

Korean Beauty

Translated into Korean, the Western musical *Notre Dame de Paris* has found a new audience and critical acclaim. **Steve Kim** reports on the sound system



Soundcraft Vi6 console at front-of-house



Funktion-One loudspeakers took over from the installed line array

SET IN 15TH CENTURY FRANCE, Victor Hugo's novel *Notre Dame de Paris* (English title: *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*) tells a sad love story set against the dramatic gothic backdrop of the Notre Dame Catholic Cathedral in Paris. Later to become the basis of Jean Cocteau's black-

and-white film classic *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) and Disney's animated *Beauty and the Beast*, the original musical was staged for the first time in France in 1998, and claimed the most successful first year of any musical – with more than 10 million people worldwide enjoying it since.



Notre Dame de Paris – staged in Korean for the first time

It features music composed by Riccardo Cocciante and lyrics by Luc Plamondon, and has been recorded for album release at least seven times to date. These recordings include those by the original Paris, London, Spanish and Italian casts, as well as that of the Asian tour when it passed through Seoul. The show has also been recorded in other languages including German, Czech and Russian.

The stage production in its original French format had already proved itself very popular with a Korean audience – as it had in Canada and Switzerland, among other countries – largely due to the high quality of the production, memorable songs, sound values and general artistic appeal. In Korea, however, much of the audience did not understand the French lyrics or the storyline. So, although it was one of many overseas musicals that have successfully been staged in Korea in their original form, it was set to make a whole new splash with its recent translation into the Korean language.

The Korean *Notre Dame de Paris* company agreed a contract with its French counterpart to undertake a stage production that would cover all of the Asia market in November 2003. This led directly to the current record-breaking run that began at the Sejong Cultural Center in Seoul in January and February 2008 before moving on to the Sungnam Arts Center in March and April, followed by the Daegu Opera House in May. The run is set to continue to the Daejeon Cultural Arts Center until early June before appearing at the Kwangju Cultural Arts Center in June and July and finally the Kimhae Cultural Arts Center during October and November.

In its Korean form, *Notre Dame de Paris* involves 54 arias accompanying gymnastics, ballet and modern dance forms including breakdance, with the French storyline translated into Korean by Changhak Park, transforming it into a modern masterpiece. The size and complexity of the production were reflected in the open audition – held during 2007 – that attracted

around 1,500 actors and actresses, hopeful of finding themselves a part. Key among those who were successful, Bumrae Kim and Heungrael Yoon shared the leading role of the hunchback bell-ringer Quasimodo opposite Bada, Haewon Moon and Jinyoung Oh playing the gypsy girl Esmeralda. Jungyool Lee and Jongwon Moon appear as gypsy leader Clopin, while Sungmin Kim and Taehyung Kim play Captain of the Guard Phœbus de Chateaupers, and Changwoo Ryu and Bumsuk Seo play Frollo, the priest of Notre Dame.

The production was pulled together under the guidance of technical director Sungchul Kim who had previously worked in the Korean productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet*, among others. The singers, meanwhile, were overseen by vocal coach Leemyung Chae who had built her reputation with popular Korean acts including the Singers of God, Sweet Sorrow, Ray and Yumi. Together, they were delighted to discover that a unique bond was to be created between performers and audience as a direct result of the reinterpretation of the production in Korean.

Assigned responsibility for the sound system to accompany the production on tour, Haewon Lee, president of Planet Live Sound, was familiar with EAW and Meyer Sound systems, having used them in a variety of applications previously. For this production, however, he was considering using a Funktion-One system, having been impressed with its high quality of sound reproduction. In spite of Funktion-One's considerable history and track record with live music, he harboured

some doubts regarding its suitability for rock concerts, and chose to visit Japanese live rental company Try Audio, a long-time Funktion-One user for concert applications.

His concerns were twofold – to distinguish the voice as one of the most important factors in a musical, while bearing in mind that *Notre Dame de Paris* looks and sounds like a rock concert, requiring both clarity and high sound pressure levels – especially during the climax of the music. After seeing one of Try Audio's systems in use at a rock concert in Japan, he was satisfied not only with its sound quality but also with its ability to handle the power and aggression of rock music, and decided to purchase Funktion-One for use on *Notre Dame de Paris* in Korea.

As a result, the main sound system for the musical comprises 12 Res-5 full-range cabinets with four F218 subwoofers, and six F55 boxes for front fill. The loudspeakers are all powered by MC² Audio E-Series amplifiers. A Soundcraft Vi-6 serves as the main mixing console, while Crown CM311As provide the headset microphone system.

The Funktion-One loudspeakers use 8-inch paper cone drivers for mid and high range reproduction, which provide a natural, balanced sound for the voice range between 3kHz and 5kHz.



Quasimodo makes his entry

The other distinguishing feature of the Funktion-One design is that it is a point-source system, rather than the currently favoured line array. 'Everybody is very happy with the sound quality for both the musical and rock concert,' says Haewon Lee. 'The sound of this system is very natural and powerful, and this is one of the main factors of the show that the audience is satisfied with. I would like to point out another Funktion-One model, the Res-1, which we have used for the foldback speakers.'

'Generally speaking, I am very happy with the sound quality of Funktion-One systems used for this musical,' he concludes.

As sound director of Arts Center Opera House in Sungham city, Minsoo Goh also has extensive experience of different loudspeaker systems. Here, the McCauley Sound system that had previously been installed has been relocated to serve the second and third floors, allowing the Funktion-One system to serve the main area of the audience. 'The sound colours are a little different between two brands of speaker, but it was a successful set-up for this musical,' he reports.

Following its initial success, *Notre Dame de Paris* is set to run in South Korea until the end of 2008.

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Scenes from Notre Dame de Paris