Martin Audio WPL for Utilita Arena



One of the most unlikely gigs Birmingham’s Utilita Arena (The NIA) has ever hosted - and certainly one of the loudest deployments of a Martin Audio line array in the company’s history - was the recent charity concert, dubbed ‘1000 Lights’. Organised by local promoter and studio owner, Jack Davis, 1000 musicians came together, divided into five categories, to honour the life of Linkin Park’s Chester Bennington, whose final gig had been in Birmingham prior to his suicide in 2017.

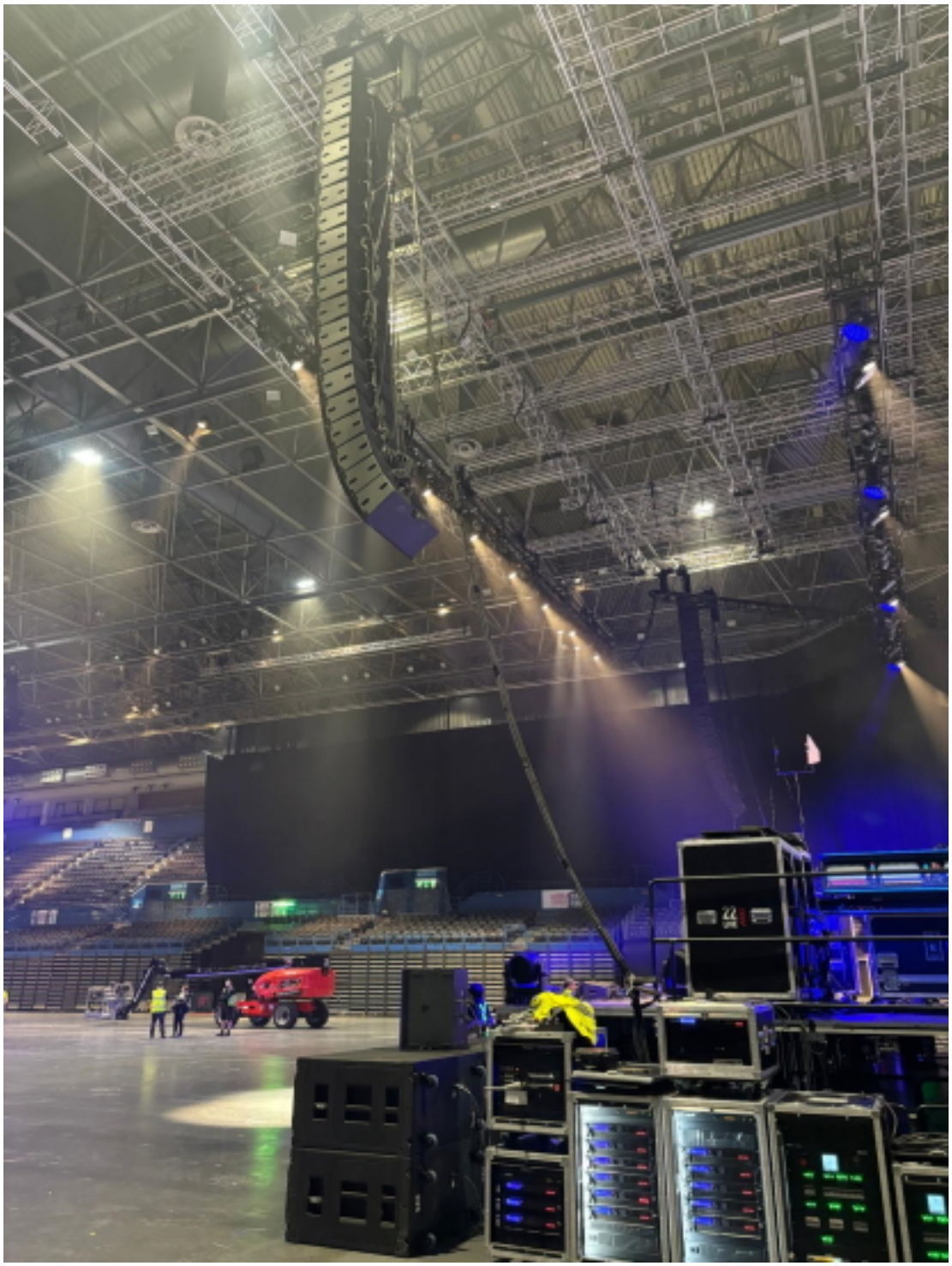
By setting up the Uprawr Mental Health Foundation his aim was to bring people together as part of a large-scale event. Thanks to the volunteers, and willing support from service providers - including Martin Audio partners 22live - he did just that, raising £135,000 for the Foundation, offering free mental health counselling (the musicians themselves paying for the privilege of participating).

Among the high-profile musicians who wanted to support the event and be a part of the co-opted band, were members of Creeper, Mallory Knox and Bullet for My Valentine, with the centrepiece being the excellent Linkin Park Experience Tribute

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Band. 22live managing director Spencer Beard had fielded the speculative phone call from Jack Davis late last year, setting out the original proposition for the show. “Although the whole idea sounded completely insane, I was intrigued and up for the challenge,” he recalled. The NIA were already onside with the idea, and Spencer helped round up other tech suppliers - DMX Productions for the video, cameras and lighting - and Fly By Nite for the trucking, while ensuring the show would take place on a day when they would have sufficient front-line inventory to support a gig that in view of its scale, was predestined to be LOUD.

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“Although events like this have taken place in the past, it’s never been indoors or with so many musicians,” rationalised the 22live MD. As the idea gathered momentum the initial projection of an 800-seat sale later required the release of many more - in fact just under 4,000 people eventually swarmed to the venue. From a technical perspective, an early concern had been that the plan was constantly evolving, and Spencer worked closely with the NIA’s event teams as the show gathered momentum. Once Adrian Basketfield had been appointed production

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manager, the event quickly began to take shape, and Jack knew he had an event. Miles Barton handled the FOH mix and record feed, while Ryan Bass was system tech and Chris Wilcock monitor engineer and crew chief.

With a vast fixed channel count at the DiGiCo Q338 FOH console, spot mics on the floor and some ambient seating mics in position, 22live detailed equally generous hangs of 20 Martin Audio large format flagship WPL on each side, upping the original count from 16, and deploying them both as the PA for the audience and the monitor system for the musicians on the arena floor. “We knew that the extra boxes would only improve the coverage and levels,” Spencer continued. “But we also knew that due to space we couldn’t do a traditional sub array, so we stacked six SXHF218 subs per side. I can honestly say it was the loudest gig I’d ever been to.” Ryan Bass optimised the sound to the back of the room, avoiding any blow back on stage, and bounce off the roof, with assiduous use of the ‘Hard Avoid’ feature in the DISPLAY software.

A further 16 Martin Audio XE500 wedge monitors provided artist reference sound; a pair each of TORUS T1215 and T1230 a side ensured balanced outfill sound while eight of the smaller footprint Martin Audio WPS provided front fill. The entire rig was powered from Martin Audio iK42 amps, and the event was recorded for YouTube and social platforms.

Chris Wilcock recalled, “When Spencer asked me to work on this gig it did raise an eyebrow. But to be asked to mix monitors and crew chief the show was a challenge I couldn’t turn down. I knew the monitor mix provided to the six drummers and 30 other musicians on stage were critical to the performance. Along with IEM mixes and 16 wedge mixes - plus the backline - the stage was loud! The XE500s delivered enough power and quality to get above the stage levels, and give everyone what they wanted in the mix.” Spencer Beard added in summary, “No-one had any idea what it was going to sound like … but the whole thing blew my mind. WPL performed better than anyone could have expected, and the coverage from two hangs, and the levels we achieved, were unimaginable. I have never read so many favourable comments about the quality of sound on social forums, as this.”

Reflecting on the entire journey Jack Davis said that at the outset he had grave doubts about being able to pull the event off. “We knew [the event] had to be something big if we were going to make a difference with the charity. Financing the event and getting people to take a chance on us and get involved was a long shot.” But his faith paid off. As to his personal highlight? “It was hearing the sound check and realising it didn't sound like a train wreck. We were very prepared to have 100 drummers playing out of time and 350 guitarists playing out of tune. Amazingly it turned out every player was fantastic and took it really seriously. Seeing everyone play in time was a spectacle and the sound matching it was equally impressive.” In fact the PA had been perfect, he added. “It provided a clear rounded sound across the room… forming an impressive wall of sound that made you feel like you were immersed in the middle of it, rather than just hearing the stage from a distance.”

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