

Running on Funktion

As far as tours go, the recent European outing from US legend Jackson Browne looked to be a fairly easy job at the outset. Starting in October and running 30 dates around Europe, this solo acoustic tour simply involved one man, his 14 guitars, a piano and the occasional guest. Not a particularly mind-bending sound plot there then. However, as with all things audio, simple eventually becomes the most difficult.

In the first instance, Mr Browne, although starting the set with a few regular numbers, would encourage the audience to shout out requests. Then, with a swift change of acoustic guitar (all are individually tuned), he would comply. There was, therefore, no set list.

The result for FOH engineer, Paul Dieter - who fortunately knows all of Mr Browne's output, having been his studio engineer at Groove Master, in Santa Monica for many years - was not so much a show as a constantly changing musical journey. A simple task for one as great etc etc.

A rather trickier problem, however, faced Gareth Jones of British sound hire firm Villa Audio. The audio contract for Jackson Browne should be a dream - were it not for wild variations in venue size, meaning constantly changing system requirements.

'We'd normally place a line array on a tour like this,' he explained. 'However, with this tour taking in venues from 2,000 capacity halls, right down to a 400 capacity club in Oslo, there's simply no space to fly the line array in some venues.'

The answer was to specify a system which could be either flown or ground-stacked, flexible enough to allow varying configurations, depending on the venue, yet which would also satisfy the high quality insisted on by both artist and engineer. Enter Funktion One.

Probably best known for its large, high SPL rigs for dance clubs and festivals, Funktion One may not have seemed the obvious choice. The Resolution fully horn-loaded cabinets, designed by Tony Andrews and John Newsham, initially look like overkill for such a subtle performance. Yet, according to tour system technician, Oz Bagnall, the Funktion One system proved itself more than capable of generating an intimate sound.

The rig used for the tour was effectively built around Resolution 5 and Resolution 2 cabinets, with the active Res 5s looking after their own amplification, and QSCs driving the Res 2s. The 'standard' rig comprised a floor sub with a three wide and two high stack of Res 5 cabinets. This acted as a main block, with extra cabinets either flown or added as required.

According to Mr Bagnall, it's all about building cells. As important - perhaps more so - is that this also makes the system very quick and easy to set up.

'We're generally up and running within an hour and a half. It really is a genius rigging design which easily adapts for ground stacking. Two flaps come down from the cabinet and clip on to the cabinet below it. That also locks them together on a groundstack. There's a biscuit that slides into grooves, to set angles in 2.5° angles up to a maximum 15° dispersion, but in effect you end up lining it up by eye, and slotting in the notch. You don't need a laptop to set this up.'

The big test for any system, of course, is its audio performance, and the system succeeded in turning heads - not only with Paul Dieter and the US crew, but also with visiting sound companies invited by Funktion One to hear the system.

'I've not found anything to touch it, especially on the top end,' expanded Oz Bagnall. 'The extended frequency response of the box is excellent. We've used it in conjunction with in-house systems and it just shows up what's missing in other rigs. In some places there have been line arrays in-house, and we've had to put quite severe eqs on them to brighten them up to Funktion One's capabilities.'

'It's best with Funktion One to use as little eq and compression as possible. The system has a depth of sound, almost 3D, and as soon as you start applying too much eq, the image disappears and becomes rather flat.'

Flat? Well, that certainly couldn't be said for the mix at Jackson Browne's recent concerts at London's Palladium. Sheer class - and totally unscripted. A W



Top: the standard rig used at the Palladium; above: Oz Bagnall; bottom left: Tony Andrews and Paul Dieter

