

Large Tour Logistics

The same system in every port?

By Dave Rat

Wednesday – London, England: I'm embarking on what I believe is the largest tour I've ever done.

Yes, the Woodstocks (numbers 2 and 3) were huge, but they were one-offs. The Red Hot Chili Peppers at Red Square in Moscow and Slane Castle, Ireland were also giant gigs, but this upcoming Peppers tour of Europe has 14 shows in 23 days for an expected million or so people.

We're going to move fast, the shows are huge, and the Peppers headline the entire run. Unlike past European trips, what makes this tour

unique is the level of sonic consistency we're working to achieve while using eight different sound vendors from seven different countries.

I've specified identical loudspeaker system types for every show, the hang configurations have been matched, and we're carrying the rest. If successful, we (hopefully) will enjoy all of the benefits of carrying a full sound system while at the same time relying on a network of separate and unrelated vendors for a major portion of the gear.

Oh, by the way, odds are there won't be a band soundcheck the entire run.

Checklist of stuff I need to bring with me:

- Big headphones
- Leftover Euros and Pounds from last year
- Passport
- Laptop and PSU
- New MP3 player and manual
- Pile of wires and plugs (Phone, Internet, AC)
- Briefcase of unfinished work
- Two collapsible fishing poles
- Toiletries
- Two weeks of clothes (18 pairs of socks, 14 shirts, 6 pants, 4 shorts, a pile o' boxers, swim trunks, and a sweatshirt)
- Plane tickets
- Empty space in my bags to hold presents for my "short people"

Thursday – 6/3/04 – Cologne, Germany: The tour is beginning to take shape, with new faces showing up every day. If I counted right, the itinerary shows 99 people traveling all in all – yikes!

I have trouble learning all the names on a three-bus tour; I won't even try on this one. If you're wondering what they all do and why we need so many humans, I am too, but we'll all find out soon enough.

O.K., back to sound. In my experience on a tour like this, there are two ways to go:

1) Carry an "A" and "B" sound system, two full sound crews and "leapfrog" the rigs across Europe. Or...

2) Hire PA locally and use in-house festival systems.

The leapfrogging concept is com-



Dave Rat, the man with the plan for system consistency in Europe.

plicated due to a schedule of playing one day of a few multiday festivals plus a wide range of venue sizes. On the other hand, just cramming the Peppers into an assortment of system types and configurations and hoping for the best is less than desirable.

Three years ago, when I made the difficult decision to switch the Peppers from our proprietary Rat Trap 5 to (L-ACOUSTICS) V-DOSC line array, there were several reasons.

My primary motivation in making this decision was to work toward "worldwide sonic consistency." There are several awesome concert systems available, but finding one that is available on multiple continents in huge quantities is another story. This tour will be a true test of my decision, based on these broad concepts:

- The exact same system type supplied for all shows.
- A common "template" system layout, applied to each PA from the various vendors.
- Minimize specific vendor-to-vendor variation to an absolute minimum.
- Carry our own system processors for cumulative fine tuning of each system as the tour progresses, rather than starting from scratch every show.

Seems straightforward enough,

except one big caveat: it's "not the way it is usually done." This, my colleagues, almost always presents challenges. (I know, tell you about it!)

As far back as last November, these issues were being further discussed and refined with Bill Rahmy (the production manager) and Nick the Fly (our front-of-house system tech). More details joined the general system approach:

- The V-DOSC arrays for every show were negotiated into the system deals by management long before I even knew when or where the gigs were. Really a nifty idea, because it removes me from battling for systems and having to make concessions.
- Two sound techs – Nick traveling with the main tour party, and Tony Smith as the "advance tech" staying ahead of us, working with each system as it's being set up and tested.
- A PA configuration that all sound companies would be asked to emulate as much as humanly possible.
- All system configurations be sent ahead of time to me, Nick and Tony for study and approval.
- Maintain flexibility as well by embracing the knowledge and experience of the various sound compa-

nies with respect to their specific venue(s).

- Two racks of five BSS Soundweb digital processors (four plus a spare for 32-input by 32-output) for all main system processing. One rack travels with Tony for pre-testing and dialing in basic settings, who then calls or e-mails the info to Nick for setting up a second identical rack for the actual show.

And, I specifically requested an attitude of cooperation – rather than competition – between the various companies. This is all about a network of sound professionals working together.

Friday – 6/4/04 – Cologne, Germany:

First show is tomorrow – 6:30 am bus call, have to be done mucking around with the PA by 10 am.

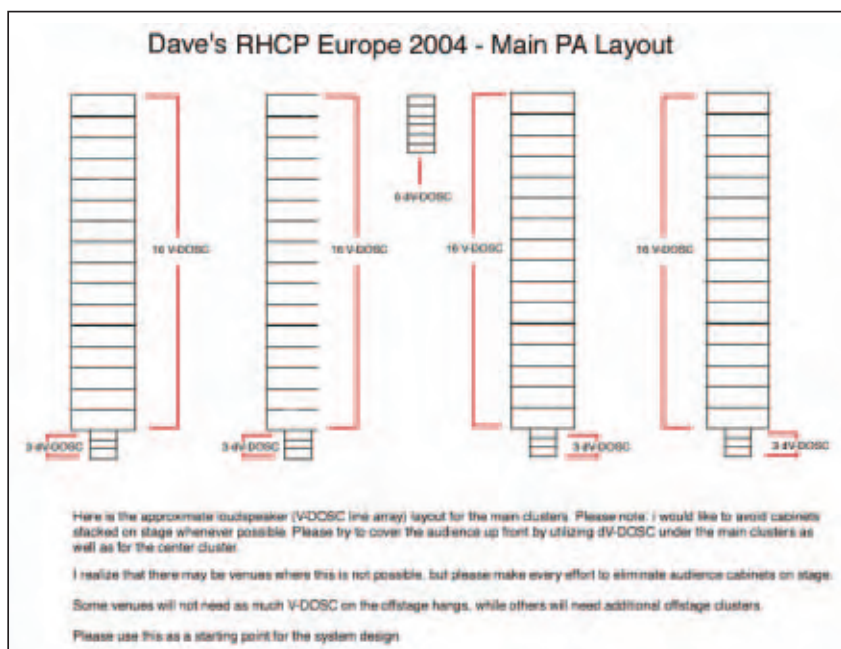
Nice busses on this run – glad we don't have those cramped double-level Euro ones with tiny micro-lounges and wafer-bunks. Itinerary says 70,000-capacity, open-air, and it's day two of a three-day festival called Rock AM Ring here in Deutschland.

This is going to be one of the more significant challenges of the tour. Carrying our own system processors for the main system means that getting the sound company to cooperate in swapping out their processors for ours – mid-festival – is a considerable request. Especially considering that some companies/system techs have had limited exposure to Soundweb operation.

Ultimately, the sound company must make sure the festival runs smoothly as a whole, and a poor call or error on our part could jeopardize the entire festival day, at their expense. Fortunately, I've previously toured with this company (Satis & Fy), and after some initial concerns, we're able to work it out.

Tomorrow we get to start finding out how well our strategy is going to play out. ■

Join Dave Rat, who heads up Rat Sound, based in California, as he continues this discussion with us. By the way, if you have comments or questions for Dave, he will be monitoring the Rat Sound message board @ <http://www.ratsound.com/wwwboard/wwwboard.shtml>



A look at the proposed system configuration for every stop on the tour, with Dave's requests to each system vendor. He's very polite!