main House System

- 4 x FUNKTION-ONE DS210 High + Mid speakers
- 4 x FUNKTION-ONE DS15 low-mid speakers
- 12 x FUNKTION-ONE F218mk2 Bass/Sub-bass speakers
- 1 x MC2 E25 amplifier (for all high-frequencies of the DS210s)
- 1 x MC2 Amplifier (for all midrange of the DS210s)
- 1 x MC2 E45 amplifier (for all low-midrange of the DS15s)
- 3 x MC2 E90 amplifier (for all bass/sub-bass of the F218mk2s)
- 2 x XTA DP446 Loudspeaker management systems (one for left, one for right)

DJ Monitor System

- 2 x FUNKTION-ONE Resolution 2 (horizontal)
- 1 x MC2 E25 amplifier (for the highs and midrange)
- 1 x MC2 E45 amplifier (for the low frequencies)
- 1 x XTA DP446 Loudspeaker management system

clarity and body-pumping SPLs with little listening fatigue, a few months later, the system was delivered and the real work began.

The Main Act

Lasnier took on the role of Special Projects Manager for the project, heading the installation alongside L'Ecuier. The first task was to run the wiring that would link the four speaker stacks to the custom-built amp racks in the next room. Once wiring was completed, custom junction boxes were installed at each end of the cables to allow for quick disconnection of the stacks for cleaning

and maintenance, as L'Ecuier had requested they be hardwired to avoid vandalism or, potentially, theft.

Following wiring, the amplifier and processing rack – a custom ceiling-mounted rack installed in an isolated area to limit exposure to humidity, heat, and tampering by the public – was assembled, visible from the VIP guest DJ room. The rack is four rack spaces wide by 12 high and holds all nine amplifiers and three management systems for the main system as well as several other matrixing components allowing the main room signal to be fed to any other zone in the club.

CIRCUS AFTERHOURS HD.

The DJ monitors were hung in the booth on pre-installed ceiling anchors at the ideal angle for booth coverage without obstructing the view of the crowd.

For the main system, each Dance Stack is set-up from the ground up on-the-spot from the individual components. First is the plinth (a riser attachment for simple mobility using a pallet jack), then all three F218mk2 low-frequency cabinets on their sides are positioned onto that and secured by rear metal joiner plates. Next comes the DS15 low-mid box with integral pre-installed mounting hardware. Last comes the DS210 – the critical step. Mounting and angling brackets are attached, a stage riser is positioned in front of the stack, and three workers lift the speaker into position while two others are waiting on ladders on each side, ready to secure the bolts once the piece is in place. The process is repeated an additional three times to build the remaining stacks.

Next comes the task of positioning each newly-erected stack. The original plans are pulled out and referenced, each stack being precisely positioned for optimal coverage of the room with minimal



interference and refractions. Each stack is hardwired and the cables are routed up to the custom ceiling boxes, fitted with the proper connectors, and then plugged in.

Lasnier, L'Ecuyer, and the team are then ready to power up the new rig for a test run. With the juice switched on and the amplifiers set to minimal output, a polarity check is performed and reveals no faults. Now for the music test...

All volumes are set to zero, all amplifiers are set to max level, and a track is tuned up on the CD player at minimal level. Everyone in the room makes their way over to the centre of the action for a sampling of the system's sound.

With everything seemingly in order, the volume knob on the output source is slowly turned clockwise while each present pair of ears listens carefully for any sign of a potential problems in the sound, amplifier panels, or controllers. Everything is green and "begging for more power."

The team gradually raises the volume to a more appropriate SPL level for this type of venue (and even past safe levels for a brief period to test for problems). Following the topped-out test, the electronics are re-checked to guarantee proper operation down the road. Even with the room SPL at remarkable volume (beyond what would typically be heard even in a club like Circus), the amplifiers aren't breaking a sweat and the system is sounding sweet.



BEHIND THE SCENES AT CIRCUS WITH

Louis L'Ecuyer Technical Director

PS: So how long have you been in the business, and when did you first start working with Circus Afterhours?

LL: I'm 49 years old and have been in the business since 16; I've always been an audio guy. I've worked in live concert production and later moved into the corporate world, freelancing for major clients like Bell Canada, Hydro Quebec, and others.

I sold a few sounds systems for Luc Belisle at Belisle Acoustics. He called one day and asked if I'd be interested in working with a nightclub. At the end of 2006, I met the team at Circus Afterhours, and they hired me for two weeks; it's now been more than four years.

PS: How do you find working in the after-hours world?

LL: The after-hours field is very special in the nightlife world; it's not like a normal club, with one basic experience; it's really where you want to go to end the night on a high note with something special, so you want the biggest sound, the best lighting, crazy videos, and monster DJs. I think every major city needs an international after-hours club like this.

PS: As Technical Director, what are your responsibilities at Circus?

LL: Now, I'm at Circus maybe three days a week. Circus began building its international profile around 2006, when I was in charge of all of the technical aspects. Just in inventory of A/V equipment alone, we have more than \$1,200,000 in the club, so it seems there's always something that needs work.

I still keep a few other customers in the club and corporate business as well. It keeps me busy, but this field isn't just a job – it's a passion.

PS: Can you describe what informed the decision to revamp the club's sound system at this particular point?

LL: Last year, Circus' administration came up with the idea of making the club more renowned around the world, and with that, they decided to do a total revamp – decor, sound, lighting, and video.

We began searching what was available from similar rooms around the world. My initial idea was to install a local manufacturer's system. We're in Canada, and I thought international visitors should experience a Canadian club with a Canadian sound system.

After several meetings, we decided to instead go with FUNKTION-ONE. It's a big name around the world, especially in the club scene, and we thought having a sound system at that level would boost our international profile.

PS: How did you find the process of overhauling all of those technical systems at once?

LL: Luckily, the timing was right on; everything came together perfectly. It was three months of 16 to 20-hour days, seven days a week. After all, this is a three-room club, so there's really three different lighting, sound, and video packages.

I didn't do it alone – Eric Lasnier at ADI deserves a lot of thanks. He really strived to give us all of the help and support needed to make this a reality. We also had a number of freelance technicians working over that time as well, who deserve a lot of credit.

Circus is a special place – there's really nowhere else like it, so a lot of the job was customized and unique. It was a lot of work, but an interesting and rewarding experience.



DJ booth with overhead monitoring system.

BEHIND THE SCENES AT CIRCUS WITH Franco Fabi General Manager & House DJ

With his dual role at Circus Afterhours, Franco Fabi reaps the benefits of the club's new sound system twofold — from the perspective of both a performer and businessman.

As A DJ:

"This system allows you to spin much longer. When you enter the DJ booth, the monitoring system is so different from the aggressiveness inherent in louder systems. It's certainly loud, but not nearly as tiring on your ears.

Along the same lines, another huge advantage is the punch that you can give any material you're playing. You have so much range with this system that you can keep the volume relatively moderate, but the crowd still gets the same intense experience without the harshness. Then, you can push that boost when you need that extra punch. It makes for a very interactive performance.

The experience for the crowd is the same, but just not as exhausting from a volume perspective."

As A GM:

"Obviously having a sound system like this brings a lot of interest from some high-level DJs. When you're trying to book entertainment for Circus, performers recognize the experience they're getting.

Not a lot of clubs around here have that kind of sound experience, so we actually get a lot of DJs that have never been to Circus now wanting to come and try out the system."

While some systems are often given a complete RTA tuning at this point, the team at Circus is able to forgo the process. As L'Ecuyer explains, one of the draws to the FUNKTION-ONE boxes is that they're designed to be flat out of the box and, because of this, no correc-



Amps & processors on custom rack.

tion or tuning was deemed necessary. A set of RTA measurements was still performed to ensure the room's natural acoustics didn't negatively affect the frequency response of the system.

Both Lasnier and L'Ecuyer notice a few minor oddities in the high-mids; however, relying on previous experience, the two attribute the inconsistencies to the reflections of the high-mids on the club's bare wooden floor. Later tests in a full room reveal that the assumption was a safe one, as the densely-packed dancing bodies eliminate the inconsistencies.

In the following days, with the club's other technological and aesthetic upgrades complete, Circus Afterhours hosted an event to officially present the new club and sound system to the media and public. The public was indeed impressed, as was the local nightlife press, relaying that to readers and building up excitement surrounding the club for a string of packed nights (or, more accurately, mornings) that's still going strong.

Grand Finale

Even a brief scan of local and international nightlife forums reveals some of the excitement

surrounding the new sound experience in Montreal's hottest after-hours establishment.

Posts on the TranceAddict.com forum from locals include snippets like: "I'm having a hard time thinking of a club where I've heard a cleaner sound," "It's like being in a professional studio," and "That bass punches you right in the chest."

While Circus Afterhours has been a well-known and respected establishment on both the local and international after-hours scenes, the club's administration and collaborators make it clear that they feel they've optimized their offerings for the world's best-known DJs and common club-goers alike. Says club GM and house DJ Franco Fabi: "With the acquisition of this high-end sound system with a power of 76,000 watts, a new lighting system, but also through the best local and international DJs and a quality team, we're putting Montreal on the nightlife map" — and in a towering way. ■



Andrew King is the Editor of Professional Sound.