



photo: John Delf.

Glastonbury: The Truth

Just like the Kaiser Chiefs,

Tony Andrews predicts

a riot...

Words by Phil Ward.

UK - The thing about mud is that it sticks. When Glastonbury organiser Michael Eavis mumbled a hasty apology to the media following complaints about the sound on the Pyramid stage this year, the lens of publicity was swiped with a thick dollop of Piltonite from the very man's boot. It should have been so very different.

Eavis was in fact presented with an opportunity to highlight the unworkable and iniquitous restrictions laid down by his historical agreement with Mendip District Council in 1970. This states that the measurable levels of music just off the site in the surrounding villages should be no greater than 60dB, taken as an average over specific durations of performance throughout the festival.

Instead of hosing down the regulators with a powerful jet of realism, Eavis sold the industry short by pointing the finger of blame in entirely the wrong direction - the innate technical qualities of the PA system itself. He also enabled less than an hour's worth of audio obfuscation to drown out a full weekend of loud, clear and trouble-free sound reinforcement.

Less seriously, he effectively played into the hands of anyone with a vested interest in restoring line array to the Pyramid site, and, while this in itself is an honest and open debate year on year, the controversy threatens to overshadow the overall success of the point source system re-introduced this year and, therefore, to cloud the debate.

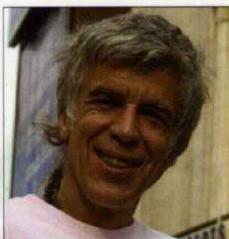
But what actually happened? According to several independent sources, a marked attenuation of the

Pyramid sound during a set by US rockers The Killers led to complaints and even unrest, but the set did conclude at more expected levels and a total debacle was averted. However, the hiatus was enough to spark controversy and Eavis, the next day, felt obliged to offer mitigations. Although these were later retracted and the system and its crews exonerated, the teams involved came away from the festival with professional pride bruised - and are still dealing with the PR consequences weeks later.

So the sudden attenuation of Funktion One's Resolution 5-based point source clusters on the Saturday evening of the festival was not, in fact, a technical fault. It appears instead that unusual atmospheric conditions created highly claustrophobic acoustics over the site, urging Capita Symonds officials to issue instructions to reduce levels. The drop in volume was, therefore, a deliberate - if reluctant - adjustment in order to comply. There was no technical inadequacy at all.

The episode highlights the perennial conflict between environmental health interests concerning noise and the cultural imperatives to stage live music in places that are otherwise healthy, safe and attractive to its audiences. Funktion One founder Tony Andrews, designer of the Resolution system used and a protagonist in Glastonbury's production technology since its very early days in the 70s, is in no doubt about the provenance of this year's skirmish.

"It all goes back to the fact that the off-site limit has always been set incredibly low," he says. "At least 20 years ago I actually said to Michael: '60dB in that position? That's hardly louder than birdsong - you



Funktion One's Tony Andrews.

shouldn't have agreed it and it's going to lead to endless trouble in the future . . ."

"But given a good wind direction, and not too much noise on the rest of the site, you can achieve a reasonable level in the valley. We had a bad wind direction on the night of The Killers - it was coming from the south - so that was the first contributing factor. The second, really, was the principle set down in law that the slight inconvenience of two or three people for the weekend should take precedence over the enjoyment of 80,000."

Andrews claims that anomalies of this kind are on the increase, as regulations beset the production industry from all sides and contribute to an environment in which sound levels prevent audiences from feeling as involved in an event as they should. Glastonbury, he argues, could even have been a test case to prove the point.

"If Michael had been better informed he could have used that platform to say how the noise controls are wrong, instead of blaming us. It was a great PR opportunity, in fact. For some reason he took quite the opposite chance to imply that the choice of PA system was wrong, and I don't know why. What actually happened was that the FOH system was turned down on the advice of David Leversedge."

As Director of Acoustics at building and environment consultancy Capita Symonds, David Leversedge has 25 years' experience in noise control. This was the fifth Glastonbury in succession that Leversedge's CSC team - 22-strong, this year - had been "monitoring Europe's largest music festival to help ensure that the show goes on, without breaking the stringent sound regulations set by the Local Authority", according to CSC publicity.

Glastonbury Festival's Limited takes these regulations very seriously. Each year, it publishes a Draft Noise Management Strategy - the one for 2005 was typical: "A noise management strategy shall be provided to the Licensing Authority on or before 23rd April 2004. The Noise Management Strategy shall identify how noise arising from the holding of the event will be effectively controlled so as to prevent cause for community annoyance."

Licensing Hearings take place regularly at venues such as the Parks Room, Wells Town Hall and Capita Symonds regularly advise on other applications to Mendip's Licensing Sub-Committee, such as this year's National Action Sport's Show at Shepton Mallet's Royal Bath & Wells Showground, for example. In other words, the relationships involved are all very well established and operate successfully across a wide variety of stages - not least throughout the tumultuous site of the Glastonbury Festival itself.

Despite the fact that certain other of the audio suppliers to the festival have exploited the controversy by subsequently using phrases such as "most consistent" in their own PR, it's worth noting the plethora of smooth-running, noise-managed systems elsewhere around Worthy Farm. APR Audio and Shuttlesound used Electro-Voice line arrays on the Jazz World Stage, a Skan PA continued its commitment to L'Acoustic's V-DOS C on the Other Stage. Pyramid FOH mixing was dominated by Digidesign's Venue D-Show and D-Show Profile, specified by Simon Honywill, system designer for control system provider RG Jones Sound Engineering, although Soundcraft's recently introduced Vi6 made its Pyramid debut with The Kooks.

A much-vaunted all-digital signal path also featured Optocore's DD32 E fibre networks under the auspices of Marquee Audio and its networking guru Andy Huffer, while XT A processor and AudioCore software were engaged here and on several other stages from the East Dance Stage to the John Peel, Park, Park Backstage, Radio One, Stonebridge Bar, Acoustic Stage and Other Stage areas.

Nonetheless, on Saturday 23 June as Iggy Pop and the Stooges took to the Other Stage, relations finally showed signs of strain around the Pyramid field. "The Killers actually said, look, we're going to be as loud as we like and we'll pay the fine," Andrews recounts, describing mounting tension regarding levels during The Kooks' set immediately prior to The Killers. "The engineer had an open cheque book. This followed heaps of praise for the system on Friday, especially for Kasabian, which was one of the best things I've ever heard, and even then we never got to turn it up to full. Even for The Who on Sunday we still had half as much again."

"But it began to get dark during The Kooks, and that's when things start to change. All the noise on the site was aggregating, and was being measured as over the limit off-site. It seems to me that some people must have been confused as to precisely where the levels were coming from, and they decided to pin it on the Pyramid Stage. We were running at 98dB for The Kooks, and it held steady as The Killers began - but they made us turn it down to 95dB. That didn't make too much difference to the offsite level, but they kept pushing us for more level reduction and, in the end, we were down to about 90-92dB at the mix position. We could hear Iggy Pop on the Other Stage from the FOH position at the Pyramid - and it was unbelievably loud."

"We wanted to play by the rules and we didn't want to be a risk to Michael's licence. Our sound just shrank back towards the stage, from a really nice 3D sound stage. I went to the back of the front-of-house tower to find out what was happening, and spoke with David Leversedge, [Funktion



Above: Russ Tite mixes The Kooks set on one of SSE Audio's Soundcraft Vi6 digital consoles. (photo: Soundcraft)

One's] John Newsham and [audio consultant] Chris Beale. You could feel that the crowd was getting restless, there was chanting and a few skirmishes with security at the front, so John and I said to David Leversedge that we would turn it back up to prevent a completely different kind of health and safety challenge: namely, a riot. He agreed and we gradually brought the levels back up again."

A feeling of defiance took root among the 18-strong Pyramid sound crew as Sunday's bill got underway and misinformation took root. As it happened, the weather conditions altered and the misleading, claustrophobic sonic canopy dissipated - allowing FOH levels to reach 103dB during the The Who's finale without further comment. That morning at 11am, however, Michael Eavis had conducted an international press conference at which, in the face of questioning about the complaints from the audience about the sound, the switch to Funktion One's Resolution system after four years of French line array was used as a scapegoat.

It's no secret that Andrews and Funktion One are vociferous opponents of line array as the only solution (see *L&S!* September 2006, p.66), and could be said to be on something of a crusade to preserve and extend point source designs and techniques throughout global pro audio. To receive such adverse publicity at this sensitive moment in the company's history was clearly damaging, and Andrews is in no mood to shrug it off.

"We regard the event as a triumph," he states. "We tackled the issue of the huge spread

between the two main stacks by putting small in-fills in the corner of the Pyramid to cover the front of stage area. That worked a treat. Otherwise we put up the sort of clusters that John and I normally do. Originally it was to be three rows of Res 5s, but in the end it was four because you've got greater control of the low-mids over a bigger surface area. One of the complaints of recent years was that a lot of

Another priority instigated by Chris Beale was to fly the clusters relatively high and point them at a sharper angle downwards, in an attempt to prevent forward and lateral dispersion of sound off-site and "keep it in the valley", as Andrews puts it. This was achieved with such a degree of success that it prompted Eavis to note that he could not, unlike previous years, hear the system up at his farmhouse at the top of the site - although whether this was a congratulation or a criticism is not quite clear, according to Andrews.

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low-mid goes squirting out at the sides, and we were determined not to have that.

"Our system is also extremely resistant to wind and rain, and really punches out the waves without any of the phasing or flimsiness you get from line array under these conditions."

Ironically this was Tony Andrews' first return to Glastonbury after a break of 15 years. Having built the first Pyramid Stage in 1970, and a second in 1979 that ultimately was destroyed by fire in 1997, Andrews will freely admit that despite his natural sympathies with the early spirit of the event it has, on occasion, turned into something of "a poisoned chalice" for him. He developed Flashlight for Turbosound, and handed it over to both the manufacturer and Britannia Row in 1991, disillusioned with the festival's increasingly corporate pressures. By the end of the '90s, his point source flagship had given way to the first of a series of line array installations for the 3-day beanfeast - and these had continued until the last festival in 2005.

Commercial realities have long since invaded the festival's pristine egalitarian aspirations, but a robust altruism still survives even if, from time to time, it can appear naive. Cynicism pushes waves from one side of the valley; careless abandon echoes from the other. Squeezed in the middle is pro audio.