

ELTON: LIVE AND LOUD

DON'T SHOOT ME, I'M ONLY THE MONITOR MAN. KEITH CARROLL TELLS MARK CUNNINGHAM ABOUT WORKING WITH ELTON JOHN



Fifteen years on from their last world tour as a duo, Elton John & Ray Cooper were back at the Royal Albert Hall before Christmas for a residency of Claptonesque proportions. The formula of the 12 nights was pretty much the same as that '79 tour – the one that included the first rock performances in Russia – but with two major differences.

Firstly, Elton's grand piano never sounded so good, but then we didn't have MIDI 15 years ago. Secondly, one would not dare suggest that Reg is going a bit mutton in his old age, but his monitors never sounded so loud! To dwell on the latter point, I cornered Elton's monitor engineer of five years, Keith Carroll.

HIGH LEVEL MONITORING - WITH A GRAND PIANO IN TRIPLICATE

hours wearing Garwood in-ear monitors and he liked their sound. But he claimed they made him feel too isolated.

He does like to feel the pressure of loud music; I've had to go up to Crest amplification on the wedges because at the levels that the instruments need to be, I was blowing speakers by driving the amps too hard. I was

"At the microphone position it's around 120dB, which is quite dangerous," said Keith, a Harrison SM5 user. "I got Elton to sit down in rehearsal for about five

creating square waves and taking speakers out."

Understandably, the amount of monitor spillage through the vocal microphone has been of considerable concern to Clive Franks, Elton's FOH engineer (Yamaha PM4000) since the early Seventies and co-producer of many of the Pinner pianist's greatest hits, including *Song For Guy*.

He said: "On some tours leading up to this there has literally been only a 5dB difference between the monitors and his vocal coming to me on the desk. I was almost riding the fader between each word. So a reliable microphone became crucial and after trying out Sennheisers and Beyers, we eventually found the Shure Beta 87 was perfect for us. Elton has to stay right on the mic for it to be most effective and fortunately his mic technique is brilliant. As soon as he moves off-mic, the rejection is great and I'm now getting a good 20dB headroom with the separation."

There are not too many singer-pianists who can keep an audience mesmerised for nearly three hours, but it's not too much of a surprise when one considers the three main qualities of this show – some of the greatest songs of the modern era, the most eccentric rock percussionist in the world and Elton's piano.

Clive revealed the secrets behind its stunning sound: "Elton recently changed to a Yamaha grand after using a Steinway for 20 years. We have a couple of condenser mics sitting on the framework in there and we are hooked up for MIDI. What the audience hears is a combination of the natural piano and stereo digital sounds from a Yamaha Clavinova and Roland MKS-20, Technics PX107 and TG-77 string modules which Dale Sticha (keyboard technician) looks after by the monitor console.

"I use the condensers to get the high, breathy sound out of the piano. The Roland has an enormous, fat, bass-heavy sound that really accentuates the left hand bottom scale of the keyboard and the Yamaha gives us a general mid-range signal.

We also have strings fed to us all the time. Elton and I worked out where we wanted them and I ride them in and out at the places we agreed on. Individually, the three sounds don't totally work.

It's the blend of the three signals that sounds so unique and magical, particularly in an intimate venue such as the Albert Hall."



CLIVE FRANKS (L) AND DAVE KOB

Credits

Production Manager: Keith Bradley

Asst. Production Manager:

George Hoadley

Stage Design & Concept:

Mark Fisher, Patrick Woodroffe

Sound Design: Clair Bros Audio

Lighting: Vari-Lite Europe

Lighting Designer: Patrick Woodroffe

Lighting Director: Shaun Richardson

Sound Engineer: Clive Franks

System Engineer: Dave Kob (Clair Bros)

Monitor Engineer: Keith Carroll

Keyboard Technician: Dale Sticha

Percussion Technician: Bill Harrison

Stage Manager: Denis McManus

Rigger: Eric Porter

Technician: Bobby Reid

Sound Technician: Jamie Connolly

Vari-Lite Technician: Rick Worsfold

Trucking: Transam

Travel: Trinifold Travel