Martin Audio PA used at Hyde Park

Pictures: Jessica Gilbert

When a formula is deemed to have reached perfection - as is now the case with the technical infrastructure at BST Hyde Park - never assume that it can’t be nuanced, or that an extra bit of power cannot be wrung out of the PA. Martin Audio and Solotech UK (formerly as Capital Sound) have been permanent incumbents since AEG Presents took over the Hyde Park lease in 2013, and Martin Audio PAs feature site wide. But this year Solotech were represented by a different system engineer in Rayne Ramsden. And while he was working to the same offsite sound level thresholds (75dBA) as set out by acoustic consultants Vanguardia, he was nevertheless able to squeeze out a couple of extra dB at FOH, giving them a potential of 101dB(A) without breaching offsite limits.

“Rather than simply cut and paste from last year I suggested tilting the delay PAs a degree or two to gain a bit more coverage and an extra 1-2dB out in the field - knowing I could use the ‘Hard Avoid’ [feature in the control software] to shave it off if necessary. Those extra degrees on the top angle gave us an extra 10 metres coverage. As with last year, independent sound consultant (and former Martin Audio R&D director) Jason Baird was present at set up for the propagation tests on the main Great Oak Stage where the complement of speakers was identical to last year. Solotech UK fielded 19 MLA (plus a single MLD Downfill) on each wing, and a 15-box MLA hang (plus a single MLD Downfill) flanking outwards on each side.

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There were 11 delay positions, populated by 35 x MLA and five MLD; 40 x WPL (in hangs of seven and eight); 12 x SXHF 218 subs and 16 x WPC (in two hangs of eight) set down the field. One important change this year was how the requirement for different stage thrusts on riders determined how the subwoofers could be configured. As Rayne Ramsden explained, “Instead of being a full castellated array, where we would start with a double stack, we put two single [boxes] in the middle so that a thrust could be run over the top of the subs - and therefore didn’t have to remove any. “We put a 400mm gap between the two central subs so that by the time you get to your first cardioid stack the distance between is 2.4m - so you can run a thrust through those speakers without having to change the cardioid every time.”

On top of that each thrust had its own unique design: Kylie Minogue’s was a simple run out, whereas Robbie Williams’ thrust included an extra 100mm on each side for lighting. “So for Robbie we put in a whole bunch of [Martin Audio] DD12 around the thrust that tied into the system,” explained Ramsden. “Over the course of the three weekends there would have been at least eight different thrusts - including a ramped thrust over the two middle subs and another with steps that needed to be ground bolted for the steps to stand on - and that also ran over the subs. We had to remove two of the centre subs for Kylie entirely, because she wanted to run underneath the thrust and come out at the end… but none of this changed the array [parameters] at all.”

Every visiting engineer that came through was “incredibly complimentary” about the PA, reports the system tech. “They gave resounding reviews about how impactful the PA was. Most are now familiar with MLA, but emphasised how really well it was sounding - which was remarkable for a PA that’s over 10 years old. Running at 96k, I couldn’t have been happier.”

Elsewhere, Solotech UK put the ‘Hard Avoid’ function in the proprietary DISPLAY2 software to good effect on the second (Rainbow) stage. As account manager David Preston explained, “We really needed to contain the audio this year because the British Airways sponsorship stand was positioned opposite the Rainbow stage, and midweek they had a couple of private events, involving a DJ and a function band. This meant we had to minimise the audio clash with the Rainbow stage; by bringing in Hard Avoid to 30 metres it meant we were no longer disturbing the BA stage 70 metres away.”

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Another stage enhancement was at the popular Cuban Garage Stage where a pair of additional Martin Audio TORUS T1230 were added as outfills. Explaining the reason, Preston said, “We noticed last year that more people were standing round the sides because it’s quite an open area; and with the site opened up, a pair of additional TORUS on pole-mounts worked really nicely."

Concluded production manager, Mark Ward (of Proper Productions), “Once again the team at Solotech made the very best of the system on Great Oak Stage - ringing every last bit of volume and musicality from the system with artists ranging from orchestras to rock bands. “[Martin Audio’s] 'Hard Avoid' control feature helped us drive the system hard without giving us problems off site.”

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