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Jump-starting the
festival season

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Summer's LEADING EDGE

»»»» Napa Valley's BottleRock Festival jump-starts the season.
»»»» by Gregory A. DeTogne, Photos By Steve Jennings



George Edwards (left) of Delicate Productions with company president Jason Alt on the BottleRock grounds.

Having successfully brought its third season effort to a close, BottleRock Festival (Napa, CA) flexed its muscles and showed its mettle, having shaken off financial adversity, dodged various other obstacles, and jumped through hoops to land on its feet with one of the country's biggest Memorial Day launches of the summer festival season.

More than 100,000 served as witness to the 70-plus acts crossing its stages at the downtown Napa Valley Expo Center, including the likes of Imagine Dragons, Public Enemy, local favorite Michael Franti, Los Lobos, No Doubt, Robert Plant, Snoop Dog, and Passion Pit. Sound, lighting, and video was provided by Delicate Productions, which has served the event since its beginning.

To accommodate the sheer size of the festival, Delicate drew upon the skills of 52 techs, three runners, a project manager, individual department heads for sound, video, and lighting, and the project's account manager, industry veteran George Edwards.

Proper Place, Right Time

"One of the biggest challenges at BottleRock was focusing the arrays," concedes Edwards, who additionally wears the title of general manager at Delicate's Bay Area facility in Hayward, CA. "Working with production to coordinate all of the performances was the second most difficult task. With three sizable stages and a steady stream of acts going day and night, it was a 12-month undertaking to make sure everything was in its proper place at the right time."

In the past, BottleRock has been the target of local noise complaints. Sensitive





The Miner Family Winery Stage at BottleRock, with VUE Audiotechnik line arrays flanking the stage and Avid VENUE and DiGiCo SD9 consoles at front of house.

to the issue and seeking to maintain good community relations, administrators have taken over-and-above measures to both keep sound inside the park and monitor levels. Presiding over the monitoring efforts was High-Tech Audio's Sidney Wilson.

Using a B&K system operating over cell towers and test stations set up across the grounds and its perimeter, Wilson recorded levels, integrating Google Maps to detail temperature, humidity, barometric pressure, wind speeds and more at every test position. Data collected was stored and can be recalled to produce a forensic report designed to stand up as testimony in any court.

Bringing tight focus to the arrays to avoid spill into surrounding areas was a carefully calculated plan integrating the multiple line arrays present into a separate, but unified whole. If that sounds like a contradiction in terms, well it is, but Edwards is quick to explain: "Each rig had to cover its area of coverage, and contain its sound within those boundaries," he says. "At the same time, it couldn't be considered an island unto itself, we had to take the collective whole of all the systems into account and steer each away from interacting with any other. Achieving anything other than that results in a condition I call audio collision."

Tried & True Plus New

Delicate has had very good results achieving goals like these in seasons past using Martin Audio's multi-cellular MLA loudspeaker arrays, and that continued (see sidebar). This year, al-Class line arrays from VUE Audiotechnik were added to the equipment manifest as well, deployed at the Miner Family Winery Stage. "The VUE rig worked out," Edwards reports. "The moment we had it trimmed, it became instant buddies with everybody else – muy simpatico."

A relative newcomer on the scene, VUE technology is developed under the engineering aegis of Mike Adams, who co-founded Audio Composite

Engineering (ACE) and played key roles in the creation of JBL VerTec and QSC WideLine components. Representing the company's first real exposure on the national festival circuit, BottleRock's Miner Family Winery Stage received an al-8 hang running 10 high over four al-4 cabinets for its mains.

"The al-8s are double-8-inch-loaded boxes, and most people are used to seeing double-12s in these kinds of applications," notes Jeff Taylor of VUE. "We're not saying there's any replacement for displacement necessarily, but this system was custom-engineered to deliver the best performance in as compact of a package as possible."

In addition, the compression drivers in these loudspeakers use proprietary beryllium diaphragms, bringing that material to professional applications. The loudspeakers are integrated with matched power and 64-bit DSP that also now offer Dante networking.

At the Winery Stage, the gear broke down further like this: al-4 cabinets deployed in mono arrays for front fill



A closer look at the main system loudspeaker set, incorporating VUE arrays and subwoofers, at the Miner Family Winery Stage.



Los Lobos in concert, served by VUE wedges on stage with front fills on the flip side.

and under hangs, four h-12N stereo side fills, four powered, wide-throw h-12W enclosures on a yoke system serving the VIP punter section running on a matrix from front of house, and a half-dozen hs-25 subs lined up in front of the stage. Wedges onstage were hm-212 models.

Working from an Avid VENUE Profile console, Delicate's Sebastian Poux was the house mixer for the stage, stage and monitor tech was Jake Gowalsky. A DiGiCo SD9 console was supplied at FOH for guest mix engineers. Monitorworld events were orchestrated by the capable hands of Lindsay Smith, who had a Yamaha PM5D-RH console at her disposal.

Turn & Burn

Edwards reports that the SystemVUE network control and monitoring package interfaced neatly with Delicate's own Lake primary front end. "The network package handled crossover points, everything you'd expect," he says. "When guest engineers arrived, we'd hand them a tablet with a flat curve and let them build what they wanted.

"When you're dealing with eight bands per day on a single stage, you don't want to have to give them an education, you just want to turn and burn," he continues. "We had all kinds of engineers pass through over the course of the festival. Sixty-year-old veterans would just hand us a thumb drive and say 'here's my starting point, you tweak the rig for me,' and then we'd have young guys who want to play with everything. Everyone on the planet has used a Lake, so it was seamless from one act to the next."

Audio power for the stage arrived in the form of VUE V6 (house) and V4 (monitors) amp rack engines. The V6s deliver stereo triamplification, while the V4s offer stereo biamplification. Input was all Delicate-supplied, with the bulk of the microphones being hardwired. Only four channels of Shure wireless were kept at hand, while the rest of the input list read like a typical stage pack with e609 and other Sennheiser offerings for guitars and horns, and Shure SM57s, BETA 98s and 52s for drums.

Rolling risers facilitated the fast-

paced tempo of the shows. With sets going from 40 minutes to an hour and getting longer as the headlining acts approached, acts were turned-over in 20 minutes with the help of four local union stagehands. Jeremy French was the stage manager for the rolling parts of the stage ("the El Jefe of all moves" in Edwards' words), most of the acts were sound checked and had their settings stored into the desk, but as can be expected, travel times and delays prohibited others from affording this luxury.

"This system did everything we expected it to do and then some," Edwards says. "You can always take this stuff and set it up back in your warehouse, throw some compressed playback through it like everyone's old Steely Dan CDs or some MP3s we've all been using for 100 years, and you'll only hear so much. There is no substitute for taking something out and putting it in front of an endless stream of bands for three days and seeing what it does.

"We saw a lot of talented engineers put this rig through its paces at BottleRock, including our own Sebastian Poux. The results made everyone happy. No matter how long you've been doing this, every year you learn more and get a little better. That's how life is supposed to work, right?"



Jeff Taylor (left) of VUE with Sebastian Poux of Delicate at front of house.

DELICATE PRODUCTIONS also utilized Martin Audio MLA and W8LC systems for the main (Intel) and second (JamCellars) stages respectively at this year's iteration of the BottleRock Festival. The main stage system included 16 MLA enclosures joined by two MLD enclosures per side for the main hangs.



These were accompanied by 24 MLX subwoofers, 12 W8LM cabinets for front fill and 8 W8LCs for the off-stage VIP hang. Sixteen MLA Compact enclosures were deployed as delays.

The real-time monitoring by High-Tech Audio, combined with

the steering control afforded by MLA, enables meeting the town's strict noise ordinance. On property at front of house, it's 105 dB C-weighted, and beyond the festival ground it's 65 dB C-weighted.

"The use of MLA, particularly on the main stage, which is less than 200 feet to the nearest house, has been incredibly helpful," Delicate Productions president Jason Alt states. "We do a broadside array for the main stage and steer the subs almost 90 degrees away from that side of the property because of the control Display gives you and the efficiency of the MLX.

"So you still literally get subwoofer in front of the barricade, but what is aiming at that house is almost a 30 dB drop-off because of the way it's steered. And we have full coverage including subs to the edge of the property because of what we can do with MLA. That's a big part of it."

Interesting Times

Between its two offices (its sister location is south in Camarillo, CA), Delicate Productions does some 1,000 shows per year. Since the cratering of the economy during the Great Recession, Edwards notes that festivals as a whole haven't been all that profitable until recently, especially with events like BottleRock that incorporate a full sound, lighting, and video package. Delicate trucked in 720,000 pounds of gear for BottleRock and spread it over three stages. Nine semis were used, making his shrug-of-the-shoulders assessment that it "was a lot of gear" a modest understatement at best.

As for the rest of its summer plans,

the company is currently out with the Foo Fighters on their North American tour, with other gigs including Earth, Wind & Fire, Chicago, and the Killers.

"We like to keep things diverse," Edwards adds on a parting note. "Festivals, tours, auctions, corporate events, they all make life interesting. It's going to be a great year. I think we're back to where we were in about 2006, finally. Anyone who weathered the storm is doing OK. The 'take the loot and scoot' companies are gone, and I think everyone is better off for it." ■

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