Martin Audio WPS for UMW’s Dodd Auditorium



Situated in Fredericksburg, VA, the 1200-seat multipurpose Dodd Auditorium, at the University of Mary Washington (UMW), has been treated to a new, fully DSP-optimised Wavefront Precision line array from Martin Audio. The installation, which comprises hangs of seven elements per side, was undertaken by Martin Audio partner, Soundworks of Virginia. Soundworks had worked at the venue many times over the years as a rental provider, notably at commencement ceremonies. Their CEO Steve Payne observed, “At these events all parents really care about is hearing their kid’s name read out clearly. But this was always a challenge over a 250ft throw distance.” But this is just one of a variety of events hosted at the venue, including all types of performance arts, lectures and movies.

Soundworks had traditionally frontlined another PA system, but it was when they switched to Martin Audio, and the WPS, that a profound improvement in coverage and intelligibility became evident. “It was a totally different experience,” he said. “What had become a challenging job now looked easy. The Martin Audio system is so much more sophisticated; it’s all in the processing, and the software.” Douglas Noble, Executive Director of Dodd Auditorium, had been equally impressed, and when he set out his requirements to Payne for a permanent PA upgrade he initially stated, ‘I don’t think we have it in our budget, but I would love to put a WPS system

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in Dodd!’ The Soundworks CEO started crunching the numbers and indeed made it work.

While Soundworks are not traditionally an installation company - “we’ve probably done three in total, and all for clients for whom we previously supplied temporary sound” - Steve Payne agreed that WPS was the system best fit for purpose. “The previous system was at least a decade old, and comprised a main cluster, balcony speakers, delays for the mezzanine … all kinds of speakers all over the place, everything delayed. When I looked at how complicated the existing system was, I knew we could simply do two hangs in there, cover the entire room, with some front fills as a precaution. “We’re now getting way better coverage throughout the room and it’s much simpler.”

The hall itself is a traditional rectangular space, with proscenium, slightly raked stalls with fixed seating and a balcony level. A pair of SXC118 cardioid subs were placed under the stage, which Payne notes is sonically well-matched with WPS. Four FlexPoint FP6 are spaced evenly across the front of the stage in mono. “These are great sounding little speakers, and we use them a lot,” he says. A further six Martin Audio XP12s are deployed as stage monitors, the set-up powered from a pair each of Martin Audio iKON iK81 and 1K42, multi-channel DSP amps in 1-box resolution.

Although the installation process was relatively straightforward, there was a delay while additional steels were added to the roof. “Although the entire PA hang weighed no more than around 500lbs, they had installed a roof-mounted air conditioning system which had maxed out the roof load!” Very little adjustment to the room parameters was required and the WPS hangs throw effortlessly to the back. “The software is incredible,” reasoned the Soundworks CEO. “After many years of using speaker systems that don’t have that software the difference is phenomenal. You make the measurements, put it into the software and tell it the variation and level you want from front to back row and it works it out. We knew we could programme Hard Avoid on the back wall if needed but we didn’t find it was much of a problem. “The way the system is set up it will play much louder than they will ever need it to; it means anyone coming in can now use the house system for pretty much anything that takes place in there.”

“We loved working with Steve Payne on this project,” responded Douglas Noble. “We trusted him to make our space sound amazing and he didn't disappoint. We love our Martin Audio arrays.” Later, following a symphony and choir performance in the Auditorium, he reinforced this. “The sound was absolutely amazing. The audience response was incredible, and I even had one audience member mention how wonderful our new system was, and asked why it hadn’t happened sooner.” Another who praised the overall coverage, clarity and power of the system, was Director of the Events AV Office, Mark Simpkins, who assists with training the student staff in the Auditorium.

Aside from Payne, who specified the system and oversaw the project, Garrett Milich generated the system documentation and accomplished the physical installation.

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Other members of the Soundworks team included Bryan Hargrave, who undertook the room measurements, ran the Martin Audio DISPLAY files, and did the final room tuning, while Mathew Walsh also assisted with the physical installation.

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