

SLINKY

When a UK-based nightclub with an international following ventured onto Japan's nightclub scene, **Craig Lovell** joined the party

SLINKY WAS LAUNCHED BACK IN

1997 by independent promoter Richard Carr, who saw that many regional nightclubs within the UK were not attracting the major DJ talent or meeting the production values that could be found at the larger clubs in London and other major cities. With this in mind Slinky was launched at the Opera House in the resort town of Bournemouth on the south coast of England. What made this venue different to other regional nightclubs was the willingness to ship in the world class DJ talent, and concentrate on providing the production values that matched those of very high-profile nightclubs. This philosophy of bringing world-class events to the people has resulted in a phenomenal expansion for Slinky, and a high regard within the dance club industry.

Slinky now attracts more than 2,000 people every Friday night at the Opera House, and has expanded to entertain 1,500 people on Saturday nights at Creation in Bristol, while also hosting tour dates every month throughout the UK. But its popularity is not restricted to British shores, as within only a short period of time the club has grown to host a minimum of four international dates per month and annual stadium tours throughout the world. In the Asia-Pacific region, Slinky has already promoted successful clubbing events in New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Korea, Indonesia, The Philippines and most recently took a three-month residency in Tokyo.

For Japan, the basic idea was to replicate the Bournemouth Opera House operation and place it in Tokyo. It was decided to use the



Masaaki 'Masa' Azuma from Funktion-One Japan and Slinky Tokyo floor manager Mark Berry in front of the DJ booth - note the proximity of the DJ monitors.

same resident and guest DJs, as well as the UK staff in order to give the same atmosphere as the Opera House and so to differentiate itself from the established clubs in Tokyo. Meanwhile, promotion of the club was to be managed by Dentsu, the largest advertising agency in

the world. Slinky's Japanese project was a major investment with intense media coverage.

The Japanese residency was to run for three months with the final clubbing event being held on New Year's Eve 2002. The venue Slinky chose to rent was already a

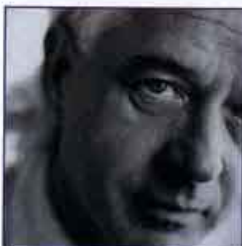
nightclub (Club Cube) located in the Shibarua district of Tokyo, near Shinagawa. This was renamed for the residency to Slinky Tokyo.

The venue itself is a converted apartment building and comprises two large dance floors plus a large lounge/bar area. Original sound systems included a JBL installation on the main dance floor, a rented EAW system for the second dance floor, while the lounge/bar area housed a small audio system to provide background music. For Slinky Tokyo the sound and lighting systems were to be upgraded to mirror Slinky's production principles in the UK. Slinky's own Mark Neil managed audio design, while David Ross, of Primal Scream/Prodigy fame, designed the lighting and laser system. The sound system specified by Mark Neil for the main dance floor included Funktion-One Resolution speakers with QSC amps and XTA processing.

To facilitate the design, Funktion-

One Japan's Masaaki Azuma (Masa) visited the UK to meet with Mark Neil in order to discuss his ideas. 'There were things which could and could not be achieved,' says Azuma, 'and it was Funktion-One Japan's and Try Audio's job to make it a reality.' Try Audio is Azuma's own PA rental company. The outcome of the meetings meant that the rented EAW system was returned, the JBLs were transferred to the second dance floor, with Try Audio renting Funktion-One Resolutions to Slinky for use on the main dance floor.

Initially Neil devised three design plans for the main dance floor area. The first was to fly two horn loaded Resolution 4s with two stacked F-218 double 18-inch bass enclosures either side of the DJ platform, the second was to install a mix of Resolution 4s plus bass bins in all four corners of the dance floor, and the third was to site three Resolution 4s on top of a stack of



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Either side of the DJ booth three Resolution 4 speakers are stacked on top of F-218 bass enclosures.

F-218 bass enclosures either side of the DJ. After practical, aesthetic and cost considerations, Neil settled on option three as the first design didn't quite look the part and would have visually been a little 'thin' - Slinky was after a powerful image as well as sound.

For DJ monitoring a pair of Resolution 2s were specified. The Resolution 2 - a compact three-way full range enclosure - has started to become a popular choice within the UK and US dance scene for DJ monitoring and, according to Mark Berry, Slinky Tokyo's floor manager, 'all the world-class DJs that visited us here in Tokyo stated that the monitoring just blew them away. They all expressed keen interest in returning just for the monitors.'

Azuma says: 'The turntables were located extremely close to the Res 2s, however even with such high monitoring levels there was absolutely no feedback'. Azuma explains: 'This was probably due to the sum of the materials used in the DJ platform construction, and positioning of the equipment, however I also think that the high quality of the low frequency content of the Res 2s was also a contributing factor. Probably if a bass reflex box was used you may well have suffered feedback.' This in Azuma's opinion is one of the merits of horn-loaded speaker designs.

Installation and calibration of the sound system did unearth one unforeseen problem. Within three minutes of testing the rig at full power the police arrived - they had received complaints from residents who shared a wall with the club. This meant that in operation, Slinky was only able to drive the stacks at a fraction of their capable power. Even though management worked hard to keep everyone happy, the police were to visit the club on a near weekly basis throughout the Slinky residency because of sound pollution or noisy clubgoers.

In spite of this setback, Mark Berry was very enthusiastic about the reaction to Slinky Tokyo and the sound system in particular. 'The Slinky sound system is quite an obsession with us and the Funktion-Ones didn't let us down,' he says. 'The club here has had such a fantastic reaction from the crowd even though we were unable to listen to it in its full glory. When

people were clubbing they tended to gravitate towards the stacks. It's like body and mind massage.' He says: 'The top end is so clean but the problem was that we were not able to kick the bass hard enough to balance it, so while we got a perfect top end the clubbers should have been kicked away from the

bass bins. This couldn't happen because of the neighbours, so we had to compromise, which was very frustrating. Saying that though the sound system is beautiful and so impressive that it didn't really have to be driven at full power.'

As for strange requests, a meditation group had heard the

Funktion-One system and wanted to rent the space so that they could lay out their mats and meditate while listening to their music being played in the background.

According to those at Slinky, the Tokyo residency was a resounding success. Mark Berry sums up by saying: 'Importing a UK club into Tokyo upped the ante, and by the end of our residency here we were up against other clubs bringing in the world's top DJs. This was not the case when we first started back in October, and it shows what an impact our residency here in Tokyo has had. It has proved exciting.'

The venue has once again

reverted back to Club Cube, and the main dance floor sound system has returned to Try Audio. However Cube will not be reverting to their old installs either. The JBLs will remain in use on the second dance floor, while a new and more permanent Funktion-One system will be installed on the main dance floor. This new system will be the first deployment of Funktion-One's new Dance Stack in Asia. Let's hope that Cube includes some soundproofing in its plans...

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