

Paperwork: “A Necessary Evil”

Clarity pays off for smoother shows

By Chris Kathman

Before handling tour and production management for bands, I worked in various venues as a sound guy. I got really sick of crews coming in, looking at the stage plot and input list we had for them, and saying, “Oh, the agent sent you the wrong one!”

So, in other words, they didn't have five minutes in the last month to call up and make sure that we had the right one. I used to patch the stage before they got there, hoping to get a head start on soundcheck, but eventually I got out of the habit of doing that because so often it needed to be re-done.

This made me want to be the person walking into a venue, with the local guy skeptically asking, “Is this the right input list?” And I glance at it and answer, without breaking stride, “Yes, it is.” There are a few ways I have developed to insure that I get what I want for my clients.

At the end of 2003, I made a new

backline sheet, input list, and stage plot for the band Berlin. The plot was faxed to the agent's office, and the input list and backline sheet e-mailed to his secretary. I requested, specifically, that she destroy all other previous versions in her possession.

However, I discovered shortly after that there is another task to perform – rewriting the basic tech rider that goes out with the contract. I confess that I'd never really looked at it since taking over from the previous tour manager; rather, I just talked to personnel at venues and sound companies ahead of time, worked out agreements as to what would be supplied for us, and never had any problems.

When it came time to advance one particular show, the owner of the sound company supplying it said, “It's going to be really expensive to sub-rent a Midas console for you.” I asked him what he meant and he said the band's tech rider specifically insists on Midas or Yamaha for FOH and he only

had a Crest. I assured him that a Crest would be fine.

More recently, I walked up to a monitor tech at a show, who asked me if a t.c. electronic unit would be O.K. for reverb in the monitors.

“We don't use reverb in the monitors,” I replied.

“Well, your rider says you do,” he responded.

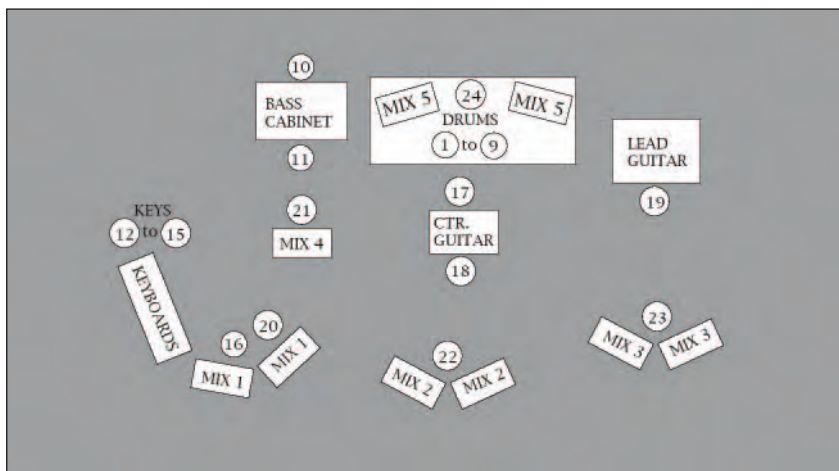
I guess I really do need to rewrite that thing!

From working in different venues, I've seen some ludicrous demands, including one from a band that shall remain nameless, asking for half a dozen Focusrite compressors. Another thing that has always amused me are riders that ask for a given number of watts of amplifier power per audience member, in relation to the room's capacity. You don't see so many of them nowadays, but they were once quite prevalent.

What does that mean, really? What if there's a bunch of big amps blowing at an assortment of crappy cabinets? What if the cabinets aren't aimed correctly, so there is tons of power, but it's banging off the walls and ceiling?

Sound companies can sometimes nitpick you to death. I used to mix a band of women whose drummer had grown up steeped in the East Bay funk exemplified by Tower of Power. She liked a ton of kick in her monitor. Most sound companies and venues now automatically provide a drum fill that includes a sub.

We went to play an outdoor festival at a beautiful site in rural Northern California. Many of the other acts on the bill were quieter, like Linda Tillery and the Cultural Heritage Choir, and Taj Mahal playing solo. After the show, the drummer said to me, “Man,



Make that stage plot as clean and clear as possible. Simple computer programs help in this quest.

Backstage Class

I was dying up there! I couldn't feel the kick at all!"

YOU DIDN'T ASK

I looked up by the drum riser and saw a single Meyer UM-1 wedge, with a 12-inch woofer. I asked the monitor tech from the sound company about why he didn't bring a "real" drum fill with a sub.

He looked me right in the eye and calmly said, "You didn't ask for one."

As a result, the stage plot drawn up for every band I work with says, "Drum fill with sub" next to the drum riser. The drummer in Berlin carries his own mini-mixer that he hears a click from, and also puts up an ambient mic behind himself. When the drum fill does not put out enough energy, he is very self-sufficient and has an XLR Y-split that he will insert on the kick mic, and run it to the mini-mixer for his IEMs.

Speaking of stage plots – if you don't have a computer-based program to generate them, just use a Sharpie! That is what I do, and Big'un, the veteran stage manager at the Key Club on Sunset Strip, actually congratulated me on it, saying, "I can tell you've seen a lot of these!"

It's true, I have, and from that experience, I go with the simplest representation possible. I hate the plots done by an excitable person with a

new whiz-bang software program that has countless little symbols all over the place, that you can't easily decode the meaning of.

With my plots, the techs will know where to put their mics and stage boxes, we will get power drops where we need them, I indicate where the playback outputs are located, and my phone number is at the bottom if they need to know anything else.

When I worked with Cake, I used a sheet that Will Cotter previously designed in (Adobe) .pdf format. He puts a half-size stage plot at the top, and then the input list in two columns below. I asked him to put my name and number on it, instead of his, and I was good to go.

It's important to speak to the sound company yourself ahead of time, since promoters are notorious for not passing on the info we provide. Also, there may still be operator error, even if you personally fax the paperwork directly to the sound company.

LEFT AT THE SHOP

Recently, I worked a show at a resort hotel on the East Coast. I took the pre-

Input List
BERLIN, featuring Terri Nunn
Contact: C.K. (555) 112-3344

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Kick (your dynamic) | 14. Laptop gtr |
| 2. Kick (your condenser) | 15. Laptop keys |
| 3. Primary snare top | 16. Laptop backing vocals |
| 4. Primary snare bottom | 17. iPod spare |
| 5. Snare 2 | 18. Guitar amp (SR) |
| 6. Hat | 19. Keyboard (top) – your DI |
| 7. Rack | 20. Keyboard (bottom) – your DI |
| 8. Floor 1 | 21. Guitar vocal (SR) |
| 9. Floor 2 | 22. Terri vocal – our wireless |
| 10. Overhead SR | 23. Keyboard vocal (SL) |
| 11. Overhead SL | 24. Spare hardware for Terri |
| 12. Laptop percussion | 25. Acoustic guitar – your DI – to the right of center wedges |
| 13. Laptop bass | 26. Acoustic guitar – your DI – to the left of center wedges |

You supply all mics except for Terri's vocal.
Please supply just a boom stand to the drummer, for an ambient mic.

List out those inputs, and feel free to explain seemingly strange requests. Also, put your phone number right at the top!

caution of walking by the area where the stage was being assembled a couple hours before our scheduled load-in time. Introducing myself to the monitor tech, he confessed that he'd left our input list and stage plot at the shop.

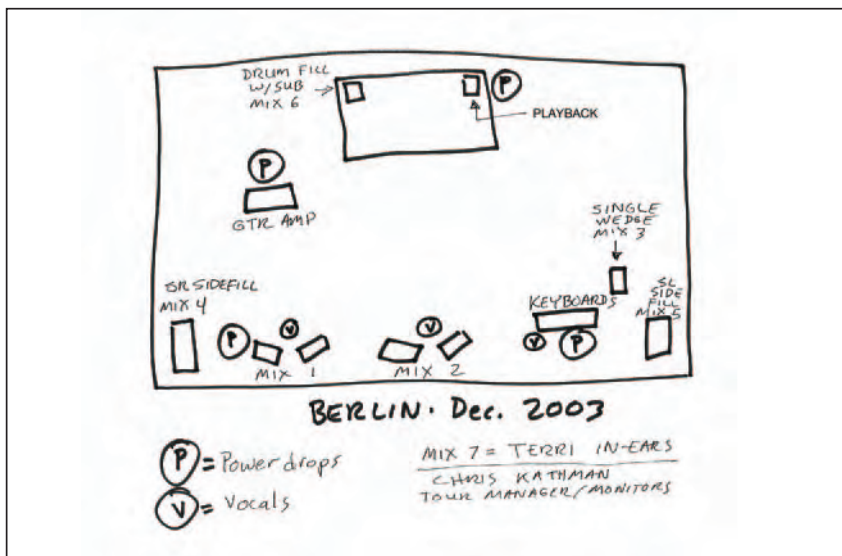
I've written before about how I've learned a lot from people whose main goal is a successful show instead of making other people feel small or stupid. So I didn't castigate or humiliate this person; I needed him on my side later on. It wasn't going to help matters to cuss, frown or roll my eyeballs sarcastically.

This is where learning to bring more sheets with me paid off, instead of assuming oh, I faxed these to them before we left, I don't need to bring any more – which has ambushed me in the past. I smiled and said, "No problem, I've got some extra copies down in my room. I'll go get them and bring them back up to you."

So what if that takes 15 minutes out of my life? I'd rather do that than spend eight hours a day driving a messenger car all over Los Angeles, or holding pieces of steel against a grinder in a lab animal cage factory, or chop frozen pork and make tostada shells in boiling oil – all of which I did when I was younger.

I am grateful for the way I make a living now. So what if it takes faxing, sending e-mails and taking a little time on the phone to insure my show days run much more smoothly? I'll gladly spend the time, and a few dollars, to do it. ■

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When a computer isn't available, be sure to still prepare a stage plot, even if it means using a Sharpie!