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Dare to be different

Franz Ferdinand live at the SOS 4.8 Festival, Murcia, Spain

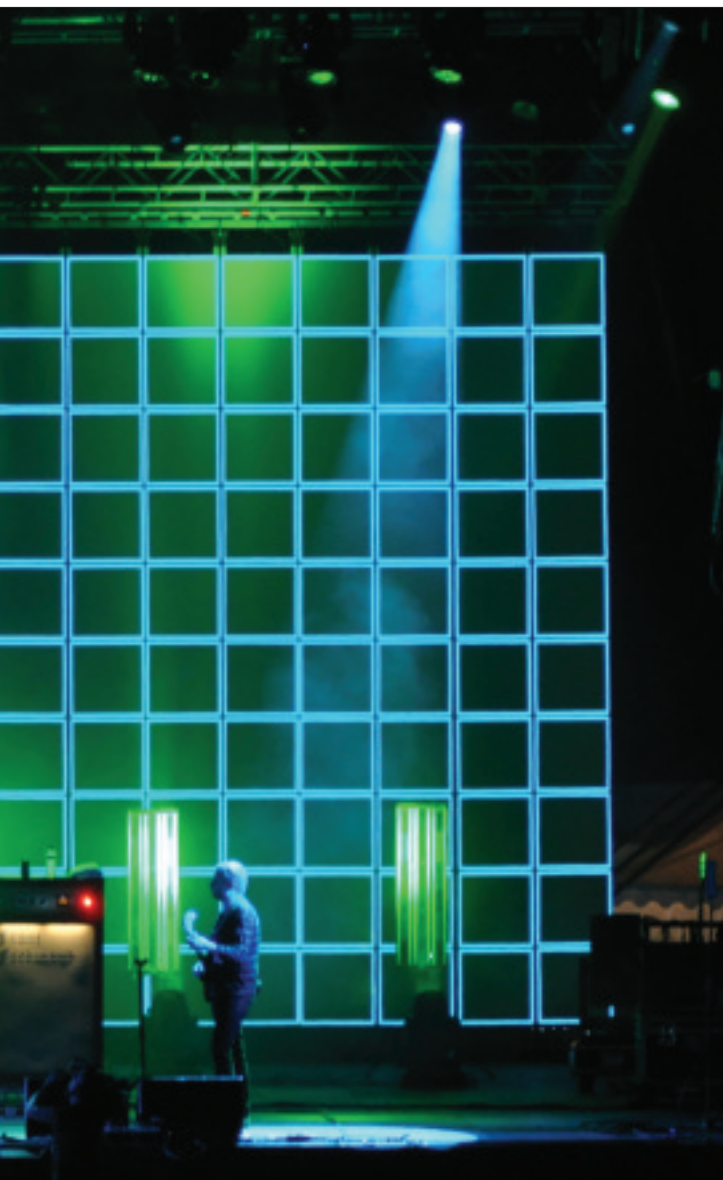
It's the convention to catch a tour for review when it first begins, but Franz Ferdinand have been out for over 18 months. In fact, after this show - at the SOS 4.8 Festival in the city of Murcia, Spain - they have just two more gigs before the recording studio beckons. Tired? Worn out? Far from it, the band was peaking.

Production

I'd never really confronted the music of Franz Ferdinand before; a couple of albums nestle on my CD rack but haven't received the attention they deserve. At 2.00am Saturday morning as the band left the stage I knew this situation would change. In the great British rock tradition, Franz defy the pigeonhole, while their music is popular and entertaining, it is unconventional. Lyrics swoop in confusion around choppy, edgy guitars; these are no simple love songs to adolescent hearts but thoughtful and provoking questions on life itself. And the music can switch from gravity defying luminescence, to aggressive, rhythmic pumping energy.

They are a great live band and they've been on this tour for over 18 months now, yet they can still turn it on. All their crew told how their energy is undiminished: don't miss them next time.

As this is a festival show it's as well to describe the stage set first. Lighting is set as per LD Cormac Jackson's prescription - two trusses well upstage (7m and 9m respectively) with a dozen moving heads on each. Backstage, a single band backdrop, kabuki rigged, will after just one song reveal Franz's talismanic scenic element, something they refer to as a 'Projection Surface' (more on this later). Floor lights comprise just seven, vertically stood Kino Flo with, in this instance, a Vari*Lite VLX beneath each one. That's almost it really. The band play huddled centrally, as if in a club; modest drum riser central, low (1ft / 30cm) risers support the backline amps either side. Here's one of the band's charming conceits, the backline is concealed behind dummy cabinets - oversize by maybe 50%, at first humorous they do in fact produce a style that makes Franz's penchant for the huddled look work on massive festival stages.



words and photography by Steve Moles

While I'm on the subject, Cormac normally gets GLP Impressions for his floor kit beneath the Kino Flos. I was rash enough recently to cite these lights as delivering the deathblow to the Vari*Lite VLX because of their output. I retract that comment wholeheartedly, the production version of the VLX on stage - and remember this was an outdoor, big show environ - is far brighter than the dim unimpressive lantern I was presented with at PLASA on its launch last year. This is a beast, and in dust-filled air you can practically walk down the beams.

Bob O'Brien is the band's production manager, and the man responsible for inviting L&S! out to Spain, for which many thanks. His perspective on the underpinning of the visual elements of show is informative. "Cormac developed the projection surface from a general idea of the band's; what he's come up with is something very different. For what it is and what the band paid for it, there's nothing else like it. But it did present a problem for us, especially from a production perspective. Tell



people you've got a projection screen and they imagine a large stretch to fit film of polythene skin on a frame; or the promoters thought it might be a video wall. Either way, it frightened them for some of the gigs we've been playing. In the end I had to send them photos with an explanation of how it worked; many were concerned it wouldn't fit the stages they wanted us to play on. More to the point, the great thing is it takes no space at all, and no time to put up and down. So for festivals we can take it down during change-over, it's that quick - and that was one of the promoter's major concerns."

The screen was built by Spezialz, a company with a long relationship with Franz. The band are all former Art School students and it seems the artistic inclinations sit easily with this most enigmatic of set build and scenic providers. "Having a band that can express their ideas in a meaningful way is great," said Dave Smith, Spezialz MD, when I called him at O'Brien's behest. "That and the fact that they make the time to talk to everyone involved - production manager, their own manager, their crew and us as set builders. It avoids those 'Oh no, this isn't what we had in mind at all' moments completely."

Famously, Spezialz built a set of dancing mannequins for an earlier tour that achieved a certain notoriety in the business. "We built the Can-Can girls with Vari*Lite VL5s for heads a few years ago," said Smith. "But the projection surface is something quite different. Essentially it's 600mm square panels of a hard-foam centred aluminium foil sandwich. The panels are joined vertically with flip-flop hinges that allow the screen to fold on itself when lowering the truss to strike. We tried it out and found a full 48ft wide by 20ft tall screen could be de-rigged and packed away in 21 minutes." Screen tech Nic Ayres told me the Dutch stage crew at an earlier show got this down to 12 minutes.

"The great thing for us," said O'Brien, taking up the thread, "is that we can easily vary width and height to suit any venue just by dropping columns of panels, or rows. The screen breaks at six and four panels horizontally for packaging purposes, but of course you can just leave unused lower panels folded at the bottom, so it's infinitely variable at 600mm intervals. We've done small clubs to Fuji Rocks and never not rigged it, and at maximum size it weighs less than 800kg, including inverters."

Inverters? "Yes that was Cormac's brilliant idea. Each panel is bordered by a strip of electro-luminescent (EL) tape [this from Light Tape - www.lighttape.co.uk]; that's the really standout signature look that makes this as much Franz Ferdinand as the Can-Can girls did last time. And that's all thanks to Mr Dave Smith. Spezialz have always done projects for us at short notice - sourcing, fitting, and devising a wiring system for the EL tape that was fast and easy was no exception - and have always been amazing and able to deliver. A typical conversation with Dave might end with him asking, 'When do you want them for?' and

me answering 'Before doors open tonight!' He has just been superb."

Gratuitous praise over, and just to bring things back down to earth, I interviewed Alex Kapranos, the band's recognised leader (though they're more democratic than that), later on and asked him about the set builders. He was stumped: "I can't remember their name, but they always manage to give us just what we want." Seems like a fair endorsement. ("Patrick who?" Mick Jagger.)

O'Brien did confirm that the EL tape is relatively fragile and a dozen panels worth has been replaced, but then the tour has been out over 18 months. "And it's almost as quick to rig as it is to take down," he concluded. "It takes about 40 minutes, and that's including testing the panels as it goes up. The great thing about the screen is it's funky, people are amazed at how effective it is." I think the photos confirm that, it is very different.

"For festival production we carry the Kino Flos and a kabuki device from PRG, who supply our full system for Europe [Upstaging in the USA]. They also provided High End DL3s for projection onto our screen, which Cormac controls from his Hog IPC. The dummy backline was very much Alex's idea; Nick McCarthy, the drummer, drew up the design. They wanted something over-stated, retro and with the band logo on it. They asked for the large red neons and Spezialz added the outsize VU meters with little audio sensors to trigger them. The band always liked to clamber on their backline so these dummies had to be strong and stable. They didn't appear until the band played the second stage at Glastonbury last year, we didn't even have chance to test them, it was just on and go. I did wonder if we'd have a Spinal Tap moment, but truth is I had enough experience of Spezialz to have faith in them. The band knew they were in good hands and went for it."





Lights

The two upstage trusses had a dozen each of Vari*Lite VL3000 Spots and Clay Paky Alpha Wash 1200s; the trusses were also dotted with Atomic strobes, and Pixelline (the latter Jackson left unused). The two principal types of moving heads were also found elsewhere in this festival rig, on the two sloped trusses running up/downstage each side, and on the front truss, though these were not part of Jackson's design, but he had added ETC Source Four profiles on the front truss to tease out the band from the stage wash. And he was not averse to using the extra movers here, or at the sides, which he did to great advantage. There was also a large number of 4- and 8-lite Moles facing toward the audience which used from time to time. The Murcia lighting crew all worked at night for obvious reasons and I never had the chance to meet a single Spanish lampie.

Jackson has been with the band since before they broke big time, and has featured in these pages before. I asked first about the deployment of the rig: why so much emphasis upstage? "They just don't like an over-amount of front light - we don't use followspots - but that's mainly because I can't get consistent positioning for them and a spot truss is not practical. So the front truss has Source Four profiles for me to pick them out instead, and I ask for six Pars for a downstage wash; they're also a bit of a safety light." For when the moving heads lose their minds? He smiled, "No, for the band - they usually end up in the pit at some point, so I like to have something for them to see their way back on stage."

But what about the backlight emphasis? "Well, you have to find a happy medium, something where the band are comfortable, but also allow for the twenty-five thousand people to see them

and enough level for the IMAG to read. We always get the IMAG rendered in black and white and very contrasty."

I did watch the IMAG a little because Jackson drew attention to it, and yes, stylistically it adds to the general ambience, but in truth he managed to produce such a spectacular large-scale show out of what looked to be very little light, that I, in the position of a punter, was compelled to watch the stage. Well done Jackson, I say.

"We do carry a small floor package, seven banks of Kino Flos from PRG, and normally I have a GLP Impression beneath each one, though today they've given me Vari*Lite VLXs. I like to have something different as a special, the Kinos stood vertically behind the band is visually interesting and dramatic, the uplight from the LED beneath [GLP or VLX] changes the Kino to resemble something more like a VersaTube."

Entirely illusory, the effect was real enough. "We also have a couple of Nova Flowers on the floor, a big effect I use a couple of times." Notwithstanding the acclaimed power of the Flowers, these were but one strong way in which Jackson had his little band transcend their huddle centre stage.

"As for the main rig, I've got the VL3000 Spot and Alpha 1200 Wash; I would prefer a MAC 2k Wash, the beam cuts better I think, but they're fine. I have had occasion recently to use the Clay Paky Alpha 300 Beam indoors and they're a great little light, smooth and quick."

"So my basic rig is 12 spots, 12 wash, that's built around the projection, you do need to cut back and let the onstage projection work. I've got hazers on stage as well, so you need to be careful that the projection doesn't lose out." Jackson

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From left to right: Lighting designer Cormac Jackson; FOH sound engineer Michael Parker; monitor engineer Tilde Bruynooghe; production manager Bob O'Brien.

Crew Credits:

Tour Manager: Steven Chapman

Production Manager: Bob O'Brien

Production/Band Assistant:
Julie Bernouis

Lighting Designer: Cormac Jackson

FOH Engineer: Michael Parker

Monitor Engineer: Tilde Bruynooghe

Drum/Bass technician: Allen Johnston

Guitar Technician: Adey Wilson

Keys Technician: Hugh Cowie

'B Rig' Backline Roadie:
David 'Slouch' Vaughan

Systems Techs: Paul MacCauley,
Austen 'Oz' Bagnell, Rob Priddle

Screen Technician: Nic Ayres

Video/Projection Tech: Seb Williams

Stage Manager: Tyrone Brunton

Lighting/Dimmer technician:
Simon Carus-Wilson

Equipment Relocation Technicians:
Chris Overton, Ray Bridgeman,
John Gordon

Caterers: Helen Cooper, David Pascoe

Merchandiser: Leanne Berry

Supplier Credits:

"I would like to highlight the quality support and back-up that our longstanding suppliers have given,"
- Production manager Bob O'Brien.

Audio: Wigwam (Geoff Muir)

Lighting: PRG (Scottie Sanderson)

Projection/Video: XL Video (Jo Beirne)

Screen & Set Design:
Specialz (Dave Smith)

Trucking: Fly By Nite (Dave Coumbes)

Bussing: Beat The Street (Jorg Albert)

Catering: Popcorn

Freight: Rock It Cargo (Matt Wright)

is very particular about this, it's a subject he references frequently as he talks about his show.

"The screen takes projection well. On recommendation from Dave Smith we had the panels painted BBC grey, which takes colour well and reduces flare."

"The main point of the design was to be modular, to be able to scale up or down. It's not a big deal to squeeze this up. Even if the projectors aren't there the screen gives a recognisable show. We tour with DL3s," here they had promoter-supplied Christie Roadsters - a 20k and 12k. "The DL3 is fantastic indoors but they do need a lot of love. We carry the Axon media server, basically the server that's in the DL3. All run off my own Hog IPC, in fact the whole control package is mine. We take some MIDI triggers from stage for one or two songs, passed by Isadora, which runs on my Mac Book into the server. I do make bright intense lighting looks, but they tend to be stabs, punctuation, again to protect the projection. In terms of lighting nothing is out; the band don't specify palette or anything on that side." Jackson chose - and I know this sounds a contradiction in terms - largely saturated pastels, with heavy hazing making that impression more profound.

The video content actually runs for approximately 50% of the songs, so Jackson is not as restricted in his lighting output as he makes it sound. "Jaygo Bloom provides the more abstract video stuff," said Jackson. "Will & Dillon's work is more cinematic. There are nine layers within the Axon so I can do pretty much what I want with content. It's especially effective for dealing with keystoneing. The screen is important, it's not just a grey wall; it looks like part of something that's supposed to be there. It's architectural, rather than just a screen."

That sounds a touch vulnerable to ridicule, until you actually see the show. It is a fact that the EL tape is alien enough to the familiar image of a screen, that it renders

the screen architectural inasmuch as it becomes a feature, not merely an object.

In the show, Jackson took greater advantage of the rest of the moving lights rigged in the roof than I had expected; even so, he used something in the region of two dozen spots and a similar number of washes, so not many, but with some well-chosen extravagant focuses out into the night sky or across the audience he certainly exploited them to scale-up his show. When he did rein them in for projection the change in level made the projected impact all the greater, but in truth the two Christie's weren't really up to the task, which is why I've hardly touched on it here. However, it should be noted that being accustomed as we are to high impact LED video presence, it was apparent that this was never the target here, the imagery is softer, subtler; as Kapranos says elsewhere in this article, in tune with the music.

After 18 months, and with all the permutations Jackson has put this system concept through, would he change anything? "I'd take more projectors, double, and some pre-production time would help. But otherwise it's been good, and it's worked everywhere."

It was notable throughout the crew, from PM Bob O'Brien down, there was no sign of exhaustion or fatigue, and none of the sniping impatience of a tour that's run too long and worn away the boundaries of personal space. "I'm lucky, because the band wanted to invest in set. It's not cheap to do it, but it looks special to them," concluded Jackson - something Kapranos addressed directly, and in charming fashion.

Sound

Michael Parker, known to band and crew alike as simply Parker (something to do with a penchant for blondes in pink Rolls Royces, I suspect) has been working for them since 2003. "I'd been doing other bands for Domino Records when they got signed. They broke in 2004 and I've been with them pretty much non-stop since then." He has done other work, notably MGMT and Hot Chip, who, by coincidence, followed Franz on stage at 2.00am this very night.

"When they kicked off in 2004 it was pretty frenetic, we did 210 shows in a year, it's been close to that intensity ever since, at least 170 shows a year."

Parker has an interesting mixing history. "I started in '99, I was mixing bands at Uni' while I studied first Computer Sciences, then a switch to Archaeology. I came from Cambridge and spent a fair bit of time at The Junction - they had a Turbosound rig I think, and I listened to what came out through it a lot. Eventually I signed up for a live sound course in London run by a chap called George Gregori."

An SAE course or some such? "No, something I found at the back of NME. Looking back it was quite relevant, George wasn't conventional, he didn't spend too much time on theory, he was keen on getting us mixing, then he'd fry things so it was feeding back terribly and leave us to find out why. He was obsessed with EQ and would spend hours listening and tweaking. Through him I got a job at the Scala - a tough room, incredibly reverberant, shiny walls, flat wooden floor, high ceiling and lots of flat glass. We had a ground-stacked Turbo' system. I spent most of my time there trying to persuade them to invest in flying the system; I submitted several proposals. Much to my satisfaction, when I went back there later my ideas had been implemented." It was a short step from the Scala to getting picked up by a passing Franz Ferdinand - and the rest, as the cliché goes, is history.

"Since I started with Franz I've done all their tours and a bit of engineering work in Alex's studio. I do like the studio work, but not half a day getting a drum sound, so I prefer the live environment."



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Franz Ferdinand

- Bob O'Brien: "Seb Williams, our video/projection tech, was invaluable to us. He joined us for a three week period and stayed for 18 months . . . and had to deal with every sort of problem on an almost daily basis to make the projection work. Basically, when we were outdoors and not able to use DL3s, he had to deal with local projectors each and every day.

- Festival Site: Side-fills were Meyer MTS4a, also supplied by Fluge, with Meyer CQ1 front-fills. The gig has a typical Stageco-style roof with goalpost wings for the PA, then projection screens and off-axis out-fills. The PA was Meyer M3D with a small number (4 cabs) of Milo to the side, and 700-HP Subs across front stage. PA looked a little care-worn, but it sounds good. At FOH Fluge provided a pair of DiGiCo D5s, and a pair of Hog IIs.

- One of the sadder aspects of Franz's hard work ethic is the loss of its lighting designer Cormac Jackson to the rest of the touring world. He's a very good operator - consider how much of a busk such shows such as Murcia festival are, even for the headline act? The Franz screen is a masterful resolution of the conflicting imperatives of impact and understatement. The same can be said of Michael Parker; he's been out with Franz virtually non-stop since he hitched his soul to their rising star in 2003. On the evidence of this show he knows his chops and knows them well.

- The drum tech Allen Johnston uses a Drum Dial: apparently these have been around a while but this was my first sight of a simple and easy tuning device: tune the drum to your satisfaction and record the skin tension it measures.



Although today is a Meyer M3D PA, a system Parker is entirely comfortable with, when his band is topping the bill he's not averse to making the PA crew drop and re-hang systems if he believes it's needed. "Seems like we did it almost every day in South America recently, one gig we had to make them do it five times till they understood and actually made the changes we asked for."

His preference is either L'Acoustic V-DOSC or dB audiotechnik J Series. "V-DOSC is a little old now though I do prefer its warmth in the low mids, but overall the J is nicer. A lot smaller and nicer, you can fly a lot more of it because it's relatively light so you always get a decent banana; a proper hang. We've done a great variety of gigs and that flexibility is important."

The tour uses Wigwag for the European market, Eighth Day Sound (EDS) in the US. "Both looked after us very well. At Bonnaroo, a major US festival, I even handed over FOH to Owen Orzack [EDS client handler] when I had to run to stage and sort a problem with an antiquated Russian synthesiser that no-one else knew how to fix." Unconventional at best, Parker has since persuaded the band that there are other, more reliable synthesisers.

His desk is a Digidesign Profile, direct from Wigwag, with FOH rack. "I have Venue Pack 3 and the seemingly limitless dynamics on the board is great; the plug-ins even better. I do try to steer away from anything too boutique. I use a DJ Bass plug-in in preference to the on-board EQ - a Rane Serato parametric which is very musical and accurate. I use it for my master EQ on the mains, and individually on the band and vocals. It has 10 filters and uses hardly any processing power. There's also an Echo Farm (vintage echo effects) and Mooga Fooga; you can now tap tempo at last, I have two foot switches down there. I use Drawmer Tour Bus gates and comps - oh, and a Crane Song tape saturation thing."

Is this a hairy band to assemble your mix in those first few minutes of festival mayhem? "There are four in the band, I get 42 inputs. The vocals are all Sennheiser e838: relatively inexpensive, they sound good for these guys and you can get them anywhere." Are they prone to failure? "No, but the odd one or two have disappeared off stage when they leap into the audience. They also look good, the band like that, and the cost means that whatever the abuse they receive, it's not like replacing some expensive Neumann."



"For Guitars I use the large diaphragm AKG 414 with a Sennheiser e906 off axis so I can mix between brightness and warmth. The keys are now mainly Moog Voyager and a sampler: I spent a week putting all the recorded sounds in there - time well spent in terms of balance. Hugh [Cowie] the keyboard tech' looks after it all for me. Better than the old Russian stuff that broke at Bonnaroo."

"It is loud on stage, no in-ears, a small but powerful backline, and for a relatively small man, the most powerful drummer in the world. Most of the band did try in-ears for the second album tour, but have since ditched them. With the two front vocal mics close to the kit I just use the bleed, Steve Albini style, rather than fight against it." He is blessed with powerful vocalists: Kapranos in particular has a strong baritone that permits cymbal splash to sit comfortably alongside.

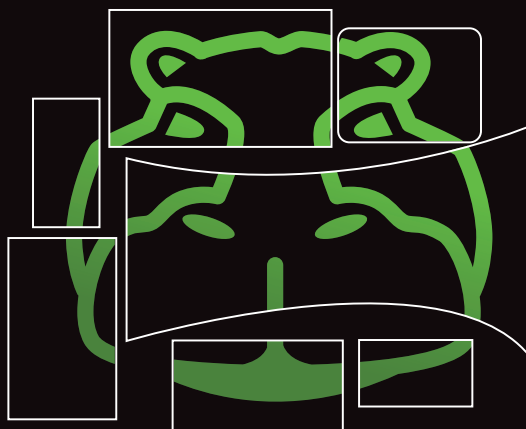
And what proves most challenging at a festival site? "I wish they would put the mix tower to one side so you're not stuck in the power alley. You end up having to mix incredibly bright to satisfy the broader coverage area. If the weather looks OK I will often take the desk off the tower and down onto the floor; I'm reasonably tall and can see enough of the stage from there. The UK especially I find very frustrating; mix platform at least four feet above the ground, enclosed in the ultra reflective tarpaulin on top and down the side. Then the noise measurement people come and set up in there." Does that really still happen? It obviously has to Parker.

For this show Parker produced a bright, well articulated mix. I especially liked the fact he didn't feel obliged to put the guitars on parity with the vocals; all the better for that one dB lower. I had a 30-minute battle to get from camera pit to FOH and approached the mix tower from left, rear, and right before gaining access, so heard the PA from every vantage point. For a flat audience



Top, Alex Kapranos. Above, Sennheiser eW300 IEM G2 transmitters.

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"The two elements - music and visual - have to be symbiotic . . . I don't like those shows - and I've seen a few, naming no names - when you feel you're just watching the show, not listening to it."

Alex Kapranos,
Franz Ferdinand



disposition Fluge (Sonido Professional) the Spanish PA company, had rigged the Meyer M3D banana rather flat, as if expecting to have to project much further than what I paced earlier in the day as 200m to the back bar area.

Monitors

Tilde Bruynooghe is a Belgian (Flemish) by birth, but moved to Amsterdam aged 18, already bitten by the audio bug. "I did the SAE audio recording course there, but I really wanted to do live and got a job at the Paradiso as house monitor engineer. Franz came through and liked what I did for them. I received a call from their tour manager two days later and here I am five years on. I've worked for other bands - KT Tunstall, Jarvis Cocker, and Wolfmother the Aussie band. I've done front-of-house at the Paradiso, but never toured in that position: I enjoy the immediacy of monitors."

Tilde now lives in Sheffield with a British musician; hence the Cocker connection, and as you'll have gathered is not just a fluent English speaker, but speaks idiomatically with all the colourful flair of the steel town where she now lives.

"We use no radio mics on stage and only Bob [Hardy] on Bass and the backline crew use IEM, the Sennheiser G2 system. We carry a set of 12 d&b M2 wedges everywhere, except South America where the routing proved prohibitive, but we still squeezed in a pair for Alex with the band's backline. The band loves them; Alex needs a lot of vocal and they're one of the best wedges around. Yes, we do get a lot of

snare and cymbals in the vocals but that's one of the reasons they prefer wedges, rather than have that in their ears; penetration is important. Each band member has an individual mix, and I use the side-fills mainly as near-fill when they wander around. I mix from a Yamaha PM5D simply for the fact you can expect to find one anywhere in the world; and of course, it's now very familiar to me so I'm not always looking down. And it's robust."

"I've used the Digidesign Venue at the O2 Academy and it's better, especially the guitar sound I was able to get, and I really want to get my hands on a Vi6; I've heard really good things about them." Soundcraft, if you're reading this, Tilde is going out on KT Tunstall soon. "We also supported Green Day in the US and they use a Studer Vista, which they let me use - sounded amazing, but way too expensive!"

"The music is very dynamic so I do have to mix a lot; I don't wait for them to ask for things, I do what I think they will expect. Alex's vocal output is very steady, but he does like to cup the mic, which is a pain. Paul [Thomson] on drums and Nick [McCarthy] on guitar both have pretty full mix; Alex is vocal only."

Alex Kapranos

I began the interview by saying how many of the crew had commented on the level of communication between band and crew, especially in terms of their stage set concepts. It's not something I'm accustomed to hearing. "We're lucky to have a really great crew who we get on with

personally," said Kapranos. "It's the best way to have a decent show. For us it's about being able to appreciate we have a creative crew. For example, before we start the touring season, Cormac and I will email ideas back and forth; then the crew and band will get involved. We often start by reference to the latest album; we'll come up with a set of aesthetics derived from that. If I were a member of the audience I'd want those aesthetics to be seen and continued on stage. That can be at a very simple level, like the backdrop with the band logo, or communicated in a subtle way with a detail in the video."

"One of the most striking ideas came from a poster we put together for a gig at The Macbeth in Hoxton. It was just a simple cut-and-paste of the band, but I knew it had passed the 'Graphics test for bands' when the bootleggers put it on the tee-shirts." A worthy observation on how close to their fan base this band chose to fly.

How does the video content evolve? "Cormac was involved, but the two main contributors were Will & Dillon - it was them that made the video for Ulysses - and then there's Jaygo [Bloom] who we've known for years. We used to stage illegal parties at the Chateau in Glasgow (a warehouse) and he produced the visuals. It's all a collaborative process." As Jackson and O'Brien previously confirmed.

And the screen? "The screen was determined by what was physically possible; but when people are at a show they want to see what's not seen before,



Above: Yamaha PM5D desks on monitor duty.

that's why Cormac's EL Tape works so well, it's a surprise. Ironically, what audiences see has to be fresh, but what they hear has to be familiar, as any band will tell you when you introduce new songs. The two elements - music and visual - have to be symbiotic: to be in tune with each other. I don't like those shows - and I've seen a few, naming no names - when you feel you're just watching the show, not listening to it." Good man.

"The amp covers (dummies) are part of the drama; we like to keep the stage minimal but bold. We don't like too much clutter. As a band we're quite physical, we've kicked our own backline over so many times that these needed to be tough as well as be there for aesthetic reasons.

"I love the old Selmer Snake Skin combo, we've taken from that and produced something new. It's a world not seen before. We took the industrial aesthetic of something like an East German power plant, where the architecture is huge and imposing; like a cathedral it diminishes the individual, makes the person small. In the same sense, when you're on stage your trying to make the audience think they're before a spectacle, you must not shy away from that as a band."

And what about that first time you got them at Glastonbury - a leap of faith, surely? "I remember jumping on top for the first time - 'f**k me, it's really high', I thought. The view was fantastic, a sea of audience with their camera-phones twinkling in the darkness, and beyond them I could see the campfires up on the hillside. Wonderful, inspiring."

And the screen, do you look at it, are you conscious of it? "It fills two extremes; it's big enough to do the job, but it's not bombastic, not arrogant. It's important to fill the space but not by puffing up something your not; it has to be tied to what the music and band are. The tape idea was from something I'd wanted to do with the instruments, I wanted it to outline the guitars so we could suddenly play in darkness and all people would see was the guitars. We tried it but found the tape produced too much noise on the pick-ups."

So there it is, a band brimming with ideas both musical and visual; and a stamina and vitality that endured throughout an 18-month trip around the globe. What was most noticeable about this show was the sense that you were watching something new; like a band that had just broken through. That's amazing after three albums and seven years - and that's the difference.

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