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## KOREA'S KING OF CLUBS

Funktion One reinvents Seoul nightlife at Ellui

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# Korea's King of clubs

Seoul's Ellui nightclub is Korea's biggest nightspot, and with a Funktion One system in place it has SPL to match, as **Barney Jameson** reports

## WHEN DECIDING ON THE BEST

way to introduce a new nightclub to the world, it takes a certain amount of confidence to choose the phrase 'the finest venue ever'. Yet this is the description attached to the newest nightclub in Seoul, and upon entering the 4,000-capacity, Funktion One-loaded Club Ellui, it's easy to see why confidence is in plentiful supply.

Situated beneath the Ellui Hotel in Kangnam-Gu, the nightclub is a vast, multi-level space comprised of contrasting themes, from the ultra-modern, snow-white interior of the upstairs White Zone lounge down to the dark corners and throbbing sub-frequencies of the Black Zone below.

Each weekend its dance-floors shake with the weight of thousands of Seoul's most exclusive party-goers, while outside the queues stretch for blocks as more try to enter. Awaiting them inside are the world's top touring DJs alongside the best of Korea's dance music fraternity, and a wealth

of Funktion One sound reinforcement ready to make the walls tremble.

It is the biggest nightclub that Korea has ever seen, and it all comes from the mind of a man who, before Ellui, had never even considered creating a venue.

His name is Eddie Son, a Seoul-native and one-time trainee chef who back-packed to Australia and, having fallen in love with its club culture, promptly decided to stay. He quickly turned to audio engineering, enrolling in college where, in his own words, he spent his time 'producing music - hip hop and R&B. I met a lot of bands, producers and DJs there. It was a good time.'

Yet following a change in Australian immigration policy he found himself unable to remain in the country, returning instead to the South Korean capital. Determined to remain in audio, he found work in a studio but rapidly became disaffected with the change in culture. 'What I learned



Ellui's packed main dance-floor



The Ellui main stage and Funktion One FOH system



Chanwoo Kang, Eddie Son and Jongsub Kwon

from the school back in Australia was to keep thinking and brainstorming to get better sound, better quality,' he explains. 'But here the system was too strict. It wasn't the place that I'd dreamed of.'

Feeling unable to express himself creatively, he shifted focus again, this time organising special promotions for international drinks brands including Guinness and Smirnoff Ice. And then came Ellui. 'I didn't imagine that I would end up running a club business in Seoul!' says Mr Son. 'But the owner of the Ellui Hotel asked me to build him a new club so I accepted the deal.'

Perhaps the best phrase to describe Mr Son is 'free spirit'. In his determination to remain true to his considerable ambition and

creativity, he frequently leaps from one challenge to the next. Even as he leads *Pro Audio Asia* around Ellui, he explains with excitement that plans are afoot for more projects elsewhere. By the time this article is published, he will have moved on.

Yet it is obvious from the way that he talks of Ellui and the months that he spent creating it alongside Soundus, Korea's Funktion One distributor, that the nightclub is close to his heart.

'The first time we had a party there were people queuing all the way to the next hotel, and last week we got 4,600 people in here - it was packed,' he passionately explains. 'It's the first time there has been anything like this in Korea - we have never had this kind of club before.'

But the process of creating a venue

on the scale of Ellui is never without its difficulties, and in the creation of the nightclub both Mr Son and Soundus faced challenges that could have derailed many lesser projects. Between the closing months of 2010 until the club's eventual opening in the summer of 2011, plans were altered and compromises were

be positioned, it was hard to shake the impression that a space so large would require a mighty ambition to fill its walls.

Returning to the site months later, and catching that same elevator down from the hotel lobby to the now completed Ellui, *Pro Audio Asia* enjoys a rather different experience.

it, meanwhile, is an LED screen that stretches all the way to the ceiling.

The front of house system is impressive – Mr Son observes that in the time since the club's opening the room has 'already had more than 10 DJs visiting and they've all loved the sound system'. But the monitoring system on the stage itself is just as



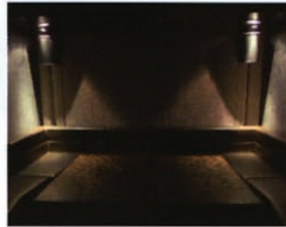
**The White Zone overlooked by a Resolution 1.5**

reached as the ultimate vision of what Ellui would become took shape.

**Filling the shell**

In late 2010, Soundus invited *Pro Audio Asia* to visit the site of what was intended to become Korea's biggest nightclub. The space that the club would occupy had already been a venue in the past, attached to the Hotel Ellui but operating under an unrelated name. Its replacement was expected to be far grander, on a greater scale than anything the country had seen before.

But after a brief elevator ride from the hotel lobby, followed by an uncertain moment on a ladder, the



**One of the six VIP rooms**

Where once there was dust and boarding, building-work and ladders, industrial lighting and only imagination to fill out empty spaces, there are now gleaming white surfaces, projectors firing onto exposed brickwork, and chrome-railed balconies.

Where *Pro Audio Asia* last stood during that initial visit, unable to venture into the main area due to the work that was still taking place, there is now a gigantic stage that runs the width of the main room. Flown to its left and right are 12 Funktion One Resolution 5 full-range enclosures (hung six per-side), augmented with eight ground-stacked F218 MkII subwoofers (four per-side). Crowning



**A Resolution 1.55TT in the Sky Zone**

striking. Positioned at either side of the DJ position is a pair of Resolution 2 enclosures, each no more than a metre away from the mixing desks, plus F118 subs for low-end. It is without doubt the loudest monitoring set-up *Pro Audio Asia* has ever seen. Mr Son just grins at our surprised reaction.

'Even with these monitors they put it up high!' he insists. 'I believe that DJs have to enjoy themselves on stage. It means that they can give people the same experience. I was focusing on how I could make the DJs have fun up here and now when they're coming up with a big sound they just start to bounce. They don't even listen to what's going on out the front, they just have fun up here because of these speakers.'

To the right of the DJ position is an SD9 digital console from DiGiCo. 'Sometimes we record a live set from the DJs,' Mr Son explains, adding: 'Also the DiGiCo desk is really good because you can save settings on it. When a DJ plays electro-house we set-up the system for electro house, or if he's playing techno then we have a techno sound. I want to build up different settings for the different music. That's why I chose a digital console.'

Chanwoo Kang adds that there is a second function for which the console has become invaluable. 'It gives very exact levels,' he explains. 'We taught the DJs what the safe levels were but they're not detected very well by DJ mixers. So instead we taught them how to use the SD9 with the right levels.'

Looking out from the stage, performing DJs have a full view of Ellui's main room. The space comprises an expansive dance-floor in front of the stage, overlooked by balconies along the right side. At its far end is a circular bar area, positioned above which is an upper VIP tier known as the Sky Zone, with seating at the rear. Beneath the Sky Zone is an under-balcony area served by four ceiling-mounted Resolution 1.5TT enclosures.

Along the area's right wall,



**The DiGiCo SD9 is used for metering**

dusty, exposed site into which we walked made it hard to imagine what was to come. Ellui was in the first stages of construction, still a shell. Though we were stood on what would ultimately become the main dance floor – at that point covered in boards – there was as yet no stage-area or staircases, let alone loudspeakers and furnishings. But one thing was immediately obvious – Ellui was going to be enormous.

So cavernous was the space that even as Chanwoo Kang of Soundus explained in detail where each of the club's zones would be located and where every loudspeaker would



**Wall-mounted F55 speakers play guests in**

INSTALLATION

meanwhile, are large doors located beneath the balconies. These separate the main dance-floor from the appropriately named Black Zone – a darker, less spacious and more brooding area which operates as a secondary dance-floor with more cutting-edge music on offer.

'Korea is more about electro-house and trance but that's old fashioned elsewhere in the world,' Mr Son explains. 'People need to be educated. When there's something commercial on the main stage we have techno in the Black Zone so people can still

enjoy trendy music.'

The Black Zone is served by its own DJ booth, this time with a more modest monitoring system comprised of two F1 RM15 boxes. In terms of the equipment on offer to visiting performers, meanwhile, Mr Son claims that 'normally in Korean clubs they don't have a lot of equipment but we have everything – when a DJ sends us a tech rider we can set up for every single contract'.

Flanking the DJ booth are four Resolution 4 loudspeakers (two per-side) and four F218 subs (two per-side). For major events, the doors are thrown open and the Black Zone becomes part of the extended main area, but on a normal night sound isolation is key to the success of the club's configuration. 'Funktion One is really good for that,' Mr Son reasons. 'The sound in here doesn't really get involved with the main room.'

Leading out of the Black Zone is a passageway that takes visitors behind the main stage, where six VIP rooms are situated alongside a large artist's lounge. Each of the VIP rooms has been set up to act as a club within the club, a sanctuary, Mr Son explains, for visiting celebrities and Seoul's wealthiest clubbers. 'Actors and actresses, singers, they come in here,' he clarifies.

Each room boasts four ceiling-



Ellui in action on a packed night



One side of the FOH rig



MC<sup>2</sup> amplifiers are crammed into the rack-room

mounted F101 enclosures – one in each corner – plus its own dedicated MC<sup>2</sup> T4-250 amplifier. VIP patrons can also select their own music should they prefer it via the TEAC SR-LUXi iPod docks. 'If they don't like the music from the stage then they can put whatever they want on,' Mr Son confirms, adding that in the past he has walked into private parties playing hip hop and even classical music.

Back in the main room, a wide staircase leads up to another radically different area – the White Zone. Of all the contrasting styles within Ellui, it is this part of the venue that most closely represents the vision that Mr Son initially hatched for the club. It is almost clinical in its décor.

'Ellui has actually changed a lot,' Mr Son explains. 'Now it looks quite classic but at the beginning it was going to be really modern, all white.' He recalls a nightclub-set scene from the movie *Tron Legacy*, in which the band Daft Punk perform, and adds: 'It was going to be like the club in that. It was really different.' Four Resolution 1.5 speakers provide coverage for the science fiction-like area.

Finally, leading out to Ellui's main entrance is a long corridor with eight wall-mounted F55 speakers. 'They are so as people come in the music is already building,' Mr Son explains.

The primary Funktion

Funktion One has become such a

well-used brand in nightclubs around the world that it has almost become unsurprising to find it in new venues, even to the extent with which it has been used in Ellui. However, at the beginning of the design process for the super-club, Mr Son was by no means settled on the brand.

'I was looking for new brands,' he asserts. 'From the beginning I was looking at five or six speaker manufacturers. Everyone told me that it had to be Funktion One but I was wondering about others. I worked with other systems in Australia both in studios and outdoors.'

'But I did a listening test with Funktion One. Soundus put on a showcase for the club and I just loved it. I decided then that it was the right one. Funktion One was the answer.' The commitment that the club has shown to the UK-based brand is made obvious by a brief visit to its compact rack-room, in which a total of 37 MC<sup>2</sup> amps – a mixture of E15, E25, E45 and MC1250 models – have been squeezed into the racks. Alongside them are Funktion One XO-4A processors.

The installed systems are also an indication of the degree to which Mr Son and his team at Ellui have collaborated with Soundus to make the nightclub a reality.

'Once we decided on the brand we had to work together to build something new,' Mr Son explains. 'We had communication all the time – always brainstorming. Soundus was

really good to me because they knew that we had to brainstorm together so maybe twice a week we did that to try to build a better quality system.'

The conversations between the two teams extended far further than simple system design – Soundus even helped Ellui to achieve an improved interior acoustic by convincing Mr Son to alter a fundamental part of his original vision for the venue.

At first, much of the club's décor was to be made up of glass.

Mr Kang laughs as he remembers the conversations that were caused as a result. 'At the design stage we visited Funktion One and talked about how we could make the club sound good when it was all surrounded by glass, and Tony Andrews said "Oh, that's impossible". The glass was supposed to be curved, not flat. We were very pleased that Ellui accepted our advice and changed the interior.'

Nor is Mr Son disappointed to have seen his early idea swapped for something more acoustically effective. 'Removing the glass – of course that's better,' he agrees, adding that since the club's opening Soundus has continued to improve the installation. 'Every week they come down and tweak it a little bit – now I think it's perfect. Soundus is working 100 per cent.'

As, it seems, is Club Ellui itself. The remarkable tale of how the biggest club in Korea came to be created is only the beginning of this venue's story – its future lies in the thousands of party-goers who pass through its doors every night, and their enthusiasm for what it represents. 'The club scene in Korea has only been going for 10 years,' Mr Son declares. 'People deserve to have this venue.'

[www.ellui.net](http://www.ellui.net)  
[www.funktion-one.com](http://www.funktion-one.com)