

Martin Audio CDD-LIVE 15 for Newport Folk Festival



Back in 2020, the iconic Newport Folk Festival introduced a bike powered stage, following the organisers' desire to incorporate bicycles into the festival experience and provide an alternative power source for performances. Masterminding this was Illiterate Light, a 2-piece rock band from Virginia who had first experimented with the idea of carrying a simple sound system powered by bike, after setting up in 2015. Eric Shy took over production manager duties as the tech scaled up, and the idea really took root after the band played the Quad Stage at the 2019 Newport Folk festival where 2000-plus bikes commuted to the festival. The festival loved the idea of bike-powered performance and invited Illiterate Light back in 2020 to become a full-blown stage at the festival (which has persisted to this day).

"A stage powered by bikes and solar was completely off the grid," noted Shy - but the organisers loved it and the following year agreed to a dedicated stage." As the concept evolved, so production scaled up and this year a full-blown Martin Audio PA rig, provided by the British manufacturer's Virginia-based partner, Southard Audio, was on show. Shy himself has a long relationship with Southard, having worked with Jason Misterka's company as an audio engineer for over a decade. "He is my point person for all things Martin Audio, and I have been working with their products ever

since they first came into the Southard warehouse. Jason has always been a mentor and huge supporter of Illiterate Light, providing wisdom and technical expertise as the band has grown. He has worked with us to meet our production goals and achieve a superior level of quality needed for an event like Newport Folk Festival."

CDD-LIVE 15 was the obvious option for the Bike Stage, he believes. "The dispersion pattern helps maximise the distance you can get out of a point source box. They sound fantastic and I am super familiar with them. Power consumption is a real concern on our stage since we are off the grid, so point source has been the solution for now." To implement this, he deployed a pair of CDD-LIVE 15 as main PA and a further pair of CDD-LIVE 12 as fills.

Sound containment was another primary concern, since the Bike Stage was adjacent to the Quad Stage. There could be no sound from the PA system during soundcheck since the Quad Stage had active performances taking place. "FOH uses nearfield monitors to combat this, so inputs can be cued to make sure they sound great before the PA system is opened up," Shy explains. "This was a further reason why it was vital to use CDDs as I know how things translate to them. So when we launch into a performance, I am confident I can get the mix sounding great in the first 30 seconds, which is critical considering the short sets on the Bike Stage and the calibre of performers."

How did the event work in practice? Some 2000 cyclists pedalled to the festival. Six cycled at a time for the duration of a song, before making way for six new cyclists "with bike coaches helping bikers saddle up and get thru the line," according to Eric Shy. "Our system can buffer the power for roughly two minutes so performing artists could play without interruption." CDD had proved massively popular, he confirmed. "They were excellent," he exclaimed. "We have received much feedback stating that we had the best sounding stage, and that the quality of sound was remarkable for the size of the system and the coverage we could achieve (75ft x 75ft-plus.)"

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