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# TANGERINE DREAM AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL

words and pictures by Steve Moles

As with Peter Gabriel last month, my early career also involved with Tangerine Dream. My time at Charisma Records eventually ran into the sand around 1975. I kept a roof over my head taking a job delivering blood to hospitals when suddenly one evening I got a call from Germany: could I fly to Munich the next morning? The pay was \$600US per week - a Kings ransom for strike-ridden Britain - so needless to say, I was off.

Tangerine Dream was touring with a big water-cooled laser, a 21W argon. For this era it was a monster and travelled separately in its own three-ton truck, which I would be driving (as well as rigging PA and lights). The laser, travelling on its own ATA Carnet, was valued for transit purposes at \$1/4m. Rented from Lasarium in the USA, its operation was overseen by Ron Lazar (how could I not remember that name?). An ex-US Navy man and barely demobbed from duty in Vietnam, Ron was a missile guidance expert. Apparently there was some technology overlap with the controls for all the actuating mirrors that bounced the beams around the concert hall . . .

This was 1976/77 and local authorities knew nothing about lasers, except that they should be afraid. Scrabbling for expertise we were, as we travelled across Europe, visited by a motley band of "experts"; several physicists from local universities, a few bemused fire officers, and one dentist who apparently had once attended a course involving lasers used to harden a new form of dental amalgam. Never having encountered anything quite so powerful, most were fascinated by the technology: they spent scant few minutes checking that Ron and his assistant were aware that neat beams into people's eyes would render them blind - and then indulged an hour or two while Ron showed off the tricks.

The Tangs, as we called the band, were wonderful to tour with: Edgar Froese and his wife Monique particular sweeties. These were the days before tour catering and we'd often eat together at local restaurants, chatting, laughing, drinking wine. The band was good friends with Salvador Dali and we visited him at his home in Cadaqués. Surreal is a good summary of the tour: the audio was primitive, I forget the PA but the desk was a Mackie, with a multicore that was microphonic - tap it and

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## TANGERINE SEGMENTS

- Gerd Plakovits, FOH sound: "I also like Midas and the Soundcraft Series 5 for analogue desks. With the PA, for me my preference is Meyer, or JBL Vertec if I'm mixing a rock band."
- The show opens with Edgar Froese's daughter playing the grand piano in a dress laced with LEDs. She plays a pleasant classical piece; her father emerges stage right, crosses the stage, kisses her on the nape of the neck and then stands listening at the far end of the piano. Suddenly he erupts and lashes the exposed string board with a leather cat-'o'-nine-tails. I wonder what Marksons would say if they knew Edgar Froese was lashing their grand piano?





## SHOW CREW CREDITS:

**Production manager:** Paul Timmins

**Stage manager:** Charles Ellery

**Audio crew chief:** Liam Tucker

**FOH tech:** Ant Standing

**Monitor tech:** Dan Kent

**PA tech:** Finbar Neenan

**PA tech:** Rob Wilkins

**Lighting crew chief:** Steve Rusling

**Dimmer tech:** Tom Crosbie

**Video tech:** Mark Cranham

**Head chef:** Sean Patterson

## SUPPLIER CREDITS:

**Sound & Production:** Capital Productions

**Lighting:** Bandit Lites

**Video:** XL Video

**Catering:** Eat Your Hearts Out

**Local Crew:** Production House

**Risers:** Music Bank

**Trucking:** Fly by Nite

**Lasers:** Discotec

• Charlie Ellery, Capital Sound: "The RAH house technical supervisor Simon Willets has been great, and Christine Boveniser; they've both been here since we arrived and been absolutely great. It's a very supportive team at the Albert Hall."

• Any difficulties working with an all-German band crew on a one-off? "It's been as nice as it can be, quite a pleasant day," said Steve 'Stoner' Rusling of Bandit Lites.

• Paul Timmins, production manager: "This show came about because of tour manager Brian Coles - we have a good rapport with him. He originally approached us for sound, but then he had to withdraw from the tour and take care of prior commitments. Before departing he asked us to take care of production."



the PA thumped - and so it had to be very cautiously routed to stage. Besides the laser we had just two 12-lamp PAR 64 Genie towers, yet this was considered a spectacular show. I arrived at the Albert Hall on 1 April 2010 expecting no less.

#### Production

A quick conversation with Paul Timmins of Capital Sound, production manager du jour, elicited the response I'd thought inevitable: "The band have their own sound engineers, LD and video director. None of them speak good English."

Timmins had several reasons to think this; the show was a UK one-off, the end of a five-gig jaunt around Europe. Primarily it seems the general level of communication between artist and service provider prior to arrival had been poor: "The rider they sent was dated 2008,"

said Timmins. "In that respect, this is unusual for us," he continued as we walked down to the production office. "The band's German promoter brought us in to produce the gig but there was a certain lack of information. For example, during the load-in, a German laser company turned up in a small truck. There was nothing in the advance spec' about lasers and sadly the documentation they brought with them was all in German. The RAH did try on their behalf, but there was never much chance of getting something like that approved by Westminster Council on the day. There are proper procedures in place and that's how it should be."

It's not outside the realms of ability for any of the establishment sound, lighting or video service providers to production manage a show, sub-contracting in the other technologies, but it's not normal, surely? "Actually, it's something we've been doing at Capital

## EQUIPMENT LIST:

### LIGHTING

#### FRONT:

4 x Arri 1kW  
3 x 19° ETC Source Four profiles  
2 x Martin Professional MAC 2000 Profile  
2 x Martin Professional MAC 2000 Wash  
2 x 8-Lites

#### MID:

4 x Arri 1kW  
2 x 19° ETC Source Four profiles  
4 x Martin Professional MAC 2000 Profile  
3 x Martin Professional MAC 2000 Wash  
3 x Martin Professional Atomic 3000 strobes

#### BACK:

3 x Martin Professional MAC 2000 Profile  
4 x Martin Professional MAC 2000 Wash  
2 x ACL Bar Long Black PAR 64  
6 x GLP Impression

#### FLOOR:

2 x ACL Bar Long Black PAR 64  
6 x GLP Impression  
2 x Le Maitre G300 (Haze Mode)  
2 x JEM AF-1 DMX Fan

### SOUND

#### FOH:

1 x Yamaha PM5D-RH  
1 x Meyer Galileo 616 loudspeaker management  
1 x XTA GQ600 Dual 31-band graphic eq  
1 x Denon DN635 Pro CD player  
1 x Wi-Fi enabled Tablet Remote Control

#### PA SYSTEM:

2 x Meyer Milo flying grid  
24 x Meyer Milo 90 line array loudspeakers  
4 x Meyer Milo 120 down-fill line array loudspeaker  
4 x Meyer Milo 120-I insert baffle

#### SIDES:

2 x Meyer Mica flying grids  
24 x Meyer Mica line array loudspeaker  
Ground:  
6 x Meyer 700 HP self-powered sub-bass  
2 x Meyer UPQ-1P loudspeaker  
4 x Adam Hall Tripod loudspeaker stand  
4 x Meyer MS UPA-1P loudspeaker  
6 x Meyer M1D line array loudspeaker  
Monitor Console:  
1 x Yamaha M7CL mixing console  
14 x Martin Audio LE1500 wedge loudspeaker



#### RADIO MICS:

2 x Shure Beta 58A capsules  
2 x Shure U2 - S2 handheld transmitter  
1 x Shure U4D - S2 dual receiver

#### RIGGING:

4 x CM Lodestar 2-tonne  
10 x 2-tonne point rigging kit  
2 x 4-way motor distribution unit  
2 x 4-way handset motor controller





since 2000. We don't do it for tours - it wouldn't do for us to be taking work away from all the excellent freelance PMs out there - but for something like this, where a band is coming into the UK for just one show and carrying only backline, then it makes sense. We do more than just provide a sound system, supplying engineers as well if needed. Capital Productions is a busy department, we have four such shows here at the Albert Hall in April, including this one."

Timmins pretty much runs Capital Sound on a day-to-day basis, as my old friend and Capital's founder, Keith Davis (no, I'll never forget that Iggy Pop tour) unwinds himself from the business and builds an 'alternative' lifestyle in the Black Hills of Wales. Doesn't Timmins' absence when producing shows prove a problem in that respect? "We have others who can do this, notably Charlie Ellery who does all our stuff for the Ministry of Defence (MoD), so yes, I do try to back

away, unless it's Level 42." Timmins is bonded to the band. "I did several tours in my formative years. But I should clarify one thing, we provide production at a technical level - we don't do flowers and carpets." Which didn't stop him organising catering.

Timmins brought Ellery in for this show as his stage manager for the in/out: "The band has their own SM for their gear," Ellery began. "It's actually the first time I've been in here since the lift was put in," a measure of just how often Ellery is away in The Falklands, Iraq or Afghanistan with the MoD shows. "This place did used to be gruelling for the crew but here we are at 5pm and everyone is comfortable and happy. We started at eight in the morning, had everything on stage by 10, PA up and finished by 11, lights broke for lunch at 1pm, but the trusses were flown by noon, all done - so it is a lot better. We also brought in risers for the band, hired from Music

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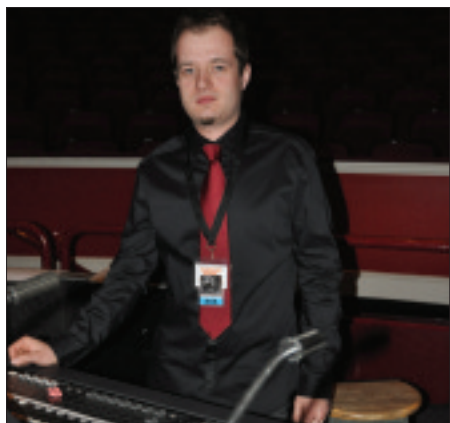
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From top:  
Lighting director Gerd Schneider.  
Mick Freer of Bandit with Gerd Schneider.  
Production manager Paul Timmins and stage manager Charlie Ellery.  
FOH sound engineer Gerd Plakovits.

Facing page:  
Dan Kent (left) and Ant Standing (right).

Bank. They're pretty big, a 4ft high 32ft by 10ft back stage platform for percussion and drums and saxophone and keys; then two 2ft high 10ft by 10ft for the keyboard set-ups. The band's crew turned up at 1:30pm and having told us previously that they would take care of ordering a grand piano, promptly asked us to do it for them. Marksons had a concert grand to us by 3pm - they're the RAH's regular supplier and responded very quickly."

Overlooked lasers and pianos apart, Timmins had mentioned the language barrier: was this an issue? "Although their command of English is not great, the band crew all know what they're doing, so it might not be great at the detail level, but it's worked out fine and everyone is happy."

#### Sound

Gerd Plakovits comes from Austria, "the band live there now", he informed. "Well between there and Berlin actually; but it's easier for them to have an Austrian crew." He seemed to have mastered the language pretty well, I thought, though he modestly said "my English is not so good."

As a one-off, this was a pressure day for a sound engineer to arrive early afternoon to an unknown system: I asked Plakovits for a bigger explanation of the tour. "With tonight here at the Albert Hall we have done just five shows and this is the last night of the tour. We played Lisbon, Barcelona, Paris, Zoetermeer [Netherlands] and London. Each place we get local PA, I have had Meyer, and L-Acoustics. I prefer the Meyer, it's more transparent than the V-DOSC, and I don't think the V-DOSC projects so far in the mids."

Capital has provided a mixed system of Meyer Mica and Milo line arrays. "We've done one of our standard arrays for here," said Standing, "Milo for mains left and right, two lines of Mica for side hangs; fill around the stage and choir stalls is UPAs, M1Ds and 700HP subs."

The flown lines were high and long enough to cover the gallery, though Standing turned off the top zone when the Gallery failed to sell. "We have the Galileo out front. I cruise the room during the show with the Tablet PC to trim, but this set-up has proved good in the past and usually requires little attention. The first couple of rows in front of the subs do suffer but there's little choice, normally we

prefer to fly the subs. The low end does sum in the middle a bit but the energy levels are generally very low so neither thing is a real problem."

The Meyer is all a lot newer than V-DOSC, this is second generation line array since Dr Heil started the revolution; so to make fair comparison I asked, had Plakovits used the K1? "Oh yes, at a festival. It is very good. But I have to say, the Vienna Stadthalle is one venue I know very well and think is difficult. I heard a Meyer system in there recently - easily the best sound I've ever heard."

Plakovits is a freelance engineer: "I work mainly for Backstage Audio in Austria and do a lot of local, Austrian schlager bands." I wanted to ask him about the desk; it had after all been on the specification list the band's German promoter had sent through? "Well it would not be my desk of choice, the PM5D is for me a first generation digital desk, it sounds a bit technical. I prefer the new Soundcrafts, I'd like a Vi4 or Vi6 for this show - I think these are currently the best sounding digital consoles, but it's about budgets."

For the Tangs there's absolutely nothing wrong with the PM5D, even though the band now has far more analogue instruments in the mix than they ever did in my day.

Promenading the RAH, I have to say Plakovits achieved very good results; good enough for me to order a new album. For a start it was so much better than the blurred output I'd had to endure 30+ years ago, more to the point, the floor subs performed exceptionally well and low end is a signature element of the Tangs' musical architecture. Here it was, fat and rich, and yet tight in every sense of the word. I suspect Plakovits had it rolled off quite abruptly but it worked, even up in the Circle just below the Gallery where the audience was noticeably thin, it sounded great.

#### Lighting & Video

Gerd Schneider has only just joined the Tangs camp, this being his fifth show. He too hails from Austria. He is a completely fluent English speaker and as an operator, is completely on top of his game. "This is a long show, over three hours so you have to be careful what you do to keep it looking fresh," he said.

The rig is quite simple: three trusses and some floor lights all supplied by Bandit





Lites. Across the organ pipes, XL Video had rigged a large screen, with projection from a pair of Barco FLMs. Lighting-wise, I asked if Bandit gave him everything he wanted? "The lighting rider - I've never seen it. This is not my design. I did ask to be given the contacts so I could advance the gigs - I would have done it for free." It would be nice to see what Schnieder could do to this show with his own design, because what he produced this night was just the job.

If you're not familiar with the music, Tangerine Dream make spacey synthesiser mood music; heavily driven by sequencers and usually with a highly repetitive and simple drum motifs underneath. In that sense there's not a lot to work with, "There is no 4, 8, 4, 8, chorus, verse, bridge structure to use," said Schneider. Did the band give him any direction? "They wanted something moody and not too bright, just pick-ups on the solos - oh, and lots of smoke. There are not many songs in three

hours so it is really tricky, it is difficult to make each different, I really have to hold back. When I first got the job I listened to the music for three weeks, all day every day. Although the design is not mine, I did ask to have the same thing everywhere, which hasn't happened. In Barcelona I had Vari\*Lites, Paris MAC 700s; here it's MAC 2000 so I do have to do some re-programming every day, but this desk makes it easy."

He has an unfamiliar-looking desk out front: "It's a Chamsys, a British product, a really great system. It's small, I can carry it everywhere, and it has a good 'Morph' function to transfer programming to different moving lights."

How did he come to be using it? "I started out my design career with Hog IIs and then IIs, but the software versions were just getting more and more expensive so I started to look elsewhere. I was working a festival when the Nine Inch Nails guy turned up with the Chamsys MagicQ Pro and I realised what a good product this is; the software within the desk was developed by a lighting designer, apparently - it makes sense to me, you can almost feel that understanding. Chamsys have done a function update for me and it



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Top: The Chamsys MagicQ Expert

was not too expensive. It will run 4 universes, expandable to 16 - well, 32 in fact, but I wouldn't want to do that. There are lots of different versions; I have a MagicQ Expert with an Extra Wing. The desk is perfect, I've been using it for some time now and when you go to countries like Bulgaria or Greece where the equipment can be a little strange . . . well, those places would be a nightmare without it."

I spoke to Mick Freer, Bandit's client manager for the show: had he seen the desk before? "Jvan Morandi uses one for Placebo and I have encountered other LDs using them. We had a show come over from Mexico last year with a Chamsys on the spec'. They said they were bringing their own, but at the last minute called and asked us to supply. I eventually found one for hire from a firm down in Southampton; they are rare, but I've only heard good things about them." Sounds like time to make a purchase?

The rig is a mix of Martin Professional MAC 2000 Wash and Spot, nine of each, and GLP Impressions. "I like the basic colours of the Impressions, the blue, red and purple. But I'm not a big friend of LED for backlight. When you come away from primary colours I don't like the fact that you can see all the different LEDs at varying intensities. But it's good for ambient and front light." True to his word, Schneider kept largely to the primary palette from behind. "Also, the band asked for not too many colours, they like it mainly monochromatic, or maybe just two colours."

The stage is dominated by the presence of the XL Video screen centre stage, and the images upon it. Apart from the two musicians on the rear platform who can become quite energetic at times, the Tangs as a rule are a very static band to watch. Thus video is an ideal tool for some visual drama and the band's music is wide open to interpretation.

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"There's video throughout the show," said Schneider. "Mostly it's real, recorded material with some effects applied at times, rather than abstract effects generation. I wish I could run it from out here," he opined, "but they operate from on stage." Andi Bernhardt runs video, with Michael Koschorreck responsible for 'visuals'. "Unfortunately, they don't realise the ambient level they're applying to the stage sometimes," said Schneider.

There was obvious frustration here, though I felt the balance on display this evening seemed entirely apt. Perhaps he'd been thwarted elsewhere? The content was at times a little obvious, but then this stuff is not cheap to produce and the band has better things to spend their money on - pension plans in particular (Froese is 66 this year). To its credit, the content was very sympathetic, there was nothing frantic here, and the images flowed, much as the music, in lengthy, seamless cadences. Sadly, time did not permit an interview with either protagonist to explore their input and creative muse; and technical problems in the 10 minutes before half-time marred an otherwise perfect evening.

This was a special show for more reasons than my own nostalgia. As I said, good enough to see me purchase an album. Visually, it lost nothing through lack of a laser, in many ways the combination of pretty much continuous narrative style contribution from the video, and measured application of lighting made for a more coherent whole. Lasers are so unique as to be intrusive; Metallica's use of them as a one big hit effect makes far more sense; so no, I didn't miss them at all. And the sound? Well, Plakovits is lucky in that he has a very controlled and reliable set of musicians, and desired levels meant he didn't have to fight the room - always a good play in the Albert.

**Next Month:** Franz Ferdinand on tour in Spain.



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