

Smoking Out With Cypress Hill

Old friends, new acquaintances - all professional

By Chris Kathman

It's always a pleasure to work a gig with a sound company that has competent people, well-maintained gear, and the experience to make intelligent, realistic plans.

One of the biggest shows I worked on last year was the Cypress Hill Smokeout, outdoors in San Bernardino, with a system supplied by Schubert Systems Group. I knew when I headed out there that the deck would be stacked in favor of reliability and success, and I was correct – it was only some improvisation by Mother Nature that complicated things at the very end.

Peter Franco and I drove out together; we would each be responsible for a Midas Heritage console at the front-of-house (FOH) position. Peter ran the one in front, I ran the one behind him on the riser, and a third

was set off to the side, for the headliners, Linkin Park. A separate Schubert team handled house and monitors for a “B” stage, inside a building at the back of the grounds.

When we got to the site, we found Dirk Schubert setting up an enclosed area around an RV, with a barbecue, picnic tables, a hand-washing station and a Porta-Potti. Apparently, at a previous Smokeout, the promoters had been pretty lackadaisical about supplying water and food to the crews.

There were familiar faces on the crew – Mike Gonzales, Kevin Korecky and Jebi Kritz. It was my first time meeting Richard O'Houllaran, who made the trek from Las Vegas to work onstage with Jebi, manning the Yamaha 4KM (PM4000M) monitor desks.

Ky Cabot, Bonnie Raitt's stage manager, supervised truck loading and gear movement, and was also kind enough to make some really crucial food runs to FOH. He and Mike Gonzales were responsible for originally coming up with the barbecue plan.

We went up on the stage and started flying the JBL VerTec cabinets. After that, I ran twist-lock power lines from distros to each amp rack, and then multi-cable to their signal inputs. There were 10 racks of Lab Gruppen for the tops and eight more of QSC power for the subwoofers. Schubert has a pretty cool system, where the racks are linked together with multicable, and pass the correct signal on to each one in the chain.

There is also XLR access to the inputs, and you can pull the sub signal out of any rack separately, also with XLR's. The back panel has four supplemental fans on it, to help keep the amps cool and functioning. The



C.K. and Troy (last?) in the midst of the Cypress Hill sound wonderland.

speed of the fans is thermally controlled, and they are also installed on the house EFX (effects) and monitor EQ racks.

DOUBLE IT

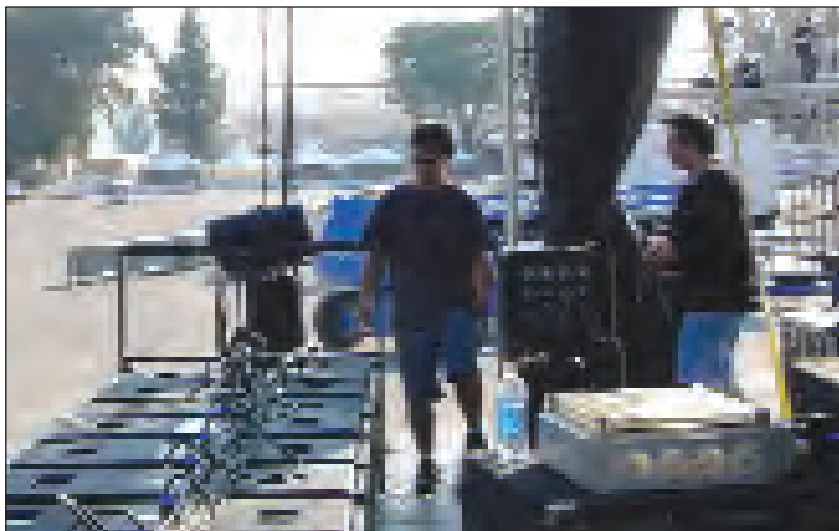
Once the stage was set, with monitor consoles to be operated by Jebi and Richard, plus one for Linkin Park, we went out to the FOH position and set up the Midas Heritage consoles. Peter broke out the Lake Contour's portable tablet PC and tested the system. Mike Gonzales, who is Cypress Hill's FOH mixer in addition to working for Schubert, spun a few CDs too – the system was sounding massive.

It should have, since we had a total of 40 VerTec tops and 16 VerTec subs in the air, plus 26 supplemental Schubert double 18-inch-loaded subs on the deck. Mike told me that when he advances a tour date for Cypress, he tells the local provider, "Bring me all the mid-high cabinets you've got, and then, the number of subs that you usually bring with those? Double it!"

While I was standing on the mix platform the next morning, a guy started walking out in the barricaded corridor that ran from the stage to our riser. (An arrangement that really simplifies getting to the stage in between acts, although it is primarily meant for performers to safely run out into the crowd during their set.) He smiled at me from 50 feet away; I totally know the face, but can't put a name to it.



Above, Brad Divens working FOH for Linkin Park, and below, Troy Staton, getting ready to do same for Obie Trice.



Mike Gonzales and Jebi Kritz get ready to fly some VerTec cabinets..

He steps up and says, "Remember me?" I reply yes, I do, but from where? It's Brad Divens, who mixes Linkin Park. I had met him a year earlier at a radio fest at The Pond in Anaheim, when I was visiting a friend who was tour-managing Stone Temple Pilots. I'd run into Roger Pigman backstage, who was there doing monitors for Linkin Park. I know Roger from him doing FOH for Face to Face and Tommy Lee.

Brad quickly soundchecked Linkin Park's instruments, with the techs playing them, before doors opened and the crowd poured in. Guerilla Union, the promoter, claimed sales of 18,000 tickets. These were a few of the highlights:

Bad Acid Trip. I haven't done acid for a long time, but if I was under the influence and Linkin Park started playing, odds are I would physically assault them and smash all their instruments to make it stop.

Brad got roped into mixing them because he knew their manager, and I really felt for him. I could tell that the "singer" was giving him absolutely nothing at the mic, but Brad is a pro and made them sound the best that anyone

possibly could have. (More on this later!)

NO GIMMICKS

Obie Trice. At the beginning of Eminem's single *Without Me*, you hear a voice say, "Obie Trice, real name, no gimmicks," and then the sound of a stylus being violently dragged across a vinyl record. I didn't know who the heck Obie Trice was, but was told he would be coming up on the front console.

I'd been looking forward to working this show ever since I heard that Ice T. and Body Count were going to be there. One of the mixers I respect most in the world is Troy Staton, who I put up systems for twice, years ago in San Francisco when he was mixing Body Count. When I mixed Suicidal Tendencies opening for Cypress Hill earlier in 2003, I met someone claiming to know Troy, who took my card and said he would pass it on.

But I never heard from Troy, so when he showed up at FOH, I was really happy to greet him. He asked me where the D.J. channels were. The evening before, I had been told there would be two DI (direct input) channels after the normal Body Count input list, so I showed him those. He put on his headphones – and said he didn't have anything.

Then he looked on the board tape and saw where I had written "B.C." at the end, and said, "I'm with Obie



Travelogue

Trice!" So I walked him up to the front board, and then asked if he would still be mixing Body Count. He told me to set up the desk like I would be doing it, because at some point he would be flying out with Obie to a show that same evening in Albuquerque.

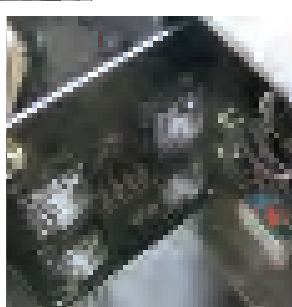
Body Count. Shortly after Body Count started, Troy took a call on his cell phone, gestured for me to take over, smiled and waved goodbye. I didn't change much, mostly worked to EQ the guitars, which were not sounding as good as I remembered them from the past. I applied the stereotypical metal 500 ms (millisecond) delay to the last word of every other lyric line, when it seemed called for, and basically drove the ship along.

Unfortunately, Ice T. is apparently worried that because he now plays a cop on TV's *Law and Order* that people won't think he is as "hard" as he used to be. When he wanted more vocal in the monitor, he started yelling things like, "Hey, dickhead!" and "Hey, idiot!" over the PA toward Richard O'Houllaran. I hate that kind of behavior – I used to really look up to Ice.

While we were loading out that night, I mentioned it to Richard and found out that he has a great attitude, and never lets stuff like that bother him. I guess I'm less mature, because it really annoys me.



LabGruppen amps racked and ready, complete with thermally controlled fans.



SURPRISE, SURPRISE

Xzbit. One of the traditional hallmarks of a Cypress Hill Smokeout is a surprise 4:20 guest. The day before, when we were setting up, someone told me it was going to be the Red Hot Chili Peppers. On show day, when I didn't see Dave Rat in evidence, I concluded the guest act must be someone else.

Peter was away from the position, doing something onstage, and the com (intercom) started flashing. I went over to his desk and picked it up, only to hear someone hollering at me that we needed to put up the D.J. inputs and various wireless mics for the surprise guest.

The mics that were lighting up did not correspond to the ones that were being named on the com, so I brought up the ones that people were talking into, plus the turntables. The next thing I know, Xzbit is running out there telling the crowd to "Put an X up! Put an X up!" and they're holding up their crossed arms and screaming for him.

Straightforward rap hollering, no big challenges.

Superjoint Ritual. I first met Troy Kliesch, FOH mixer for Superjoint Ritual, many years ago when he was traveling with Insane Clown Posse. SJR features the lead vocals of Pantera's Phil Anselmo. During his between-song raps to the crowd, it seems like he has sworn a holy oath to make every other word the f-bomb. Phil is the prototypical rockin' metal dude. The band is fierce, and features Hank Williams III on bass and hair-whipping.

They had visited the House of Blue Sunset Strip when I worked there, so I told Jebi that they might ask for the bowling alley of death for Phil – six wedges running three a side right up the middle of the stage, so that nothing is between him and the audience. It turned out they went with just the standard festival front line.

Papa Roach. As we were about to leave the grounds after setting up, the night before, I noticed a familiar silhouette



One side of the main rig: 20 tops and 21 subs a side, baby!

having a smoke with a bunch of guys whom he towered over – I walked closer and yes, it was Kevin Lemoine.

Known for his extensive work the world over with Green Day and Sum 41, Kevin is known to me from first encountering him deep in the mists of time, when he was mixing fellow Texan the Reverend Horton Heat.

Papa Roach is not my personal musical cup of tea; to me they're the Rascal Flatts of rock, but Kevin did an excellent job on their mix. After, I handed him one of my business cards, and he smiled and handed me a purple comb. "Why is he handing me this comb?" But then I looked down and saw that on one side it says "Kevin Lemoine – Since 1969" and on the other, it has his phone number and "Look good, SOUND good."

Now that is the coolest piece of swag I've seen in I don't know how long! It ranks right up there with my Wicked Picketts potholder, my Cake doormat, and my Carter the Unstoppable Sex Machine tour shorts.

PUT IT UP HUGE

Cypress Hill. Mike Gonzales, or "Mikey G" as he's more familiarly known, is one of the most high-energy, unfailingly positive people I've ever met or worked with in the last 20 years. He'll race up the back of a line of speakers in a flash, like a mountain climber, to re-adjust something at the top of the stack. He knows how to



Schubert Systems' Peter Franco (left) and Mike Gonzales.

put a rig up safely and rapidly and lead the local crew effectively.

When Mikey G starts to work for a band, he tells them, "I can only mix you the way I mix. If that's not right for you, then I'm not the right guy." I admire that kind of honesty, as opposed to the frustratingly prolonged experiences many of us have had trying to satisfy crazed musicians and not lose the gig.

He's missed six shows in 10 years with Cypress Hill. In his younger days, he worked some tours where he would do monitors AND play keyboard parts! Mikey G., everybody!

Cypress Hill uses real percussion combined with samples and a DJ. Mikey put it up huge. Every fan in the audience was feeling like a *Rock Superstar* as B. Real chanted the lyrics to that song and other trademark hits like "insane in the membrane, insane in the brain." At the end, he shouted, "Free Tommy Chong, dammit!"

Linkin Park. Brad Divens, who's been all over the world with these guys, totally nailed it. The crowd went absolutely buck wild and sang along to every word when they played their hit *In the End*.

The day had been fairly gray and chilly throughout, and then there started to be a few sprinkles followed by some pretty seriously prolonged rain. Our mix riser had what we thought was a solid metal roof – the huge spotlights and operators were set up on it, right over our heads.

But it turned out that there was a gap in the seam running from front to back. Water started pouring through, and down onto the consoles. The lighting guys pitched in to help us put tarps over them, and I shoved quad boxes underneath.

DMX. This gentleman did not appear during his scheduled slot, after Pennywise. We assumed he was a no-show, and Peter Franco started tearing down the front desk, while Brad Divens was mixing Linkin Park off to the side. Peter was pretty far into the un-patching when the com started going off and the stage crew relayed that DMX was going on after all, right after Linkin Park.

Peter wins the old-school award for

finishing out the night by mixing DMX with no compressors and no EFX. It kept raining as we struck the rig, and had finally tapered off just when we were buttoning up the trucks.

That Mother Nature has a funny sense of humor! ■

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SLS PICK UP APRIL PAGE 65