

On Tour

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NATACHA ATLAS: CHARISMATIC

of ideas as the set unfolds. With thoughtful and creative precision, gentle rotating gobo mixes on the cyc, moody side washes, colour changing shadows from the floor lamps and the occasional burst from strobes and scans, the West Refectory melts into the background and we are in a wonderful world of colour and movement.

SONIC DIVERSITY

Sound engineer and tour manager Gerry Wilkes has to wrestle with an assortment of very diverse instruments.

Along with the more orthodox drums, percussion, bass, guitar, keyboards and clarinet, there are some Eastern instruments, such as the Egyptian tablas, dharabuka, and an Indian wind instrument called the shenai.

"The most difficult of these to work with are probably the tablas," Gerry reflects. "They are multi-tone instruments — a bit like singing percussion — so you get loads of overtones because they are so touch sensitive."

This meeting of ancient Eastern instruments and Western technology can be problematic. "You can't really EQ the tabla because of all the variations in overtone depending upon how it's being played, so it's a case of the sound simply reinforcing those things, to get them over the top of everything else that's going on," says Gerry. For all that, he loves them as an instrument.

The PA is a Turbosound Floodlight from Skan. Its compact size is ideal for the venues TGU are playing and the ergonomics of the

rig also suits them well. Gerry explains that with plenty of open mics on stage, generally loud levels and five channels of sequencing, the flat response of the box at the top means he doesn't have to dig too deep with the EQ.

Tonight they are using four bass bins and two high-mid boxes per side, which easily fills the room. Although not the ideal sound conditions, once the band are up and running and the punters working up a healthy, if pungent, lather you couldn't ask for much more.

The powerful bass kicks in at lower abdomen level without being domineering and further up the scale there were no compromises in the subtleties of all those extravagant TGU sounds.

Gerry uses a Soundcraft 8000 desk and has his own toy — a Klark Teknik parametric which is used on Natacha and rapper Neil. "Neil is a big guy with a big voice. Having the high and low pass filters on there and all that extremely good EQ really helps me out."

Effects wise, Gerry describes his set up as "pretty much standard" — a couple of SPX900 reverbs for drum sounds and specials, a Rev 5 for vocals, one delay line and a fair sprinkling of compressors for the sequencers and keyboards. "There's a lot of difference in output levels between the various sequencers — some are from scratchy old Arabic records — so I run all the machines into a group and compress the group gently."

The basic tour brief was to make the TGU live experience something distinct from the albums, which are smooth, sequence based and sometimes very ambient, so the sound was raw and punchier without being harsh. Or as Gerry puts it: "Like Transglobal but with a touch of that BIG seventies funk sound." He admits that the combination of jobs was a bit

taxing in Europe; when he had a deluge of production grief the sound engineering didn't always receive its fair share of attention. "But I really want to see the band succeed, and that's why I offered to take on both jobs."

Gerry is quick to praise the crew, monitor man Al Jones being the fourth member of his team, as well as bringing to my attention that they are all doubling up on two jobs at times. He also states emphatically that the hire companies have provided excellent deals for the tour.

"Pople should be looking more at this level," he adds. "It's very well supported by the public and there's a lot of exciting acts coming up through it at present."

With a touch of irony I exited the gig, warm, glowing and very chilled to be confronted by the bizarre spectacle of a Chieftain tank that had appeared out of the blue opposite the entrance doors. Draped over the gun barrel was a banner advertising rag week! After a quick check with my consciousness for hallucinogens, I can only hope that this now impotent great lumbering hulk of destruction was put there as some surrealist art statement!

Credits

**Tour Manager /
FOH Sound Engineer:**

Gerry Wilkes

Lighting Designer:

Skippy (Steve Monk)

Monitor Engineer: Al Jones

Backline: Keith Dunn

PA Riggers:

Mick Brown / Mike Hornby

Sound Equipment: Skan

Lighting Equipment:

The Spot Co / Neg Earth

Catering: Buzz

Trucking: Stardes

Buses: Wharfedale / Nuneaton