Radio Riot relies on Martin Audio BlacklineQ Series

Picture: Amy Kolsteren

Radio Riot are a three-piece pub and function band delivering Britpop and guitar-driven covers spanning five decades. Like the best function acts, they bring the same energy and ambition to every show regardless of venue size. And in choosing a truly portable sound system capable of consistently delivering a big gig sound, lead singer and guitarist David Preston turned to Martin Audio's new BlacklineQ Series of loudspeakers.

Preston has been playing with bassist Luke Stephens and drummer Dean Fowler since the age of 19. "We did originals, covers, and an Oasis tribute band over the last 25 years together but around 9 years ago stopped because life got busy," he explains. "We all missed it, so we got back into it last year with Radio Riot." For Preston, who brings a professional audio background to the project, production standards are non-negotiable regardless of the venue. "We want to create a big gig feel," he says. "Everything is mic'd up no matter what the venue, whether it's a small function room, a cricket club or a pub. We want the full show, every time." That ambition extends to the backing tracks, which incorporate keyboards, strings and synths. "When we're doing songs like 'Bittersweet Symphony' or 'Town Called Malice,' we need those strings and keyboards to land properly," he notes. "We spent a year and a half building the show before we played our first gig."

In search of a PA capable of delivering that big-gig impact from a system that could also fit in the boot of a car, Preston turned to Martin Audio's BlacklineQ - a new series of passive loudspeakers driven by a Linea Research 44M06 amplifier. "With self-powered systems, you sometimes hit limiters too early," he explains. "Stepping up to external amplification gives you much more headroom and quality and allows us to control the PA far better.”

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The portable rig comprises a pair of Blackline Q15 tops and a pair of Blackline Q118 subwoofers. The Q15 is capable of a peak SPL of 133dB, featuring a 15-inch LF driver with a 4-inch voice coil and a 1.4-inch exit HF compression driver with a 3-inch dome. Its 70°– 90° horizontal × 50° vertical Differential Dispersion horn ensures wide, consistent coverage across the audience area. Completing the system, the Q118 is an 18” compact, high-performance subwoofer extending low-frequency response down to 38Hz, with a peak SPL of 136dB. "I love the top-end clarity that the Q15 delivers," says Preston. "And because we always mic up the full backline, the subs handle whatever we throw at them. The PA handles the whole band even when we have all the synths, keys, or full-range horn parts on the track as well, and we can still break the system down easily and load it into our cars."

That portability and handling are important for a band loading in and out of venues quickly. “It's a system we can put up and power on quickly," he says. "The subs are light enough to lift into a car on your own, and even the 15s aren't unreasonably heavy - it's essentially a one-man operation. What we're running now is smaller than we had before but delivers the same power with considerably more clarity. For system control, Preston runs Martin Audio's System Engineer 8 software on a tablet, using the Linea Research amplifier's onboard DSP for system EQ. "I do my main overall PA EQ within the amp rather than the mixer. The quality is more accurate and simply sounds better," he explains.

Ultimately, it is the sound that defines the system's success. "Every venue we've played, the BlacklineQ covers the space exactly as we need it to," says Preston. "They're really good-sounding speakers with great definition." For Preston, the investment speaks for itself. "If you're willing to spend a little more over a mid-range self-powered system, it really makes a difference," he concludes.

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