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- A decade down the line: Live Aid revisited
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PLASA

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A DECADE OF CHANGE

Steve Moles catches up with the stage crew who worked on Live Aid and finds out whether the ten years since has treated them kindly

That the Live Aid show at Wembley was a landmark event for the British music business hardly needs saying. The global stature of the broadcast, coupled with a similar concert in the US and many smaller national events around the world, brought pop and rock to the attention of a truly enormous audience, unparalleled in history, and let's not be churlish here, for a very worthy cause. If you need reminding of what it was like, the BBC will be broadcasting several 'specials' on July 15th (just past the tenth anniversary, the closest Saturday to the day in question), including six-and-a-half hours of recorded television footage on BBC2.

For those of us who were there - the many sound, lighting, stage and electrical crew who worked on the show - the day's events flashed by in an instant. For most, it was months before we were able to sit down and watch the video playback and really take on board what it was that we had been a part of. Despite the prestige and scale of the show, and contrary to what you might imagine, most of the crew were not chosen for particular prowess. It was a busy touring summer all around and the main lighting and sound providers (Samuelson/Vari-Lite Europe and Malcolm Hill Associates) had to draw on who was available. That's not to say competency wasn't a foremost consideration, but rather that necessity determined choice. For many of us, it was just a case of being available in the right place at the right time.

The show had a profound influence, and not just on the plight of several million Ethiopians. Most notably, it re-launched the career of Queen, who had for a couple of years been languishing in the shade. Their performance at Live Aid brought them to a wider audience and also underscored Freddie Mercury's astonishing ability to capture the undivided attention of not only the 60 odd thousand in Wembley Stadium, but also all those who watched on TV. But what of the crew? Did they all go on to greater things? Was such a high profile event a springboard to their careers? Dealing with all those it was possible to contact, and in no particular order, below is a thumb-nail sketch of where they are now.



The Live Aid show at Wembley - a landmark event.

Lighting

Mike Humenuik has been through some tumultuous times. He rose to crew chief his own tours immediately following Live Aid and topped off this phase in his career in early '92 with an extensive Joe Cocker tour. He then came off the road and took over as warehouse manager for Samuelson Lighting Division at Fairway Drive, a role he developed and defined until his departure in the Spring of '94. Following this, he has returned to the road, perhaps the place he most enjoys to be, and is currently crew chief for the seemingly never-ending round of tours undertaken by Take That. Curiously, that band seems to have become a haven for several of the Live Aid crew.

At 50 years of age, Brian Condrey, if not one of the oldest men of rock and roll, is certainly one of the oldest active crewmen on the road! One of life's gentlemen, Brian has never felt the urge to stray away from touring, despite his age, and has contrived to arrange other interests in his life. He is, like many roadies, an accomplished musician and when time permits still writes and records his own material. Will he ever retire? "No, I still enjoy it too much." Brian has been working almost solidly with Take That for the past two years, imposing his calming influence on LD Simon Tutchenor.

Kate Crampton was, to my knowledge, the

only female crew member on the day. It reminds us all that it was only 10 years ago when, with the exception of those wonderful women in the catering department, women were a rarity on tour, certainly amidst the technical crew. Kate remained a lampie until 1990, by which time she'd made a speciality of running the main stage lighting system for the Roskilde festival in Denmark each year. By this time she was married, inevitably to a sound engineer, and the two of them, both recognising the immense strain touring places upon a marriage, left the road and took 'proper jobs'. Kate has since run a Ritz video shop and a seaside boarding house, written a children's book and is currently vying to become a local magistrate (citizens of Scarborough, you have been

warned). Does she miss the road? "Only the money. Well, the money and the people. Hmmm. The money, the people and the travel."

Steve Nolan is a well known name in this journal. Steve has, on his own devices and through a long-standing relationship with Patrick Woodroffe, built a varied career. He now divides his time between crew chiefing, lighting design, operating and organising some of Patrick's more esoteric shows. In recent years, he has carved out a well deserved reputation for lighting classical music.

Phil Freeman was lighting designer for Live Aid: it fell upon him to provide a generic system that would satisfy the cameras, as well as the egos of the stars. Central to his task was having to fend off the numerous 'suggestions' submitted by Peter Clark (SuperMick) and Paul Turner (then head of Samuelson Lighting) about how he should do this! Phil is of similar vintage to Brian Condrey - 48 this year, and he too is still on the road, designing most recently for one of the Glastonbury Festival stages. Like many others featured here he is "... content to earn a crust, and have a good time doing it."

As for myself, Steve Moles, well as you can see I now scribble for a living and I must say it's very nice. Do I miss the road? No, I've no desire to get hot and sweaty in the back of a freezing cold truck at 3.00am outside Madison Square Gardens in the depths of winter, thank you.

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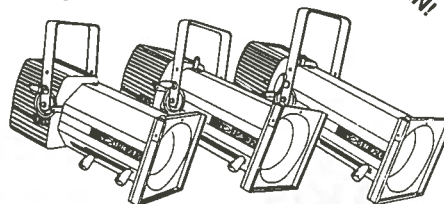
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Sound

Malcolm Hill wound up his PA rental company, Malcolm Hill Associates (The Live Aid PA supplier), in late '92, and is now concentrating purely on his sound equipment manufacturing company, Hill Audio. Designing sound equipment is what he likes to do best.

Despite being company boss, Malcolm played a hands-on role on the day, and amongst many other items had his manufacturing company build a custom stage box for the show. He also provided two monitor and two FOH consoles for the event, something we now accept as commonplace but in 1985 was considered something of an extravagance.

Martin Conolly did all the logistical planning for the concert, arranging rehearsals and scheduling in crewmen and equipment, but wasn't actually there on the day, as his wife was in hospital about to have baby. Martin left MHA days prior to its wind-up in 1992, jumping straight on to the then-current Status Quo tour. He soon became their monitor man and through regular contact with Capital Sound (Quo's PA supplier), was asked in '94 to join the company as rental manager by its owner, Keith Davis.

Mike Scarff had the unenviable task (with Andrew Jones q.v.) of 'baby-sitting' the FOH consoles on the day, hand-holding many a band's engineer through an intense 20 minutes of patching and EQ hell prior to the band's arrival on stage, ready or not! Already a well-established sound engineer, Mike was also Malcolm's partner in the PA rental business at the time. Mike now owns Malcolm Hill Associates outright in the U.S. (trading as MHA Audio), which is based one hour West of Washington DC. He still mixes when the need arises but devotes much of his time to the

running of the company.

Andrew Jones also now has his own company, Media Mobiles, with partner Andy Peacock. The company provides mobile location vehicles for the photographic industry, a Mercedes 709 van fitted with TV/video, fridge, toilet etc, etc. Andrew is still an active sound engineer, having worked almost non-stop with Paul Weller for the last three years, he has also diversified into studio engineering, having recently worked on both Paul Weller and Carmel's latest live albums.

Andrew was, in fact, only supposed to be doing sound for Midge Ure on the day (being Ultravox's FOH engineer at the time) but, "It was obvious that Mike Scarff would need support, and as I had worked with Malcolm Hill equipment many times, I volunteered and ended up out there for the whole day."

Phil Tame is still active as a sound man, dividing his time between John Henry's and Big City Sound. He has been working as a FOH engineer for the past seven years mixing for the likes of Tanita Tikaram, Bonnie Tyler, Fish and more recently Warren G, but for Live Aid, he was responsible for monitors. Phil would like to tour more (he mainly does one-offs these days), but as a father (boy and girl aged four and two respectively) is still quite content to have so much time to spend with his kids. Phil also rather bravely volunteered that he thought it might have been him who was responsible for the faux pas of the event - the failure of Paul McCartney's microphone - but when pushed he said he couldn't really be certain.

The sound crew ran to a cast of thousands, and most of them still appear to be on the road: 'Privet' Hedge is on tour with Eric Clapton; Tom Boyle is looking after the stage set for Wet Wet Wet; Steve Dove was last sighted heading off to

Showco in Dallas, but according to them has never arrived; Paul Timmins is working for Capital Sound on Take That; Kevin Hopgood is baby-sitting monitors on Simple Minds; and John Callis progressed onto monitors and is currently working for Mike and the Mechanics.

For all the other working crew on the day, scaff/riggers like Tom and Ashley, the lampies who worked unseen and non-stop for five days to illuminate the stadium roof, and the many others not mentioned here, apologies. Space only permits a focus upon those who worked the stage.

So perhaps not so earth-breaking after all for those who 'only serve'. A couple of career changes here and there, but even then not born out of the event, but more from economic or social influences. No meteoric runs up the ladder of success, no rapid promotions, but then maybe this confirms how fortuitous was the choice forced upon those who had to decide. Most of the crew contacted here, both sound and lights, are of the opinion that the London show was superior in presentation and professionalism than that staged in Philadelphia, and I've heard many an American admit as much also. I mention this as Phil Freeman is exceedingly modest about his lighting contribution: "There's always somebody better, I'm not great." And yet acclamation of the visual aspect of the show is practically universal. Similarly, if one screw-up with Paul McCartney's vocal mic is the only thing the sound crew have to fret over, then considering the circumstances their achievement was extraordinary.

For the many who still practise the same role they had on that wonderful day, surely their continued presence on the job, in spite of their age, underlines their lasting prowess.

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