

From
Maggie May





to the
PARADISE
Great American Songbook

Behind the system for
the latest Rod Stewart tour

Rod Stewart's first North American tour in over three years is a marathon affair in almost every sense.

The show itself clocks in at close to three hours, comprising two separate sets and multiple wardrobe changes, and is hosted primarily at venues large enough for the singer to punt a few soccer balls into the audience in the upper seats. • The first set features Stewart as Rod the Mod, backed by an ultra-tight 11-piece band, and showcases his two decade-plus career as the gravel-throated voice behind the Faces, Jeff Beck, and a succession of solo hits. • After a 20-minute break, he re-emerges in full crooner mode, clad in tux and tails, and backed by an 18-piece big band to run through a selection of tunes from his two recent *Great American Songbook* albums, including such classics as *It Had to Be You*, *I'm In the Mood For Love* and *Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered*. • The sales of the albums themselves - and their associated Grammy nominations - certainly justify the material's place in the show. As Stewart himself has observed, tongue firmly in cheek, on a couple of evenings, "these are wonderful, wonderful songs, even done by me."

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The show revs it back up after 35 minutes or so, welcoming back the raspy rocker persona to close with hits like *Maggie May*, the disco chestnut *Do Ya Think I'm Sexy*, and Rod's homage to Motown, a cover of Sam Cooke's classic *Twistin' the Night Away*.

ATMOSPHERE IS EVERYTHING

The two sets call up two distinctly different visuals as well. The rock segment is set against a stark white backdrop, replete with rows of matching amplifiers. The look is something of a cross between a set of the *Ed Sullivan Show* and an early-'60s-vintage kitchen, and it works well to set off Stewart's typically loud wardrobe fare.

The ambience changes dramatically in the second hour, when the curtain raises on a multi-tiered art deco bandstand, replete with conductor and ersatz radio tower marquee (with the flashing "RKO" altered to read "ROD").



The D5 at FOH, with nicely contrasting screens.



Right, a main MILO array and its companion line of flown subwoofers. Above, one of the arrays for the extreme sides.

While Stewart is not normally known for subtlety in either manner or dress, here he emerges in dark tux and tails adorned with a white carnation.

The house sound system is furnished by Escondido-based Sound Image, and employs 60 Meyer Sound MILO self-powered curvilinear array loudspeakers. They're split into main left and right arrays, while extreme side coverage is provided by two smaller arrays flown above the sides of the stage.

Veteran mix engineer Lars Brogaard, serving as both front-of-house (FOH) mixer and production manager, has high praise for both the system and the company.

"I went down to Spain to hear a system there, and was really impressed with the power and the clarity," Brogaard notes. "Then Meyer provided us with a system for a shootout against a couple of other line arrays at London Arena in the U.K. The vocal clarity of MILO was simply fantastic. Not long after that, I met Helen and John Meyer, who



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are just wonderful people. They invited me out to the factory in California - I was really impressed at how such a big company somehow manages to operate like a family business. The stuff is all hand-made, like in a Swiss watch factory."

Aside from the sonic performance, Brogaard is also impressed with the ease of the system's setup and transport. "We're able to keep the MILO's splayed in array formation, loading them in and out on dollies without having to take the whole rig apart every night," he explains. "It saves a lot of setup time, and makes the most of the space in the truck as well."

The MILO arrays are supplemented by 20 Meyer MTD3 subwoofers that are flown in tandem with the main left and right full-range arrays. Eleven Meyer UPA-1P wide-coverage loudspeakers added for front fill, with two LD-3 compensating line drivers (at FOH) providing corrective equalization.

DOWN IN FRONT

Brogaard drives the mix via a DiGiCo D5 Live EX digital console, noting he's been using this board since it was first introduced. "Essentially, I'm mixing two



System Engineer Ali Viles (center) and Lighting Designer Mark Payne (behind rack) having some fun in this staged "we're an intense crew and we mean business" photo.

different shows every night," he shares. "Even though we've got the same core band of musicians in both sets, the second set is really a completely different band and a much different sound.

"We add an eight piece string section, and we use completely separate guitar setups and a different drum kit. In all, I've got more than 100 input channels coming in. With an analog desk I'd need to have several consoles side by side. But with the digital realm, I just

push a switch and I'm set up for the next set. It saves a lot of work, not to mention reducing the amount of space we need for FOH, as well as cabling between the console and system."

External signal processing is notably light, with the majority of these duties also assigned to the D5's DSP. The system also boasts the debut and beta test of the new TC Electronic EQ Station.

"We've had the TC Electronics EQ Station for beta testing, and thus far I'm really pleased with it. It's great to be able to have eight channels of EQ and delay to do the entire system within a single 2U unit," Brogaard says. "We also like the fact that we can connect digitally to the D5 maintains the audio quality while keeping latency to a minimum.

A TC Electronic System 6000 handles reverb, while two Millennia STT-1



Wide-coverage loudspeakers on road cases for front fill, and (right) clean I/O from the house console.

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compressors cover the vocal channels. "I use them mainly on the standards set, to cut down on the sibilance," he explains. "Trying to EQ it out makes the vocals a bit too dull, and it's hard to keep them on top in such a big mix." An Aphex II Studio Exciter is applied to kick drum.

Perhaps owing to the vast assortment of venues on this tour, Lars and company have opted to carry dual test measurement systems: SIA SMAART Pro and Meyer SIM systems are both represented at mix position. Asked if there were any particular reason for carrying the two systems, Brogaard quips "not really. We just had them handy, so we brought both."

AT THE SOURCE

The stage is dominated by AKG microphones. "I've been working with AKG for years," Brogaard explains. "The new WMS-4000 wireless system has worked out great for us - very clean, no distortion, and the self-scanning



An isolation booth around the drums to keep things quieter on stage.

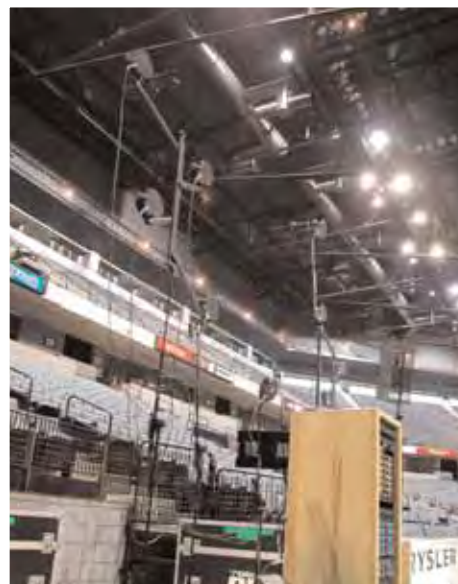
mode makes it easy for the guys to find multiple frequencies in each new city." Vocals are all handled via series 5900 capsules, with PT-4000 body packs for instruments.

Hardwired mics are also predominantly AKG, with D-112's on kicks, 414's on overheads and percussion toys, 419 on sax, with C3000's and 451's almost everywhere else. In a nod to time-honored tradition, a Shure SM57 sits on the snare. ("Just because you're supposed to - there is no other snare mic.")

A couple of guitar amps also host SM57's, with a handful of SM58 and SM91's in attendance as well, and Schoeps CMC6 on the grand. Avalon and BSS DI's cover direct inputs.

At stage side, two more DiGiCo D5's handle monitor duties. Engineer David Bryson mixes monitors for Rod and the three background vocalists, while his colleague Robin Fox looks after the rest of the band. As with the FOH position, the D5's are credited with making the job of mixing 20 musicians and 100 inputs easier, as well as reducing the overall footprint of monitorland.

Monitor effects are also relatively spartan. Compression is handled by a rack of Smart Research C-2's, with reverb courtesy of the ubiquitous Lexicon PCM90 and Yamaha SPX990.



Now that's some serious RF! Antenna jungle above, stacks of AKG wireless receivers below in the wood case.

At 59, Stewart is one of a handful of '60s survivors who can still live up to the legacy they've helped to create. His swagger and rapport with the crowd - and particularly its female faction - is right up there with fellow contemporaries like Mick Jagger and Steven Tyler, and his voice is in equally fine form.

If his journey down memory lane diverts to a nostalgic era unfamiliar to most of his fans, they seem to be accepting it graciously. After all, it's just an interesting detour along a road paved with enough hits to satisfy fans from several generations.

And the system assembled to reproduce it all certainly is upholding its end of the bargain. ■

Based in Los Angeles, Daniel Keller regularly covers a variety of professional audio applications for Live Sound.



The two racks at front of house, topped by laptop with SMAART. Also note one of the first sightings of the new TC Electronic EQ Station, in the right rack under the dbx RTA-1.