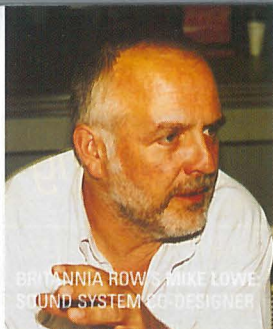


HEATHCLIFF/sound

BRITANNIA ROW / MIKE LOWE
SOUND SYSTEM DESIGNER

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Shoe Shuffle. Commented Mike Lowe: "More of these theatre shows are now crossing the frontiers and bringing people in with different disciplines; for example you are getting conference specialists doing the projection work and a lot of the lighting certainly wasn't designed for theatre and wouldn't be there if it wasn't for rock'n'roll. Cliff has always wanted to do a musical and *Wuthering Heights* is something that captured his imagination.

"As for the sound, it's a mix between rock'n'roll hi-fi and the spoken word. But to put bums on seats people need to be more and more adventurous and on that basis we look forward to becoming more involved in legitimate theatre – on shows with a spirit of technical adventure."

Mike Lowe commented: "*Heathcliff* certainly came together properly this year and the sound design has had to track the music and direction as it has continued to evolve."

He added: "In a theatre performance we recognise that you cannot kill people at the front in order to get the sound to the back – you have to use a lot of delays. You are getting up to fairly high SPLs, and the fact that Turbosound Flashlight/Floodlight, which will be used on the main system, have tight and predictable dispersion patterns, helps a great deal – particularly with a lot of radio being used on stage. When you're going into a theatre for a residency it enables you to install your rear sound effects properly on three levels, and we would take the same approach with quad; but you simply don't have time to do that on a rock tour."

Other Brit Row crew members seconded to *Heathcliff* for the duration of the run include Vince Sharpe (looking after the radio mics) and Maria Mazarracin (tending cues for the Akai hard disk and a DAT player with effects like wind noises), while Paul Johnson is their man PA system technician. Huw Richards is assisting Colin whilst Oasis are off the road.

Other Britannia Row crew have also formed an advance party to add necessary fly points and run cabling and so on into the feature theatres, in preparation for an easy production load-in and PA rig when the time comes.

THE SYSTEM

Colin Norfield outlined the system design – beginning with the NIA itself. "The fact that the tour started at the NIA has been a challenge in itself," he said, "because *Heathcliff* is a theatre show. Even with the drapes the NIA is still really an arena; the sound is still bouncing off the back wall. Mind you, compared to the Earl's Court dress rehearsals the NIA is wonderful. There, with the whole cast and band in an empty room, we were kind of stabbing in the dark."

He added: "Cliff's fans are pretty loyal to him, and I don't think this is quite what they expect. But they love it."

Let's start on stage. The band comprises drums, bass, guitar, three keys and three vocals. Mics are cardioid Sennhesier 104s "because when they're standing very close we get so much spill down them – they're used on the five principals and five 'elements' (on-stage backing vocals) and three dancers".

All are on Garwood in-ear monitoring – there are four wedges up in the truss, too, one in each corner, principally for the *Journey* sequence. "Hand Held

Audio supplied the Garwoods," commented Norfield, "and they're supporting us brilliantly. JJ mixes the monitors on a PM4000. But Cliff's been using in-ears for years – in fact, he was one of the first to try them."

BRP also purchased several AKG C568 shotgun and C547 boundary layer microphones for the job.

By far the *strangest* implement in the sound crew's armoury here has to be the Redburn Transfer 45ft trailer – carpeted and curtained-off to accommodate a drum booth / studio.

On all productions the band are positioned remotely from both stage and audience. At the NIA they are working, on wired cans, inside this trailer but in Edinburgh and Manchester they will perform from a sealed-over pit, while at Hammersmith they'll perform from an upstairs room. The band receive their channels through the cans from the PM4000M monitor board, and then create their own mix levels via Formula Sound Que-10 mixers.

IN THE AIR TONIGHT

The tour commences with arena-proportioned sound coverage for the 4,500-capacity NIA, and then scales down to a Broadway-type set-up in the provincial theatres. The main PA system comprises a Turbosound Flashlight/Floodlight combination, with Galaxy Hotspot fills along the edge of the proscenium for front row coverage.

"The main PA," explained Norfield, "consists of two clusters of Flashlight, and we're using Floodlight boxes for downfills, where normally we'd use Underhangs. I mix bass in the air, too, because with this audience they wouldn't be too happy if we put in loads of ground-stacked bass like we'd have with Floyd or Oasis or another rock band. All the band are routed through the main PA clusters, and there are theatre-style infills using Galaxy Hotspots.

"On this show, I'm running the whole system in three-way mode, and all the low end is coming off an auxiliary on the Midas XL4 house desk into a BSS FDS360. There are six Flashlight sub boxes in all. I always run the low end separately for Cliff – including his rock shows – so that I can fine-tune it."

Delay speakers at the NIA comprise nine Floodlight boxes in a wide arc two-thirds of the way back. "They're just for vocals," explained Norfield. "We tried to remove some bounce-back by lowering the main PA."

The delay and quadrasonic FX systems are reasonably complex, and appropriately enough (for the company so closely associated with those pioneers of quad, Pink Floyd) there are elements of things sonically Floydian in the surround-sound design.

BRP purchased 16 JBL 4892 Array speakers and 15 JBL 1710Ps for the surround and rear delays, with a major change-around of these elements due between the NIA and the later theatre shows.

A series of Floodlight quad boxes some 15 feet in from the back of the auditorium is supplemented by another set of JBLs hard against the back wall – forming a sort of 'quad in-fill'. The reason for this duplication is simple, explained Lowe: "We couldn't get the main quads far enough against the

back wall because of weight restrictions in that part of the roof. So we supplemented the main delay system by putting in a rear quad fill spanning the back 15 rows, with eight JBL 1710P cabinets." For the theatre shows, the JBL 1710Ps will be used on stalls delays and at each balcony level – in effect becoming the main delay system – while quad will be served by their newly-acquired JBL 4892s.

IN CONTROL

Desks initially deployed at the NIA were a Midas XL4, an XL3 and a Yamaha O2R. However, when I visited, the XL3 was shortly to be replaced by the aforementioned reminder of the BRP warehouse's status as a Pink Floyd world heritage site – a 16-channel Midas 'Quad' board, custom-built to provide part of the Floyd's quad routing facilities. (Actually, there's more. Prior to the Midas Quad desk's arrival, Colin was using a 'quad pot' run off the desk's auxiliaries, which once toured the globe atop Rick Wright's keyboards.) "But the quad board will make it more controllable," affirmed Norfield. "I'll be able to access any quad or in-fill from any board because they're all bused together. So I'll end up with the XL4 and the quad board.

"All vocals and all the band are on the part-automated XL4, mainly so that I can programme the band's levels on the left-hand side, using the desk automation to store cue sequences." For track recording the production started out with Tascam DA-88s, ganged-up in threes, but transferred at a later stage to the faster Akai hard disk format.

The band must be pretty reliable, then? I ask. "They certainly are! [he laughs]. I'm using the 40-channel XL3 for the AKG float mics (for backups, in the unlikely event of the radios going down)."

He outlined the show's digital domain. "The Yamaha O2R has some backing and effects tracks running through it, off an Akai DR16 hard disk recorder, which effectively is automated through the O2R."

He paused to reflect: "We used to use the Roland DM80s, on which you can go in and change the levels internally – they were really ahead of the game at the time, because now we need an external mixer to do the job!" At present there's no Midi linking between desks and effects: "Although this might change as we get going, I'll probably Midi the O2R up to the XL4.

"Outboard includes Summit DCR200 compressors, BSS FDS960 graphics for the princi- ➔ p30

MONITOR ENGINEER 'JJ'
WITH YAMAHA PM4000M
MONITOR CONSOLE