Sennheiser Digital 6000 used for West Side Story



Picture: Johan Persson

Premiered in 1957, West Side Story revolutionized the musical genre with its iconic choreography by Jerome Robbins and timeless music compositions like Maria, Somewhere and America from the legendary Leonard Bernstein. With BB Promotion leading the charge as the organiser of the latest West Side Story production, the musical set out on a world tour in late 2022 and has been capturing the hearts of audiences around the world ever since. Theatre sound designer and live sound engineer, Tom Marshall, worked with BB Promotion and Stage Sound Services (SSS) to create a perfect audio setup which includes Sennheiser Digital 6000 wireless audio solutions as well as monitor speakers and microphones from Neumann, ensuring an unforgettable musical journey for audiences.

The show’s audio equipment includes 34 Sennheiser SK 6212 mini-bodypack transmitters, two Sennheiser MKH 40 microphones, 14 Sennheiser EM 6000 dual-channel receivers, 10 Neumann KH 120 monitors, eight Neumann KM 140 cardioid microphones, and two Neumann U 87 microphones. To ensure seamless performances during the tour, Marshall requested an identical ‘B’ system, so the two systems can ‘leapfrog’ their way around the globe.

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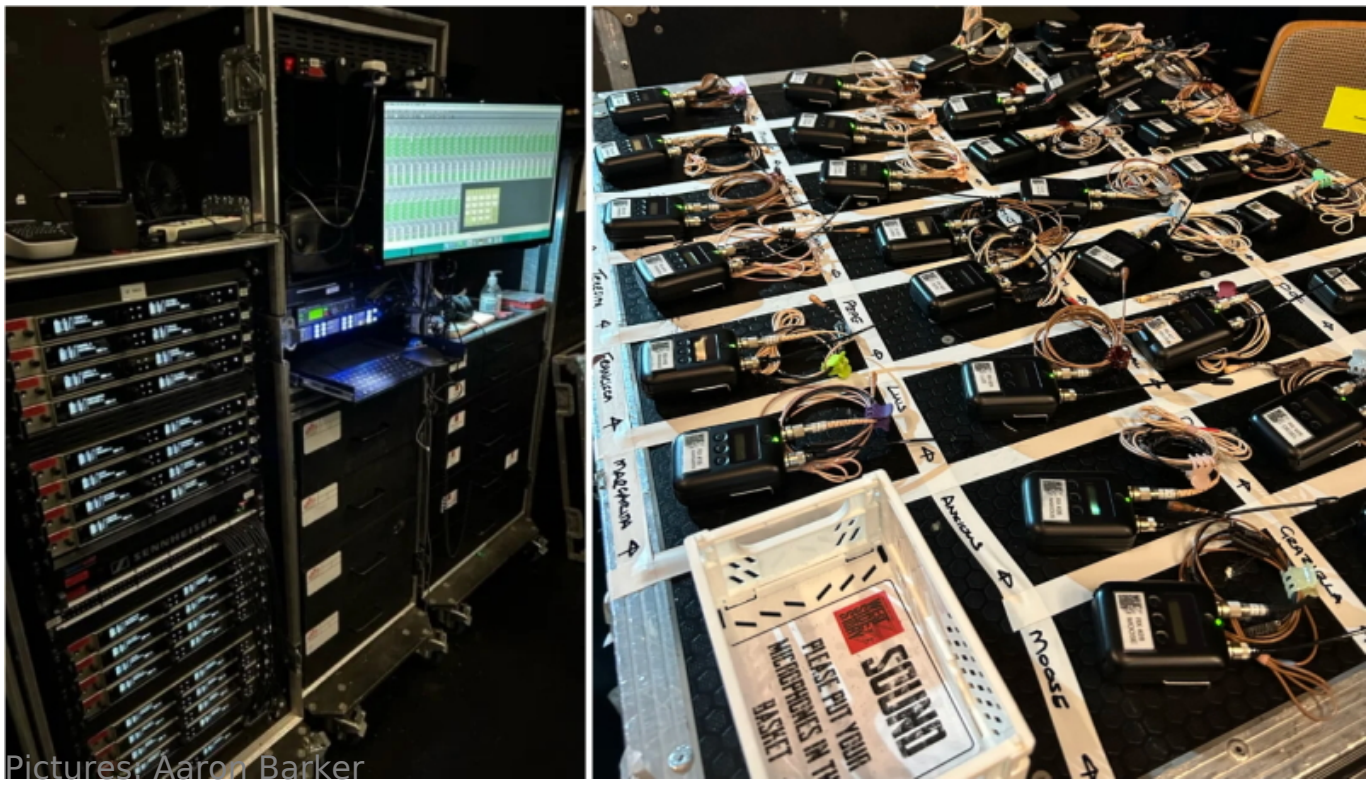

Pictures: Aaron Barker

Working in theatre sound since 1995, Marshall's expertise in mixing musicals, as well as his foray into live music mixing, have earned him a reputation as a highly regarded international theatre sound designer. He has a deep-rooted connection to brands like Sennheiser.

"Sennheiser is the trusted brand for audio professionals. Throughout my theatre career and my ventures into live bands, rock'n'roll, and corporate projects, I continue to use Sennheiser products, knowing that I am in the best of hands."

Marshall's association with BB Promotion, the organiser of the new West Side Story production, goes back to a project they collaborated on six years ago in Cologne, Germany. The relationship was further strengthened when Martin Flohr, the Executive Producer and Artistic Director of BB Promotion, attended a West Side Story production in the UK where Marshall was overseeing the audio. "They were impressed with the sound quality and wanted to replicate the design for the new production. I was thrilled to be invited to be part of the project," he says.

Having worked for more than 15 years with Stage Sound Services on various productions, Marshall reached out to the company's trusted experts to enquire about the equipment needed for the show. "I have a long-standing relationship with the company and its Director, Phil Hurley," Marshall explains. "When the deal was being negotiated, they were the only company that could provide what we needed. Since they supply a lot of my shows in the UK, I had unshakable confidence in them and knew I could trust them to deliver an exceptional service."

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Pictures: Aaron Barker

Hurley notes that supplying products for the West Side Story global tour was exciting, so when Marshall contacted them, they were eager to be a part of the project. “Tom had a specific request for the particular loudspeaker manufacturer, which we had in our inventory,” he says. “We then discussed using Sennheiser Digital 6000 and the company’s flagship mini-bodypack transmitter SK 6212, a benchmark for advanced digital transmission technology in modern audio productions. Tom was pleased with the recommendation and decided to use the SK 6212 for the show, amongst the other products we supplied.”

Marshall concurs: “I remember Phil asking me if I was interested in using the SK

6212, and I said ‘definitely!’ With that much RF on a show that’s touring weekly in multiple territories, we needed a system that was really user-friendly, would work straight out the box, and had an intuitive interface. Product quality was of the utmost importance and that it is widely recognised worldwide would also allow us to easily find a local supplier if we had any issues.”

A big advantage of the SK 6212 is its size. “It’s one of the smallest transmitters available on the market,” he continues. “As soon as you show it to the performers and the costume department, they are immediately on your side because hiding them in wigs or costumes is so much easier.” Marshall also emphasises the SK 6212’s exceptional battery life. “It takes a headache away from the backstage team; they put the batteries in at the beginning of the day and get a whole day’s rehearsals and the show in the evening out of them. Things like that make life so much simpler, especially on the road, as there’s no need to take multiple sets of batteries,” he says.

For orchestra monitoring, Marshall and the rest of the team, which includes Dan Gregory [Lead Production Sound Engineer], Tom Meehan [Head of Sound], Aaron Barker [Deputy Head of Sound], and Clara Lim [Assistant Sound Engineer], wanted some self-powered monitors that could be used as and when needed.

“I was determined to incorporate top-notch monitor speakers into the show, so when Phil suggested the Neumann KH 120 studio monitors, I was intrigued. Neumann is renowned for producing exceptional sound, and after listening to the KH 120s I was blown away. I was using a different brand before, but the KH 120s truly exceeded my expectations. I was so impressed that I even asked if I could take a spare set home with me,” Marshall jokes.

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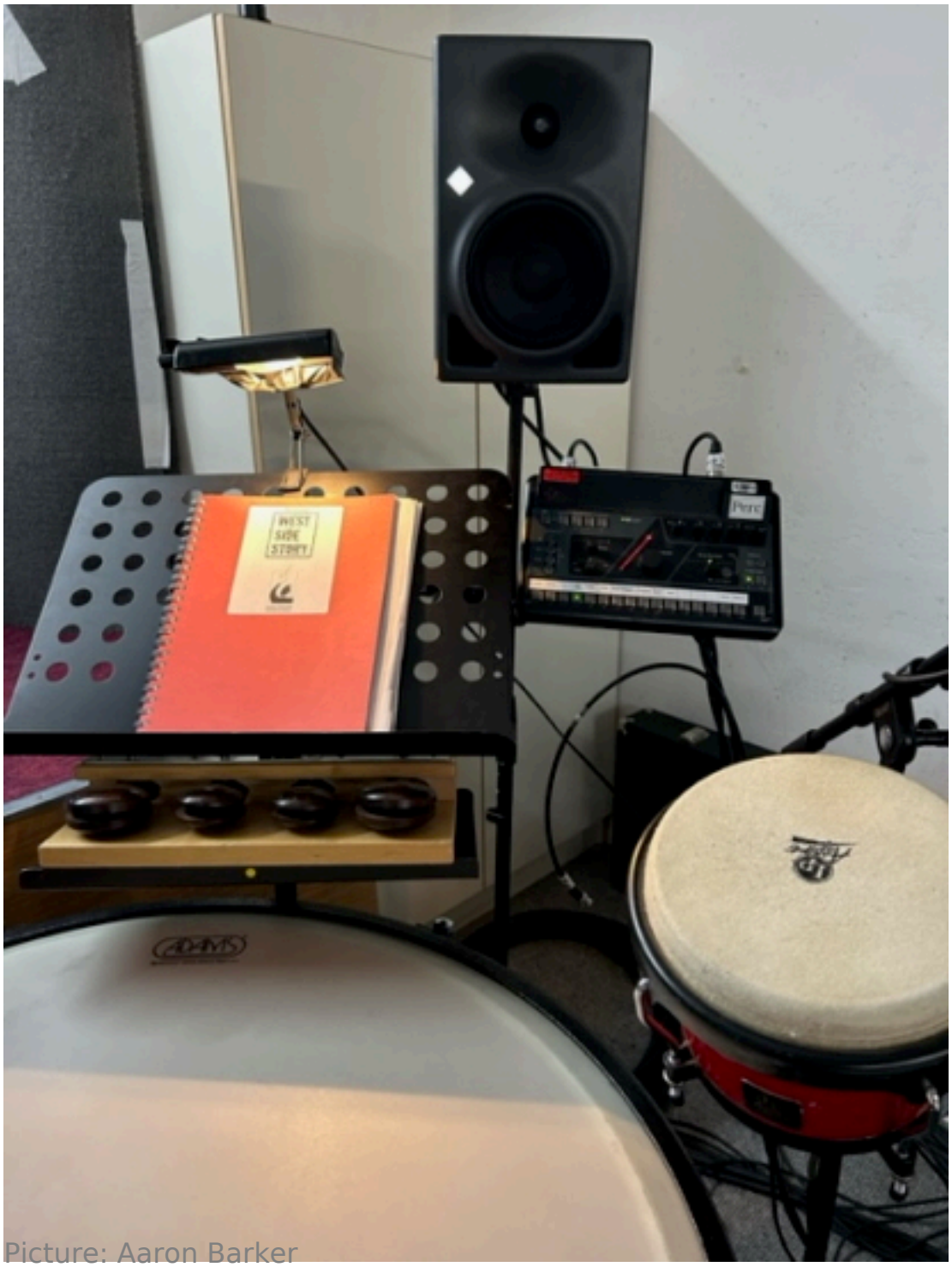

Picture: Aaron Barker

Sennheiser’s Business Development Manager, Pro Audio, Kevin Gwyther-Brown, along with other members of the Sennheiser and Neumann team, played an instrumental part in supporting SSS with the delivery of the products for the show.

“Sennheiser went above and beyond in delivering the new RF system, despite tight deadlines and challenges in the global supply chain,” explains Hurley, who worked closely with Huw Semmens, Head of Hires and Technical at SSS, and other members

of his team to gather the required equipment. “Their timely delivery was critical to ensure we could continue with Tom’s original audio system design, and I am truly grateful for their commitment and willingness to work with us to ensure that we had everything we needed and make it come together seamlessly. Their flexible approach made all the difference.”

“Collaborating with the great team at Stage Sound Services is always an enjoyable experience,” concludes Gwyther-Brown. “We were thrilled to be able to provide a comprehensive solution, featuring top-notch products from Sennheiser and Neumann, for this tour, especially within such a tight deadline. Our team is proud to have delivered a world-class audio setup that includes everything from microphones to on-stage and musician monitoring, ensuring an exceptional experience for this incredible worldwide tour.”



Picture: Johan Persson

The West Side Story production premiered in Munich at the end of last year, with 1,500 cheering spectators, including Alexander Bernstein, son of composer Leonard Bernstein, who called it a ‘fantastic production’, enjoying the electrifying spectacular that opens a new chapter in the show’s epic success story. Currently touring in Germany, the show is set to travel all over the world.

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