Martin Audio WPL for ibis RockCorps at Accor Arena



Picture: Chang Martin

The latest edition of ibis RockCorps returned recently with a major gig at Paris's Accor Arena, featuring the triple bill of Macklemore, Franglish and Rosinia. The concept of the event is unique in that anyone giving four hours of their time as a civic project volunteer in the French capital is eligible for tickets to this free concert. Martin Audio partner, experienced production company 22live, tendered and won the contract, having worked for the show's producers CC-Lab in the past.

However, 22live director Paul Timmins was aware that to service a gig economically within the Eurozone would require a marriage of careful logistics and high-octane sound - knowing that working in Europe post-Brexit poses a bureaucratic nightmare of Kafkaesque proportions. He rationalised that by flying Martin Audio's large format Wavefront Precision WPL line array in 20-box hangs either side of the stage, with a further 16 WPL as outfills on each flank, he could project some 90 metres to the rear of the auditorium without the need for delays - thus enabling the inventory to be confined to a two-truck haul. He also realised that to make sense of the accounting this would need to do this with a four-man crew, so picked a senior team comprising crew chief Nick Jackson, monitor engineer Sam Cook, system tech Ryan Bass and Jack Davis.

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With a 13,000-strong, highly charged, young demographic audience rushing in to grab the best seats, the 22live team knew they would need to deliver sound to a level close to the maximum threshold for American rapper Macklemore and the two huge French acts, Franglish and Rosinia. Explained Timmins, “I knew we would require a big PA system, and when I picked up the spec, I was pleased to see Martin Audio on the rider - so it was an easy decision to quote WPL. “WPL is a bit of a beast and like MLA it tends to be able to handle these big arenas without delays,” reflected Paul Timmins. “I believed that by going deeper with the system we could dispense with the delays, and it absolutely nailed it.”

Aside from the main and peripheral PA hangs, production had 18 Martin Audio SXHF218 subwoofers on the ground in a castellated split broadside configuration … split largely because there was a catwalk thrust down the middle. The system was powered by a total of 42 iK42 DSP amplifiers in 1-box resolution - which afforded greater DSP power and ensured consistent coverage front to back. Fills were required for the front rows and 22live turned to the trusty TORUS, deploying T1215s while for a VIP breakout room the sound was relayed via TORUS T1230s.

Aside from Timmins’ careful logistics the show’s success owed much to Ryan Bass’s adept system engineering - and his ability to suddenly pivot. For having done his visualisation and calculations on the day of arrival, based on a full arena, he suddenly had to reoptimize on show day after discovering an area in the upper balcony had now been draped off. But he was undeterred. “Reoptimising within DISPLAY allowed for a quick and easy change of the coverage,” Bass confirmed. Changing the area at the back that was now draped off from ‘Audience’ to ‘Non-Audience’ ensured there was no wasted energy directed at an empty space whilst also helping to reduce slapback from the back of the arena. With a traditional system this would have required a full re-deployment of the PA.” He, too, was confident the main PA would throw consistently across the 90m distance. “By adjusting the weighting of the prediction to prioritise the audience over non-audience or ‘Hard Avoid’, this allocated more DSP power to ensure consistent SPL and frequency response from front to back.”

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Picture: Roxane Montaron

The use of ‘Hard Avoid’ at the back of the arena “helped massively” in calming the room, making the task easier for sound engineers in what is a notoriously challenging environment to mix in. ‘Hard Avoid’ was further deployed onstage to avoid unnecessary levels bleeding back. “Some of the audio crew working on stage expressed how impressed they were by the reductions compared to out front,” noted Bass. “Making use of the cardioid presets within VU-Net [software] further allowed for a good reduction on stage.”

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Both Paul Timmins and Ryan Bass can look back on the show with pride - the former because with the right degree of planning it showed that an experienced UK production company can work competitively in Europe - even for one-off shows, with a quick turn-around, and despite the amount of carnet and manifest prep involved. As for Ryan Bass he was delighted with the sound delivery. “The technology Martin Audio has developed in DISPLAY, with its optimisations, allowed for a quick and easy deployment as well as responding to sudden changes such as the late addition of drapes. “Overall the system, and all the acts, sounded great with all guest engineers leaving the show happy. The audience certainly seemed to be enjoying it too!”

And Stephen Greene, CEO of RockCorps, added, “When you're putting on a show for more than 13,000 people who've all volunteered four hours of their time to earn their ticket, you want to be sure that it's the concert of a lifetime. “The look and sound of the production are key and thanks to Paul and his crew at 22live, they always deliver. From pre-show planning and sourcing equipment to working with the creative team, ibis RockCorps was always in safe hands.

“Dealing with three big name artists in one show has its technical challenges but the changeovers at the event were seamless, ensuring the crowd stayed in the vibe while keeping the artists confident and set to light up the stage … in this case, literally, with Macklemore's crew clear to deliver off-the-scale pyrotechnics. The ibis RockCorps production was next level, delivering a huge celebration that this crowd of volunteers justly deserved. And it just sounded great!”

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