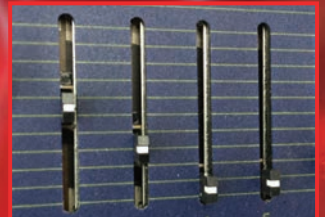digital edition

Queen

with Adam Lambert,
Live at Leeds First Direct Arena

Also Inside:

Big Fat Wedding
An Italian-Indian Spectacular . . .

The Pocket Console
And DMX testing tools . . .

Barnum the Musical
Unusual touring demands . . .

**PLUS: Stageco Looks to the Future ● Violetta: The Lyon Kings
Lenny Kravitz's Good Impression ● VER-Live's Royal Performance
Lighting Huddersfield's Victoria Tower ● In Profile: Carol Scott
Entertaining Sustainability ● New Products . . . and more!**

Download our FREE Apple & NEW Android apps at www.lsionline.co.uk/digital

Classic Gear: QLab

Rob Halliday takes a nostalgic but instructive look back at the tools that have shaped the industry . . .

What makes a classic piece of gear? In my mind, one factor has been something that causes a dramatic shift in the way we work - because curiously, many in the entertainment technology world show no fear of new tools, and once the pioneers accept them they tend to spread rapidly.

Case in point: QLab, a powerful piece of software for handling audio, show control and, later, video that seemed to come out of nowhere and can now be found running more shows, big and small, than you might possibly imagine.

Of course, software has the advantage of being easy to get into peoples' hands, particularly if you let keen early adopters have it for nothing. QLab's creator, Chris Ashworth, took this approach almost a decade ago; having created a Mac application to play back audio files for a theatre friend, he announced it on the theatre-sound listserv - you could try it free, but Ashworth wanted to know what you thought of it . . .

QLab arrived at a moment ripe for technical transition. Sound had moved past mechanical replay (reel-to-reel, carts, mini disk) to digital replay from samplers, but those systems were slightly cumbersome, with the need to get files into the sampler and set up some kind of show

control computer to trigger the cues. QLab offered two sets of functionality: it was a show control system that could trigger other devices via MIDI, allowing it to fit in with existing systems. But it could also play back audio files directly, with programmed fades across multiple tracks to multiple outputs. It could replace your sampler entirely - all with a friendly interface based on a comfortable, familiar theatrical structure of cues and with a big, easy to hit 'Go' button in one corner of the screen.

It wasn't perfect or complete on its first iteration, of course - software never is. But it did enough things well enough to grab the attention of some serious professionals who were impressed enough to take time to give Ashworth feedback. He, in turn, responded quickly. QLab improved, evolved, gained more users, and set off a snowball effect where now it is the dominant audio playback/show control platform around the world. As the website notes, 12 out of the 14 shows to win the Tony Award for Best Sound from the categories' 2008 introduction to its demise last year used QLab - but its reach extends from the fringe to the Olympics.

Over the years, its scope has expanded still further - it can now also do a pretty good job of running video alongside everything else.
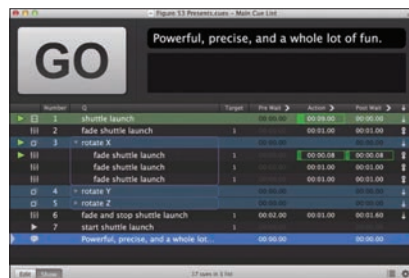
And while for a complex show it'll cost you money (the price very fair for the power it offers) a free version is still available to learn or do simple shows with - and there's an interesting alternative model where you can just rent a licence if you only need the software for a short period of time.

QLab is no longer just Ashworth working alone in his apartment; his company, Figure53, is a thriving enterprise with 12 employees and an office in Baltimore that doesn't just evolve QLab, now up to v3, but also creates other useful tools for the entertainment industry. It's proof that if you build something better the people will come - and that if you look after them you can build a thriving business around it. More than a classic, a role model for anyone looking to build tools for our crazy world.

Figure53: > //figure53.com/qlab
On those 12 out of 14 shows:
> //figure53.com/notes/2014-06-15-tony-can-you-hear-me