Martin Audio WPL Line Array used at MOBOs



In a repeat of their successful deployment at OVO Arena Wembley for the 25th MOBO Awards, SWG Events this time headed north with their flagship Martin Audio WPL Line Array to the Utilita Arena, Sheffield for this year’s event. They had to overcome the challenges of providing balanced sound reinforcement for the live audience inside the 12,500-cap arena, while preserving the integrity of the set and striking a balance between the presenters’ mics and the live showcases, in a fast-paced show.

These live performances ranged from UK rap to Afrobeats, Dancehall to Pop/R&B and Garage, with back-to-back performances from Soul II Soul, Ghetts, Sugababes, Cristale, Byron Messia, King Promise and Camidoh, plus a Garage set from DJ Spoony. The event was hosted by Babtunde Aleshe, Indiyah Polack and Zeze Mills. It required SWG Events to increase the WPL box count from 16 to 18 elements for each of the main L/R hangs, compared with last time; but more significantly, was the increased number of outhangs, comprising 12-a-side WPC - all driven in 2-box resolution from iKON iK42s.

Phoca PDF

Explaining the rationale SWG Events' Head of Audio, Simon Purse stated, "It was a fairly standard arena set up, and [Sheffield] is a very pleasant-sounding space as far as arenas go. But the additional outhangs enabled us to better cover the raked seating in the nearfield. That was a massive benefit as the tonal response from WPC and WPL is really similar, so when you walk around the rig it just really works well. "There's the additional benefit of being able to use the same amp racks in the same configuration, in terms of the LK connectors, breakouts and big multicores that Martin Audio can provide. All of that worked brilliantly at the stage end."

As with the previous MOBO Awards, which took place in November 2022, they chose an 18-box SXH218 sub array in end fire configuration, with three rows of six subwoofers delayed to a central point. That works well in these arenas because you can achieve the broadside array coverage without intruding on the set design—it can sometimes be quite challenging with such a visually oriented set." To avoid interference with the LED screen the PA was trimmed at little higher than normal. Below, there was just a single stage but with a catwalk thrust on stage left, while on stage right there was a smaller thrust for the guest presenters.



SWG Events turned their attention to the stage, providing a number of Martin

Phoca PDF

Audio's top-of-the-range dedicated XE500 monitors for foldback and adding stage sidefills on each flank in the shape of TORUS T1215 stacked on a pair of SXC118 cardioid subwoofers on each side. Purse formed an effective tag team with colleague, freelance engineer Matt Pope, who handled system tech and alternated FOH duties. "Matt focused on the musical performance elements while I handled presenter mics and guests," he explained.

"There were a lot of different intricacies, and the infrastructure behind the show was complex compared with a standard headline arena show. We had our stage system, which was split to FOH and monitors, and another split to an OB truck, which is handling the live broadcast mix. Finally, there were further split heads to a TV truck that was dealing with the presenter microphones and presenter IEM units as well as a separate broadcast mix for presentation later in the week."

And then there was the speed of turn-around to contend with and imponderables encountered when one merges a live show with an awards presentation. "But the PA element helps tremendously. If it goes in easily - which this did - we can focus on the job in hand." Other challenges included striving for good gain before feedback, and trying to adequately project a quietly spoken vocal. To meet these obstacles requires a highly skilled crew. And these included Will Fisher (monitors); Ian Williams (Playback/Comms); Phil Hughes (RF Tech); Fraser Wilks, Sam Jones, Laura Evans (Stage Patch & general Audio engineering); Mark Bott (SWG Operations Manager) and Henry Roper (SWG Production assistant. All worked under overall production manager Rob Smalldon (of Marvellous Incorporated Ltd), as last year.

Having Martin Audio's flagship WPL as their front-line PA has enabled SWG Events to push ever further into the world of arena shows. However, Simon Purse knows that fastidious prep now becomes ever more important. For the MOBOs, having received the CAD files from the venue the SWG Head of Audio was able to plan ahead, arriving on site with all presets stored and ready to go. "For due diligence I then always take additional measurements. You never know exactly what you will find so I was able to fine tune it and utilise the array snapshot feature to update my array optimisations."

Summing up, Simon Purse said, "I was extremely happy with the sound. We got the vocal presence right out of the PA, at an event where intelligibility was the name of the game." Rob Smalldon agreed. "The team worked tirelessly to make sure we had a great sounding show especially with a few curve balls thrown in during the weeks leading up to the event," he said.

"The support pre-event was magnificent, ensuring all the acts got what they needed audio wise, and the system sounded great in the arena. A show like this only works when the experts in their particular field bring their A game and work together with the rest of the production teams to deliver. It felt very calm on site, and everyone did a magnificent job."

www.martin-audio.com

Phoca PDF