Martin Audio MLA again bowls over South Facing audiences

Following the success of the inaugural South Facing Festival at the Crystal Palace Bowl last year, Festival Director, Marcus Weedon, requested the same formula for this year's 10-day event. And that included Martin Audio's ground-breaking MLA loudspeaker array, supplied once again by Capital Sound (part of the Solotech UK group).

This perfectly served the requirements of a top-class bill, including London Grammar, Bombay Bicycle Club, Jungle, Becky Hill and Richard Ashcroft. Two other key developments helped boost the quality of the sound, as Solotech Project Manager David Preston - who was working alongside production manager, Julia Bruns, and site/production specialists, LS Events - explained. Driven by the excellent feedback, and absence of complaints from neighbours last year, he noted that levels within the bowl were raised from an SPL of 96dB(A) to 98dB(A) for this year, while the tech team still managed to stay within offsite thresholds.

The second advantage for Solotech was the extended space on the floating platform which housed the stage. Last year a lack of space at the front precluded mounting a broadside MLX cardioid subwoofer array across the front.

But with no such problems this year, 10 MLX subs were arced across the front of stage, with MLA Compact enclosures deployed as frontfills. David Preston explained: "Having the extra couple of metres along the front of the pontoon meant that we were able to get to a broadside cardioid array and provide more even sub coverage across the venue, and this also gave us greater control in the lower frequencies.

"The event is in a natural amphitheatre which seems to really help us with the audio coverage; the clarity at the back was similar to that at the front - which was great. As for MLA Compact, these provided a more robust option for front fills and could throw effortlessly across the nearby pond to hit the front of the audience."

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Preston led a Solotech team comprising Rayne Ramsden (System/FOH Tech), Isabella Di Biaise (Monitor Engineer), Harry Garcia and Diego Ternivasio (Stage Techs). Ramsden programmed the DISPLAY software so that the sound tapered off at the site perimeter, thereby ensuring minimum bleed and maximum containment.

Once again, MLA was a hit with visiting sound engineers, among them Richard Ashcroft's sound engineer, Al Davies. He has been using the PA since shortly after its launch over a decade ago, when with girl group Neon Jungle he said it was the best sound he had ever heard in Brixton Academy.

At Crystal Palace, despite the mix position being off axis he said the sound was balanced, the coverage even throughout, and the rear rejection impressive, with no backstage bleed. The subs also sounded great and non-granular. "Some have a tendency to sound 'notey', but the bottom end was balanced beautifully." He added, "Richard likes to be loud, so I was mixing at 97.5dB, almost up to the threshold, without ever struggling. He was really impressed and congratulated me afterwards."

In conclusion, David Preston stated that Crystal Palace is now becoming one of the favourite festival sites he looks after during the summer calendar. "It's a great space for concerts," he said. "Working with Julia and the LS Events team is always a pleasure, and I look forward to 2023.

"Martin Audio's MLA proved yet again that - noise control wise - it can do things that no other box on the market is capable of. For suburban festivals, with tricky noise limits set by local councils, that's the important factor, to ensure the license for the festival can be granted again for the following year."

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