

Lake of Stars 2011
Malawi

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LAKE OF STARS

FESTIVAL-GOERS WOULD BE HARD PUSHED TO FIND A LOCATION TO BEAT THE IDYLIC AFRICAN SETTING OF LAKE OF STARS HELD IN MANGOCHI, MALAWI. A COMBINATION OF CULTURE, ADVENTURE AND A DIVERSE LINE-UP HAS PROPELLED THE MUSIC-LOVERS PARADISE TO BECOME ONE OF THE CONTINENT'S MAJOR ANNUAL MUSIC EVENTS, AND A TRUE HIGHLIGHT IN THE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL CALENDAR. ONCE MORE, LAKE OF STARS WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS, ENTHUSIASTIC LOCALS AND SOME KEY BRITISH AV COMPANIES WHO WERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO DEBUT THE BRAND NEW MIDAS PRO2C CONSOLE.

In the eight years since the three-day event was established by Will Jameson - who had previously worked as a volunteer in Malawi - the goal of encouraging people from all over the globe to visit the area has been achieved. Last year, more than 100 people from the local area were also employed at the event and \$1,000,000 of local spend was generated, of which around a third was in foreign currency.

Having been established from a desire to raise money for Malawi's developing economy, the ethos behind the award-winning international arts festival is rather unique. Giving back to the local people is a priority for the dedicated team behind the event, so it comes as no surprise that almost all of the staff are volunteers from around the world.

When Jameson first encountered Malawi in

1998, he was a gap year student volunteering for the Wildlife Society. Jameson became so enamoured with the country, that upon returning to the UK - as a student at Liverpool John Moores University - he soon created a student club night named after a Malawian beer, Chibuku.

Said Jameson: "I always wanted to do something positive for Malawi - something that would attract people to visit the country. Taking inspiration from events such as Glasto and Live Aid, I came up with the concept of an arts-tourism festival in Malawi with local and international artists performing. The first LOS event took place in 2004."

As Lake of Stars' Founder and Director, Jameson is continually trying to better the African event seven years on. "What inspires me about the project is the way it combines

the arts and travel to generate economic growth for Malawi," continued Jameson. "The idea of creating an event that attracts foreign tourists and positive media attention is part of it all. From a consumer's point of view, you get an adventure, experience new music and art in a stunning location and help a developing economy by spending Forex as you travel around. It's about the arts, travel and development working together."

Perhaps part of Lake of Stars' appeal is its volunteering opportunities, not only on site as with many festival programmes, but with pro audio and lighting aspects too. Jameson elaborated: "We had over 80 volunteers from Malawi and the UK work on the 2011 event. Many of our core volunteers are from the UK events industry, working for such companies as Vespasian Security, Live Nation, RPM,

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Opposite: Lake of Stars' unique appeal makes people travel from all over the globe to be part of the event. Below: Bands from 12 countries played at Lake of Stars 2011 including Foals, making this year's line-up the most diverse to date; Production Manager Edwina FitzPatrick.



LoudSound, BBC, Exposure, Audile, KOKO and Funktion One."

A star attraction for Jameson this year was the live debut of the Midas PRO2C mixing console. "Midas partnered with us this year, which is amazing. They provided a brand new PRO2C console for our Main Stage that worked like a dream. It kept the headline acts more than happy and the sound was perfect. The Funktion One systems we use are always great to hear too... apparently fishermen far out on the lake can hear the bands performing! And backline from STS Touring was brilliant, as were the lighting rigs provided by Audile."

Ordering, transporting and sending volunteers from the UK may at first seem like a mammoth task, but it's a task which the British industry pros are enthusiastically dedicated to. "Overall I think what really stood out was our volunteer AV crew who worked tirelessly in the tropical heat for five days," Jameson highlighted.

"Leme and Castro, our Malawian engineers and Jack from Funktion One, Kristina and

Eduardo from KOKO in Camden and Craig and Matt from Audile not only ran the stages seamlessly, but unloaded and packed up six tonnes of equipment that DHL transported. We could not do the event without their support."

A WORLD APART

A record number attended this year's festival, with 3,800 people travelling to Lake Malawi's palm-fringed shores to see UK artists such as Beverley Knight and Foals PLUS the cream of Malawian acts including Black Missionaries and Lucius Banda. With a total of 80 bands from 12 countries, this year's line-up was the most diverse yet and helped strengthen the festival's reputation as a global event.

"The attendance has been steadily increasing since it started, but over the last three years the figures have increased substantially," said Production Manager Edwina 'Eddie' FitzPatrick, who first fell in love with the country and the event when she attended the festival back in 2005. "I went back in 2006 to live and teach in Malawi and whilst I was there, I went to the

festival again. When I moved to London, I got in touch with Will, telling him I worked in events and would like to get involved."

Pre-event, a large proportion of FitzPatrick's role is interviewing, assigning roles and briefing all volunteers, which reached almost 160 this year. "As volunteers - some of whom don't have event experience - many of them won't get involved in the logistical preparation necessary for their positions so that falls into my remit," said FitzPatrick, who currently freelances at a variety of events.

Site design and helping monitor the build, security preparation, liaising with local agencies such as representatives from the police, Government, village and venue are among the many responsibilities of FitzPatrick and the other Production Managers, Tom Branston and Anna Cox.

Explained FitzPatrick: "I also manage how staff from all sources will come together, be fed and housed, briefed, meet each other, settle in and have everything they might need in time to deliver the event as a unified Lake of Stars team.

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Below: Many companies provided audio visual equipment for free to help raise money for the local economy; Lake of Stars' FOH Engineer Craig Williams and Malawian Engineer Vinos Kaziputa set up the Midas PRO2C.



"A special mention must be made for our Festival Control Manager, Rosie Ponting, who leads a fantastic 24-hour control centre team. In the lead-up to the event, however, it's mainly the two Festival Directors, Will Jameson and Tom Porter."

According to FitzPatrick, the event is a world apart from other festivals on multiple levels, but essentially all differences in the delivery are for the same reason: "Many resources that you would usually rely on just don't exist. Fencing, cable ties, buggies, easily accessible diesel, printer ink, local event-experienced staff, admin systems, phone network, constant electricity - the list goes on!"

"It really challenges you to think around problems and new systems of delivery. This can put more pressure on the team, but accordingly as the pressure increases, the team works harder as a unit and there's such a great team spirit on the event, with the same people wanting to come back year after year bringing more friends from the industry."

A MORE RELAXED APPROACH

Coordinating and organising the stage production, before and during the event was KOKO's in-house Production Manager Kristina Riddington. Typically found helping sound checks run smoothly in Camden, Riddington worked closely with the technical team on the Main Stage as well as the festival production managers at the Beach Stage and Star Bar.

Said Riddington: "All of them are wonderfully skilled, funny people to be around, who make my job much easier!" Having worked with both Jameson and Audile in the past, the addition of Riddington to the LOS crew was a natural step.

"It's a massive eye opener, being here. I've taken away a more relaxed approach to life,

new friends and some amazing music," said Riddington. As previously praised by Jameson, one of the biggest challenges the volunteers had to cope with wasn't technical at all, but rather, the extreme environment in which they endured to get the festival running smoothly.

Riddington continued: "I find working long hours in the heat with malaria medication running through your system makes everything a little more challenging, but it's totally worth it to be in those beautiful surroundings. We always try and anticipate any issues that may come up, for example, fire dancers on a wooden stage, but the unique environment means there are always surprises, which keeps it interesting."

"It's refreshing to have to make do and think imaginatively to fix things when we don't have access to all the services we're used to back home. I was blown away by the generosity of all the companies who lent us professional quality equipment."

"The Midas PRO2C performed beautifully and made it possible for us to meet the specifications of some of our more complicated band set-ups, the PA sounded fantastic and I had bands and audience alike praising the quality of the sound both onstage and out front, and it looked brilliant due to [LD] Matt's creations."

PREMIERING THE PRO2C

To fit in with the volunteer-orientated theme of Lake of Stars, the whole audio and visual set-up was provided for free this year by UK companies including Audile, Funktion One and Midas. All equipment had to stand up to the challenge of coping with extreme temperatures of up to 42° and excessive sand and grit.

At FOH, the new Midas PRO2C live audio system was put to the test at its first live event by Craig Williams, FOH Engineer, who used it to mix a host of international acts. Williams singled out the daylight visible screen as one of his favourite features of the desk: "Even in the midday african sunshine I could clearly see the screen, something that not a single other digital

"There's such a great team spirit at the event, with the same people wanting to come back year after year bringing more friends from the industry."

desk can boast."

After just 30 minutes Williams felt confident using the PRO2C and benefitted from the MCA groups, which made mix navigation easier on the small footprint console. The colour coding system for selected channels in the VCAs was also invaluable when using such a small desk in a festival situation. The tiny footprint and low weight was much-needed for a festival like Lake of Stars and with no outboard rack requirements, production were able to save a large amount in shipping costs to Africa.

Williams was not the only fan of the PRO2C at the festival - Foals' touring engineer, Paul

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Below: FOH Engineer Craig Williams was impressed by the Midas PRO2C, which was being used at its first live event; the wooden stage featured some of the audio kit shipped from the UK.



Fyfe, was impressed by the desk and was considering purchasing one himself. "What I really like most about it, is the way it sounds," said Williams. "It doesn't sound cheap and grainy like many other digi desks, and the depth of field is beautiful. I also had multiple camera feeds and audio recordings to deal with, so the matrix system was used a lot. The desk performed without a glitch for the whole three days in high temperatures for prolonged periods of time, better than can be said for my body!"

A FASCINATING EXPERIENCE

The PRO2C console also doubled up as a monitor mixing desk for Eduardo Puhl, who has worked as a monitor engineer at the festival for the past two years. "In 2010, one of the engineers couldn't go due to personal matters, and Stage Manager Kristina Riddington, who I work with at London venue KOKO, passed my credentials to the organisers of LOS and they welcomed me in almost at the last minute. I was invited back for 2011," said Puhl.

All of the kit was brought over from the UK and, as Puhl pointed out, he had to compromise on a few things. "The festival is a package of new experiences: It's bare ground, an empty beach and then they build a wooden stage, the truck arrives and what's in there from the kind loans of Audile, Funktion One, STS Touring, Studiocare and Midas, (limited by cargo weight), is what we get to work with," explained Puhl, who has worked as a monitor engineer at KOKO for the past four years.

"It's a country challenged by socioeconomic difficulties so one should not demand or expect to have everything the way we might have it

over here. It's almost going back to the basics, you've got to remember that you're doing it for the music, for the culture and for people's integration and enjoyment."

For FOH and monitor mixes, the engineers frequently worked on the fly because they rarely received tech specs from Malawian artists. The exceptions were Foals, Freshly Ground and Beverley Knight, who sound checked.

On stage, there were seven wedge mixes - three across the front, one upstage right, one upstage left, one on the drums and a floating mix that was used for the DJs. Said Puhl: "We chose seven mixes because that was the biggest count of wedges requested by a band and it also gave us flexibility onstage for quick changeovers with minimal re-patching."

Working in such a different environment to the one he is familiar with was a fascinating experience for Puhl: "We are all professionals volunteering at LOS and we constantly have to adapt to the challenges and unforeseen events which is, to me, what makes the festival so special. This meant that the crew did not have a mixing desk for monitors, with everything being done from FOH using Midas new PRO2C."

Lake of Stars 2011 was the third successive year that Funktion One has supported the festival with equipment and personnel. Following in the footsteps of Tony and Ann Andrews (two years ago) and David Bruml (2010), the long trip to the heart of Africa was this year taken by Funktion One's Jack Newsham who joined the sound crew stalwarts Craig Williams, Eduardo Puhl and Stage Manager Kristina Riddington along with regular Audile freelancer, Matthew Poole on lighting,

The main stage system comprised five Funktion One Resolution 5 high-intensity point source loudspeakers above two F221 dual 21-inch bass enclosures per side. The whole FOH system was powered and controlled from a single 12U amplifier rack comprising an XTA crossover and four 2-channel MC2 amplifiers (an E90 and three E45's).

For the return journey to Africa, keeping the size and weight of the system to a minimum was critically important to the production budget. The Funktion One system not only proved ideal for the logistical restrictions but also delivered high quality sound.

With 2012 creating a successful hat trick for the company, Funktion One were also pleased to supply stage monitoring in the form of five award-winning PSM12's and two RM18 point source monitors to give performers high accuracy stage sound.

A new Midas PRO2C mixing console was chosen for main stage for its combination of sound quality, functionality and weight. Williams (FOH) commented: "The PRO2C was great, it had all the guts of an XL3 or Heritage but in a tiny package," and on the monitoring Williams continued, "the African artists really noticed the difference in monitoring quality this year - it made all the difference; I'm very happy with what we all achieved."

Two other areas of the festival also benefitted from Funktion One sound. The Beach Stage, with its wide variety of live artists and DJs, simply used a pair of Resolution 3 enclosures to provide full-range FOH sound with a pair of RM12P Funktion One monitors on-stage. As with the Main Stage system,

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Below: Mangochi in Malawi provided a heavenly setting for the award-winning international arts festival; the dedicated and enthusiastic team of volunteers at the heart of the three-day event.



a high-quality signal path was realised with a Midas Venice for the live acts, a Formula Sound FF6000 was used by DJs with XTA control and MC2 amplification powering the Resolution loudspeakers. A third area known as the Star Bar enjoyed a pair of self-powered F1 Resolution 2 loudspeakers for DJ sets throughout the festival.

Upon return from his first trip to Africa, Funktion One's Newsham commented: "It was a pleasure and a privilege to work on Lake of Stars as part of such a dedicated and enthusiastic team of people. The atmosphere out there was one of professionalism and great spirit, which never faltered, I am truly proud to have been a part of such a tremendous wave of initiative, innovation and teamwork."

Audile's Paul 'Stev' Stevard has known Jameson since his days as a sound engineer at the Liverpool Barfly when the Chibuku Shake Shake club night was in full swing.

Stev's involvement with the event has helped shape its audio spec into what it is today. "I first went out to the festival in 2008 when things were a lot smaller - Audile provided mics and desks but we used local PA. After my involvement in 2008, I put Will Jameson in touch with Funktion One, both of us persuading them to bring out a system in 2009."

Their plea to the Funktion One owners paid off. "I went out in 2009 with Tony and Ann Andrews [Funktion One] to run the show, since 2010 Craig Williams has run the actual show - I just help with organisation from the UK. This year I organised the audio equipment that Audile sent out to the festival and coordinated with Funktion One to make sure all necessary

kit / cables went to LOS and that all carnets were present and correct."

"Audile have been a part of the event from the start, and are a key reason for the festival's success. Due to Will's existing working relationship with them back when he was a promoter, they were approached for the first year, and have continued to provide nothing but a brilliant service," said FitzPatrick.

"Funktion One was part of our dream to bring the best equipment to a country (and a region) which has incredibly poor audio equipment, and do the talent we have justice. In keeping with us trying to continually improve our systems, Midas came on board this year to bring a new desk for our Main Stage," said FitzPatrick.

festival-goers also brings a large number of local traders to sell food and other goods to the site. "Initially, this could raise security issues - especially with our bamboo fences - but our G4S security team are managed impeccably by representatives from Vespasian Security, who've worked on Lake of Stars for three years now and are fantastic," said FitzPatrick.

As well as the challenges presented by the large size and openness of the site, the secondary issues that have been raised were of food safety and hygiene, fire safety - as the structures are straw and sticks - and ensuring local traders are not pushed out by those from the larger, surrounding cities. Explained FitzPatrick: "This area is a key part of the festival's economic footprint in terms of input to the local

"You've got to remember that you're doing it for the music, for the culture and for people's integration and enjoyment."

STAR OF THE SCENE

In 2011, the traffic management system and certain access routes were adapted, but otherwise the focus was on beautifying the site more. "This was especially true in our Festival Village, where we drew all the vendor sites closer towards the stage and created a more intimate feel in the space," explained FitzPatrick.

As part of the festival organisers' understanding with the local Chipoka Village, the villagers have access through the car park to gain access to the lake, which inevitably means the area is open to all. This access to

economy, so each year we work with the Chief, representatives from the village and the traders to keep the area safe and fair."

Jameson and co are still in the early planning stages for 2012's Lake of Stars, but will be exploring ways in which to share well-crafted skills and experience from the British AV networks with more Malawian locals to generate knowledge in various areas of live event production.

TPI

www.lakeofstars.org
Photos by David Harrison