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ROB THOMAS' CRADLESONG TOUR

Jim Yakabuski tours with Digidesign Venue, Sennheiser and d&b
Story and photos by Mark Frink

Above left: Jim Yakabuski with LMG Touring Digidesign Venue Profile tour package. Above right: d&b audiotechnik J Series 12-box array at Atlanta's Fox Theater. (Photo: A. Hall)

After a decade with Matchbox 20, Rob Thomas branched off in 2005 with ...*Something To Be*, becoming the first solo artist from a group to debut at number one. He's best known for the 1999 triple-platinum hit "Smooth" he co-wrote with Santana. This year we caught up with his "Cradlesong Tour" towards the end of the US dates.

The sound system was supplied by LMG Touring of Orlando. Live Sound Engineer Jim "Yak" Yakabuski is best known for seven years with Van Halen and subsequent duties on Avril Lavigne's last three tours, working her recent "Best Damn Thing" tour as LMG Touring's senior touring engineer instead of as an independent. He's also author of 2001's *Sound Reinforcement Techniques: Tips and Tricks of a Concert Sound Engineer*. Yakabuski mixes on a Digidesign Venue with a Profile control surface and dual 48-channel stage racks.



LMG Touring's standard Digidesign tour package is based around a Front of House Venue rack, equipped with five DSP cards and fully-loaded with Venue Pack, Venue Pack Pro and All Access plug-in bundles. An inspection of his D-Show software plug-in racks reveals that he employs Digidesign's Smack! on vocals, and the Eventide Reverb from their Anthology II bundle for vocals and drums. "My new favorite plug-in is the Eventide Reverb as it sounds fantastic, is very simple to use, but also has some bells and whistles," Yakabuski commented. "In the new record's title track, there's an explosive reverb that echoes several times, and this was possible with the Eventide utilizing the 'delay' section of the effect."

A Joe Meek SC2 Photo Optical compressor is used on the drum subgroup to give clarity and edge, while a Bomb Factory Purple MC77 1176-style FET limiter tightens up the bass. Other notable plugs include MoogerFooger's band-passed delay and Crane Song's Phoenix, used on all electric guitar and vocal channels.

He deploys TC Electronic's Master X3 virtual Finalizer across the

matrix output for the mastering of the recording feed. Concertgoers are offered All Access Today LiveFlash USB flash drive wristbands with a recording of the show for \$40, just like on Matchbox 20's 2008 "Exile in America" tour.

On the left side of Yak's double-wide Venue rack was a 128-track Pro Tools HD system with an Apple Mac Pro computer and four Glyph Technologies GT 050Q RAID hard drives, providing the benefits of Virtual Sound Check, by playing back tracks from previous performances through the console's channels. "I generally use Virtual Sound Check in a more sterile environment, such as headphones or near-field monitors, and during rehearsals it was extremely beneficial," he explained. He fired it up several times down the road to "test drive" differences between using phase reverse or delay time on inputs like bass DI, its wet DI, and the bass mic. "When these inputs are combined, a simple phase switch does not always optimize frequency response and audio quality, whereas a small delay on one of the inputs brings it all together."

An additional outboard rack houses



LMG Touring standard Digidesign Venue tour package with 128-track Pro Tools HD in double rack, plus dual Mac adn PC auxiliary rack with 4-way KVM. Above right: All Access Today USB wristband that fans can purchase after a concert.

four computers – two Mac Minis and two PCs – which run Pro Tools LE for two-track recording, iTunes, Smart and d&b R1 remote control software. It also employs a four-way KVM switcher to connect all four computers to a single 24-inch LCD monitor.

System Engineer Evan Hall flew and optimized the main loudspeaker system. Though LMG's inventory includes a wide selection of loudspeakers from Meyer Sound and L-Acoustics, the spec for this tour was d&b audiotechnik. "Adding d&b to the LMG inventory specifically for this tour was an easy decision," Yakabuski noted. "LMG Director of Touring Steve McCale and I decided on d&b because the weight and size to power output ratio is really quite remarkable."

The main system is typically a pair of 12-box arrays of d&b J-Series, with eight 80-degree J-8s above four 120-degree J-12s. "On many occasions we could hang all 12 of our main J loudspeakers in a single cluster from one motor, which was very successful in theatre situations," he added. "The sound of this system is really wonderful, and rigging is a breeze."

Yakabuski prefers flying eight d&b J-Sub triple-18 cardioid subwoofers as a center cluster for more even coverage in larger venues, employing two more on the floor, each about 12 feet off center. Four J-INFRA triple-21

:: Rob Thomas ::



Doug Kimball's monitor beach with dual Venue Stage Racks and Sennheiser 2000 Series IEM transmitters. Below: Background singer and guitarist Marc Von Em's Digidesign PQ Controller and pick tray.



subs provided low-frequency extension. The tour also carried side hangs of eight d&b Q1 line arrays, each with Q-Sub single-18 at the top and d&b E8 enclosures for front-fills. All of the d&b cabinets were powered by LMG's tour-standardized amp racks with three d&b D12 amps, controlled via d&b R1 Remote control software.

Doug Kimball mixes monitors on an identical double-rack LMG Digidesign Profile Tour Package. His credits include monitors for Velvet

Revolver, Goo Goo Dolls and Aerosmith, plus Front of House for Natalie Cole, Lady Gaga and for Ronnie James Dio and Tony Iommi's "Heaven & Hell" tour. Kimball considers himself more of a Front of House engineer and likens in-ear monitor mixing to simply providing multiple individual Front of House mixes. He uses the Virtual Sound Check feature to tweak his mixes in pre-production and rehearsals. "I especially like the Venue for the plug-ins and the Virtual Sound Check," he commented.

"I can set up and breakdown with just one stagehand, and the foot print is promoter-friendly when I mix Front of House."

Kimball's plug-in choices reveal a different approach for monitor. He inserts a URS 1970 compressor on his mix outputs, and also uses Trilium Lane reverbs. A Bomb Factory Fairchild 660 compressor is assigned to vocals, acoustic guitar and bass. "The Fairchild is my favorite plug-in," Kimball stated. "It responds nicely to heavy compression if needed." He uses their Slightly Rude Compressor on electric guitars and Purple 77 on snare, along with Digidesign's Impact on kick drum. On keyboards, Kimball simply relies on the Venue's on-board compression, which he added, "sounds great as well."

The tour is entirely on IEMs, with Thomas using the new Jerry Harvey Audio JH13 PRO custom ear-molds, along with bass player Al Carty and two of the background singers. The other members of the band have previous Ultimate Ears UE-11 drivers. The BGs and multi-instrumentalist

:: Rob Thomas ::

Matt Beck received hard-wired mixes supplied by an 8-channel 10-watt Lectrosonics single rack-space PA8 amp. Drummer Abe Fogle relies on a pair of Lab.gruppen LA48-powered Butt-Kicker thumpers.

The rest of the band and backline techs have wireless mixes from Sennheiser's new SR2050 dual transmitters. "The Sennheiser IEM system is my favorite," Kimball stated. "The RF sounds incredibly close to the console outputs." Thomas sings into a Sennheiser SKM 5200 handheld with a Neumann 104 capsule, used with an EM 3732 dual receiver, while the background singers use Sennheiser e935 dynamic mics. The band also employs Sennheiser G2 wireless systems for guitars.

Background singer and guitarist Marc Von Em employs a Digidesign PQ Controller allowing him to easily control his mix as he changed acoustic and electric guitars. The backline techs also utilized PQ Controllers to more easily cue mixes and instruments backstage without distracting Kimball from his main duties to Thomas and the band.

A variety of manufacturers are represented on the input list, with kick drum double-mic'd with the typical Shure Beta 91 and Beta 52 combo, and the snare classically mic'd from below with a Sennheiser MD 441 and above with a Shure SM57 that employed a protective guard fashioned from a fork. The toms were mic'd from below with Beyerdynamic Opus 88 mics, a favorite of Kimball's. "They just clip on the drum and the XLR plugs right in," he said. "Their sound

Top: Rode NT4 stereo condenser drum overhead. Middle: Beyerdynamic Opus 88 under rack tom. Bottom: Shure SM58 with custom protective fork grille.

is awesome! Nice design."

Ride and hi-hat cymbals were close mic'd with Neumann KM184 condensers, while a Rode NT4 stereo mic was used overhead. "I usually employ a closer cymbal mic'ing technique, but when I did Matchbox 20 with Robert Scovill, he brought the Rode out and mic'd it up high," Kimball explained. "It just blew me away how nice the top end was, and it added snap to the snare. I've been a fan ever since."

The guitar amps were remotely located off-stage and mic'd with Shure KSM32 and Audio-Technica AT4050 large-diaphragm condensers, which

the backline techs isolated a bit with gobos improvised from plywood and packing blankets. Monitor System Technician Wayne Teaster assisted Kimball on stage.

Next month, the tour headed "down under" to Australia, where Thomas

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is immensely popular, working with Australian vendor Johnston Audio, whose principal Bruce Johnston is an Entech Award winner and has toured with Crowded House, Silverchair, The Killers and Oasis. "This is our first time using them, but so far they have been extremely helpful and attentive," Yakabuski added. "They're one of several d&b providers in Australia, and they've worked very hard to emulate the system we're currently using in the US." Good on ya, Yak, that's dinki-di. ■

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