

Martin Audio WPM System at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival

Pictures: Hannah Murphy; courtesy of Jacob's Pillow



Set against the scenic backdrop of the Berkshire Hills in Becket, Massachusetts, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival is America's longest-running international dance festival. Founded in 1931 by modern dance pioneer Ted Shawn on a historic 220-acre farm, this National Historic Landmark District welcomes thousands of global visitors each summer. To support its diverse, world-class lineup of international choreographers and artists, the Festival's Ted Shawn Theatre - originally opened in 1942 as the first performance space in the US designed exclusively for dance - has been equipped with a complete, state-of-the-art Martin Audio sound system.

Designed around Martin Audio's Wavefront Precision WPM Series line arrays, the system was specified and supplied by New Jersey-based Audio Inc. "This is the first year we've taken on full production in the venue," begins Stephan Wojtecki, Head of Audio at Audio Inc. "When Edward Tolve, our Operations Manager, and I did the walkthrough, as soon as we walked into the room, we knew: WPM, 100% WPM." Audio Inc.'s introduction to the Martin Audio Wavefront Precision line originally

began with an installation project. "We had an installation at the time in a high school auditorium. We realised WPM was an incredibly good-sounding product. After that job I immediately knew we had to do more with it."

Subsequently, the company approached their local Martin Audio representative when they needed a versatile, scalable setup for rental applications. "I approached Martha Callaghan when we were looking to invest in a small-format PA that could scale from small-to-mid-size rental events. After talking with Martha, we looked closer at WPM, which also led to a conversation about WPS, and we made a major purchase of both a couple of years ago."

Fast-forward to this summer's Ted Shawn Theatre deployment, where the team performed a complete system redesign, modelling the space top-to-bottom using Martin Audio's DISPLAY software. The ultimately specified system comprises six WPM cabinets per side, supplemented with a flown SXC115 cardioid subwoofer in each array. To address a challenging rear mezzanine - where the front-of-house audio mix position is also located - Audio Inc. deployed a pair of Martin Audio TORUS T820 constant curvature arrays as delay positions, while ultra-compact FlexPoint FP6 cabinets serve as front infills. The entire system is powered by six Martin Audio iKON multi-channel amplifiers running over a Dante network.

"The system sounds so warm and musical, even at a distance," describes Wojtecki. "That's often the general description I get when people hear Wavefront Precision or most Martin Audio boxes for the first time. The venue has a clean-sounding, perfectly tailored array that - importantly for dance - is so discreet people hardly notice it is there." Christopher Marc, Jacob's Pillow Audio Supervisor, adds: "People are appreciating the upgrades in clarity and tone without it being overbearing. Our rigs in the past have relied on volume for 'clarity', thus eliminating any real dynamics in the room. This system has allowed us a huge improvement in clarity at any level."

With their system design, Audio Inc. has also been able to solve long-standing coverage issues. "The top of the steeply-raked rear mezzanine is where they had the biggest coverage problems," Wojtecki explains. "The TORUS T820s filled in very nicely in the software. When we did our final tuning, we watched the Smaart traces as we blended in the delays and they filled in the gaps perfectly. It was very rewarding. They are voiced so well with the WPM that the transition is totally seamless, and overall we have it down to a 3dB variation from front to back."

The stage monitoring package is designed to fulfil the high-energy demands of the performers. Audio Inc. specified four Martin Audio CDD-LIVE 8 coaxial differential dispersion speakers per side, paired with compact SX212 subwoofers, alongside Martin Audio XE500 floor wedges when "throw-and-go" capabilities are required. "Everything blends together nicely and creates a highly uniform sound field across both the audience and the stage," Wojtecki confirms. "The rear-rejection of the WPM array is incredibly helpful for a proper dance monitor setup. Because of that rejection, it feels like you have two separate systems: one for the stage and one for

the audience, working together to create a linear field. That was one of the biggest appeals to them - having proper coverage on stage that sounds voiced identically to what the audience hears out front." Wojtecki describes the effortless tuning process: "All I had to do was time-align everything and apply a tiny bit of corrective EQ on the delays and front fills. If you measure the room correctly and input the exact data into the DISPLAY software, the results just work - especially in single-box resolution. Nine times out of ten, you don't have to touch it."

While the system design setup primarily stays consistent throughout the Festival, the WPM's flexibility allows the team to adapt to specific rider demands. "The Akram Khan Company have a specific 'mountain' scenic element on stage from which the sound needs to be localised," explains Wojtecki. "We added an additional centre WPM array and delayed the entire PA back to that spot. We also supplemented the low-end with two additional SX118 subwoofers on each side for the immense soundtrack of the production."

"As Jacob's Pillow grows as an organisation to facilitate and support all kinds of dance, this investment signifies a huge lift in support for that mission, and the idea that live sound and design is a significant part of dance," notes Marc, adding, "Audio Inc. has taken the time to truly invest in what we are trying to do. They have provided a huge support system to us by listening to our needs, responding to them, and making the appropriate recommendations."

Hands-on with the system, engineer Mads Hamilton is also effusive in their praise: "I could not be happier with the system and the team that has worked alongside us to install it. All interactions I have had with Audio Inc. have prioritised the operation of our systems to their fullest capacity and the quality of audio for Jacob's Pillow patrons. Stephan's patience, kindness, and availability to our team has made my job as the engineer exponentially easier. I am looking forward to the remaining weeks of the Festival getting to play with this stunning system."

The final words come from Stephan Wojtecki: "We've built our Martin Audio inventory to the point where we have almost the full line now: CDD, FlexPoint, TORUS, and Wavefront Precision. Our clients love the sound quality, the business just keeps growing, and Jacob's Pillow is a true demonstration of this. It has been an incredibly rewarding experience to see the system and our team deliver so successfully for this world-renowned event."

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