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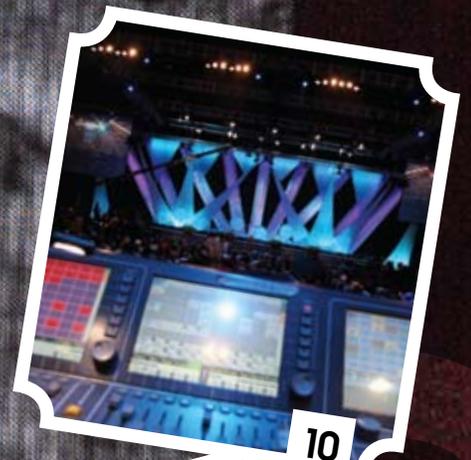


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FROM THE *Publisher*



It is hard to put into words the impact of Brooks & Dunn's farewell tour and final performance. This show has been a mainstay of the touring industry for so many years that it is really strange to think of next season without their presence. So many talented and dedicated people served with that show for nearly the entire duration that we found the story especially bittersweet to produce.

The smiling faces of the crew belies an undercurrent of concern, however. Certainly, many of the key people will go out again, but with whom and when is as yet unresolved. This begs the question once again of the status of the industry, both within and outside of Nashville. The Nashville touring community is clearly unique and although a bit incestuous, it has been a breeding ground for top talent and experienced road pros for decades. The loyalty of the acts to their people is legendary, but it has created an artificial barrier that is hard to break into and sometimes hard to break out of. All of us at the magazine wish the best for the crew members and we hope to see them smiling once again down the road.

Finally, it is the time of the year when our annual Tour Link Conference begins to occupy our time and energy. If there was ever a year when it made sense to attend this annual gathering of the industry, this may be the year. In addition to the entertaining and informative events (check out tourlinkconference.com), we know that there will be a lot of private discussions on the state of the industry and plans will be laid on how best to address the challenges and needs of the next season. Please try to be there January 27 - 29 in Scottsdale, Arizona. We are on a PGA golf course and at the rates we negotiated it is not a bad thing to consider. The future of our industry is a compelling reason to attend as well.

Larry Smith



cover photo by JA Cheong

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DIGICO SD8 on tour with Faithless



Archetypal electronica band Faithless has been on tour since early this year, playing in clubs, theatres and on the summer festival scene across Europe. Such diversity in a schedule requires a mixing console that can adapt to any situation or size of venue and still deliver on functionality and audio quality. For the band's monitor engineer Ben Milton, there is only one choice – the DiGiCo SD8.

and eight stereo in-ears, and the SD8's two solo busses have been invaluable for monitoring both. In addition to this, there are a large set of side-fills, tech mixes and effects.

"I needed a mixing desk that was capable of having at least 60 inputs and 24 output busses and 36 input faders displayed on the surface," he continues. "There is a large section of the input list that is electronic, so my set-list is very snapshot heavy. As the music never stops during the set the cross-fade function has been invaluable. The SD8 ticked all the boxes."

Using the SD8 has meant that Ben's original equipment list was dramatically reduced.

"I started the rehearsal period with a large rack of outboard FX that I was going to use," he recalls. "By the time we loaded out, I had a big pile of FX units on the floor and was using the SD8's onboard FX."

"I think the console sounds fantastic. The EQ is especially good. Spill has been an issue for me on stage; I have the side-fills almost flat-out, but also have 16 condenser mics on a percussion/drum set up, so it has been crucial that the EQ was incredibly fine."

Ben has also found the Gain Tracking™ feature useful for double picking up inputs, allowing him to have a set of input channels dedicated for in-ears and a set for wedges.

"I find the editing functions within the cue-list quick and flexible for writing monitor changes to where I need them," he says. "Being able to import and export presets between my two SD8s has been very useful as well and the dynamic EQ has been great for using on backing vocals where the artist might be on and off the mic throughout the show."

He continues, "Damo Pryor of Britannia Row Productions put together a fantastic system for us, which has been on the road now for six months now, running a dual SD8 system over the last couple of months to cope with the schedule of playing 36 consecutive festivals.

"I always want the technology to be as transparent as possible to the performer. Touring the same console and equipment not only brings continuity to the live show, it enables the artist to focus on the show musically, especially in the sound-check free environment of the festival. Throughout it all, the SD8 has not missed a beat." 🎧

digico.org

Ben has been using DiGiCo consoles since the company started in 2002, when friend and prolific theatre sound designer Bobby Aitken [We Will Rock You, Mamma Mia, Dirty Dancing, etc] introduced him to the brand.

"I have been specifying DiGiCo consoles when I can ever since," says Ben. "When I was putting together the monitor spec for Faithless, I wanted to use the best sounding console with the smallest footprint. We were starting the tour in European theatres, some of which have very limited space onstage - the Paradiso in Amsterdam springs to mind - so it was crucial that I kept my footprint small and flexible."

Ben has seven wedge mixes on stage

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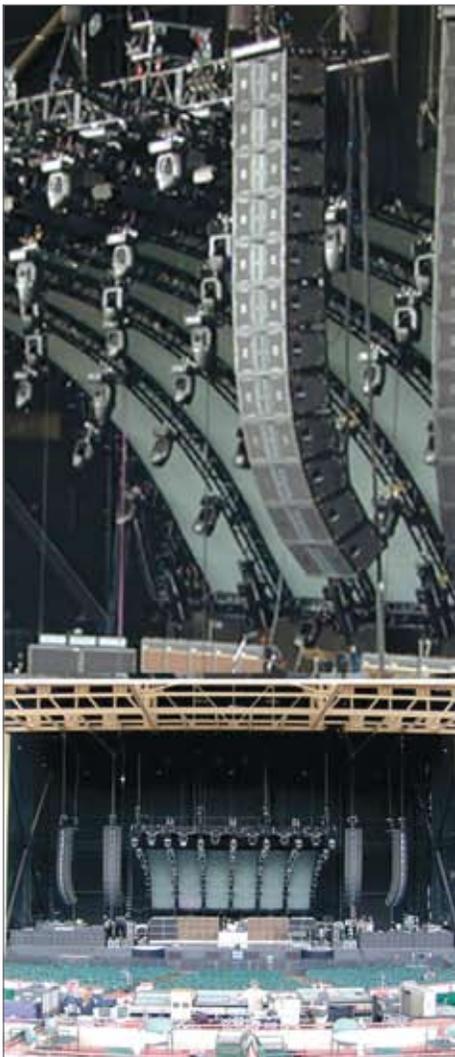
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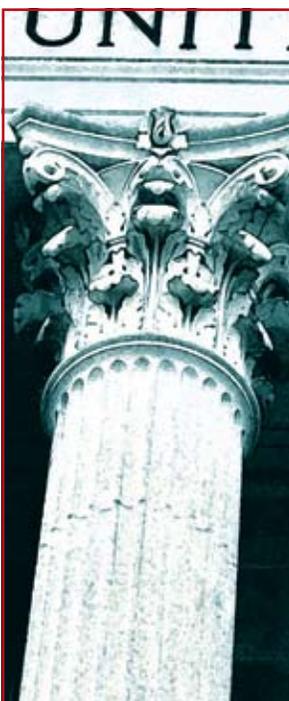
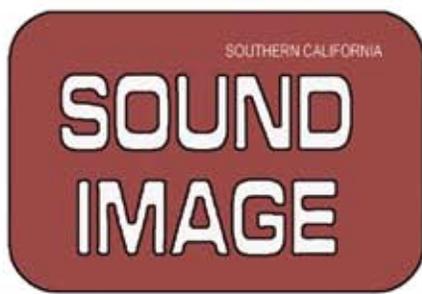


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ENTEC'S NIGHT OF BLISS at the Embassy

London, UK based Rental Company Entec Sound & Light supplied sound and lighting equipment plus 19 crew for a non-stop get-in, show and performance marathon "Night of Bliss", the biggest ever Christian Conference in the UK - for the Christ Embassy Church at the O2 Arena.

The event featured various Christ Embassy ministers who delivered blessings, prayers and sermons to the crowd. Speakers included Pastor Anita and Pastor Chris Oyakhilome. A live worship band and a choir of over 1000 voices accompanied them. The whole event was also recorded for DVD.

Entec's seriously gruelling schedule demanded some nimble logistics, so they brought Simon Tutchener onboard as technical production manager for the project, to integrate their services into a vast XL Video set-up, Hawthorn Set Design and 4 Rigging Teams from Summit Steel. Eat To the Beat and Stage Miracles completed the cast. Tutchener was also the anchor between client and the O2 staff Emma Beszant, Alex Donnelly-Palmer and Summit's Simon Frost.

The get in commenced at 6 a.m. on the Thursday. Everything had to be rigged, sound-checked, focussed and ready for the first rehearsals at midday on Friday followed directly by the show from 5 p.m. Friday till 5 a.m. Saturday. All production equipment then had to be clear of the venue by 3 p.m. on the Saturday.

Sound

Liam Halpin was Entec's sound designer, who also worked on the 2009 Christ Embassy show - also serviced by Entec - at Wembley arena. The event utilised the whole of the O2 Arena

with audience overspill accommodated in the O2's adjacent Indigo venue.

The main PA consisted of main & side hangs of d&b J8 cabinets, with J12s at the bottom of the hang for wider coverage of the nearfield, together with a centre cluster of d&b Q1s. The



system was positioned to achieve the clearest and best possible coverage throughout the space, catering for many acoustic dynamics - from the spoken word to music and to multiple voice chorals/choir.

d&b J-SUBS were flown directly behind the main arrays, giving a zero point for all the delays and more expedient time alignment parameters than hanging the subs to the sides

of the main hangs. Ground infills and outfills were covered by d&b Q10s and Q7s & the whole system was driven by d&b D12 amps & processing. Before the show, the sound system was modelled using the latest version of d&b's Array Calc software, explains Halpin, which helped enormously with positioning, especially time being so precious. The PA return system was a fully digital RME MADI interface, with the only analogue section being the mics and stage return boxes, which eliminated numerous potential issues like noise and weak signal transmissions.

FOH was mixed by Brother Mike using a DigiDesign D-Show Venue console, looked after by Kevin Smith & Owen McAuley. Additional sound feeds from the main stage were sent to Indigo.

A Yamaha PM5D was supplied for monitors mixed by Entec engineers Justin Grealey & Iain White. They worked in double shifts both ends of the multicore to ensure that there was always a fresh engineer at the desks.

The monitor system was a combination of d&b M2s and M4s wedges all over stage with a single C7 cabinet for side fill, flown each side. Another 2 hangs of Q1s were hung for choir monitors as they were in the seating behind the stage. E3s were utilised for the dressing rooms to enable the Pastors to hear what was going on during the event. One of the specific requests from production was to keep the stage as clean as possible, so the monitor wedges were all concealed in custom-built hides.

Entec also supplied multiple radio mics with Guy Gillen as radio tech along with full mics and stands package which included a number



of mid-side & gun mics for the choir. Other stage & PA techs were James Kerridge & Lee Furnell.

Matt Hay assisted by Juan Ayala ran a D-Show Profile supplied as the recording console, hooked into a Pro Tools recording system. There was also a fully redundant Pro Tools system fed from analogue source as back-up.

The challenge was the tight timescale, and the installation of the recording system - it was a large amount of gear needing to be integrated very quickly, straight into sound check, rehearsal then directly into the live show.

Lighting

Entec's lighting crew faced all the same time-based issues as audio. Ryan Brown joined the show delivery team again to design lighting following his highly successful work on last year's event.

The show provided many design challenges; combining a large stage area that had to be lit for TV as well as a complex set. Planning and modelling the truss locations were essential, as video and audio required clear lines of sight. Working with XL Video, Ryan and Liam planned the location of all the trusses. Over the stage lighting, video and set trusses as well as audio cable bridges all occupied the same space so precise trim heights became crucial. At this point Simon Tutchener stepped in to plan the load in and load outs as well as truck packs to ensure everything was built and flown in order.

Video also complicated matters installing a 50ft crane at the side of stage as well as remote 'hot-head' cameras on the lighting

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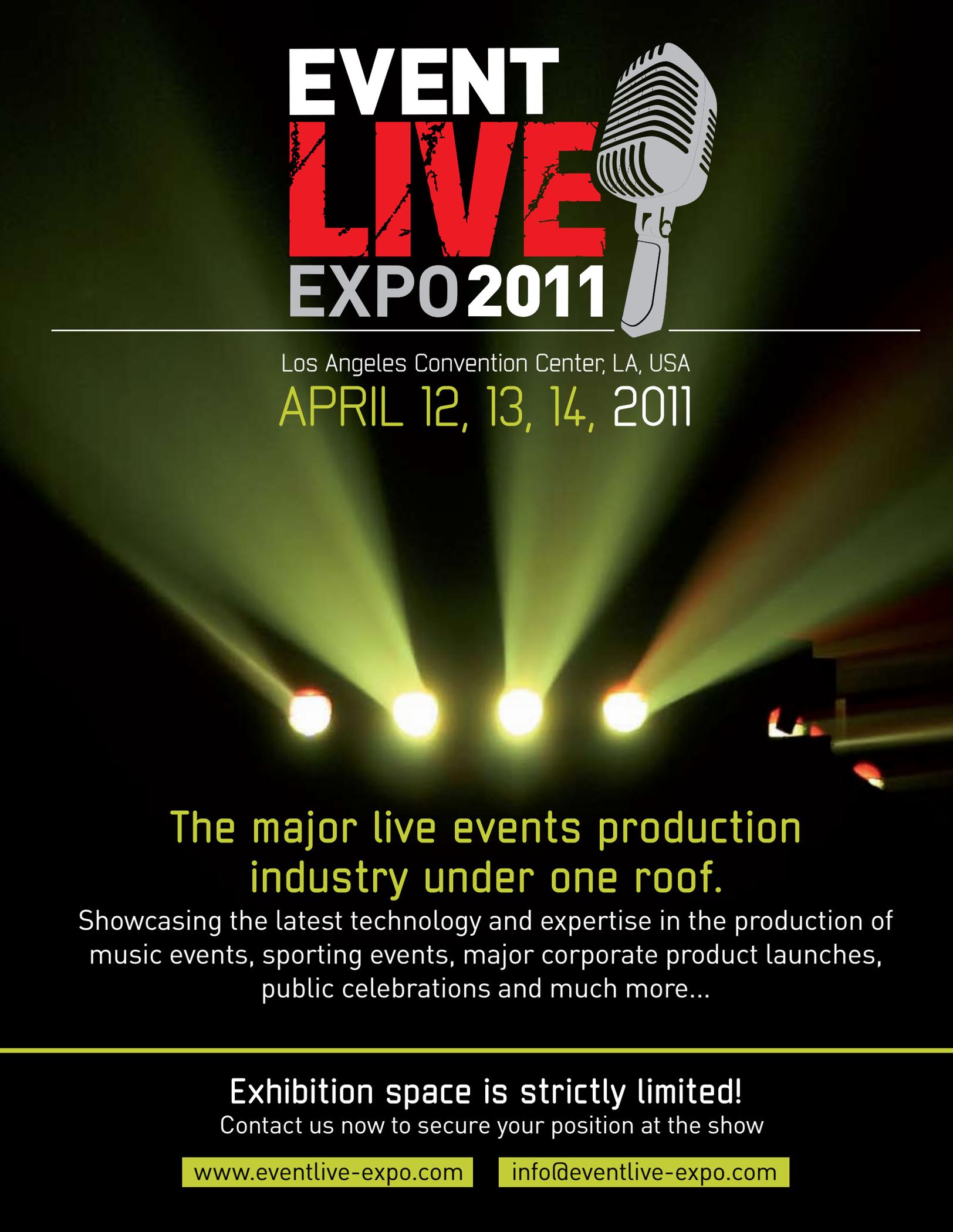
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Crop Over Festival

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Crop Over, a five-week summer festival, is Barbados' most popular and colorful event. Its origins can be traced back to the 1780s during the period when Barbados was the world's largest producer of sugar. At the end of each sugar season, there was always a huge celebration to mark the culmination of another successful sugar cane harvest. That celebration came to be known as the Crop Over festival.

Since 1974 when the festival was revived, Crop Over has incorporated other elements of Barbadian culture and the event has transformed into an extravaganza that attracts people from around the globe. This year's festival featured several Calypso music performances and competitions. To ensure the thousands of people in attendance were able to hear and enjoy the festive atmosphere, high powered sound systems from D.A.S. Audio were placed into service.

Bridgeport-based Quality Sound Inc. (QSI), a full service company that, in addition to sales and rentals of music and audio equipment, operates a sound services division for concerts and similar special events as well as a recording studio, a design/build division for the installation market, and serves as a promoter of live events, was contracted to provide sound reinforcement for several of the largest activities during this year's festival. Austral Estwick, co-owner of QSI, discussed the nature of the project.

"For Crop Over 2010," Estwick explained, "we provided sound reinforcement for an all-day Calypso competition called Soca Royale. We also provided sound for the Calypso Finals, Cohoblot (a 6-hour show of calypso and cultural performances, as well as '10 to 10', a 12-hour show of Calypso music. The Calypso Finals had roughly 8,000 spectators, Cohoblot had 10,000, and Soca Royale and '10 to 10' each had approximately 20,000 people. With Calypso being such a high ener-

gy, upbeat music genre and crowds as large as these, we knew that we needed our big guns to deliver the SPL (sound pressure level) and coverage to ensure the festive nature of these events. That's precisely why we deployed our Aero 50 and Aero 48 line array systems."

For Soca Royale, which was held at Bushy Park, the QSI team erected a setup that drew from D.A.S. Audio's Aero Series 2 catalog. The sound system included twenty-four Aero 50 3-way, large format, active line arrays—flown twelve elements per side—along with twenty-four LX-218 high power subwoofers, which were positioned twelve enclosures per side. "The system's performance was excellent," states Estwick. "We had even coverage throughout the area and sound quality was absolutely consistent for the entire day. We averaged 115 dB SPL at the mix position, which was located about 200 feet from the stage."

For the Calypso Finals, which took place at the Kensington Oval cricket stadium, Estwick and his crew deployed an Aero 50 system consisting of eight enclosures per side. Sub bass tasks were aptly handled by the D.A.S. LX-218 subwoofers, positioned eight cabinets per side. "This was a challenging setup," Estwick recalls. "We were projecting the sound into the stands that had high reflection and considerable slap back, so we had to conduct quite a bit of testing and modeling of the system in order to obtain the speech intelligibility we wanted. It rained quite a bit, which shortened our setup



and testing window, but because of the system's excellent rigging hardware, we were able to make adjustments easily and get the desired results. Everything came together and we received numerous remarks that this was the best sound heard in the venue to date."

Like the Soca Royale and the Calypso Finals, the Cohoblot event also took advantage of the D.A.S. Audio Aero 50 line arrays and LX-218 subwoofers. Again, the QSI team set up a system consisting of sixteen Aero 50's—eight modules per side—accompanied by sixteen LX-218 subwoofers positioned eight enclosures per side. Estwick reports that the system "provided excellent coverage."

For the '10 to 10' show, which took place in a large parking lot, Estwick's crew deployed sixteen D.A.S. Audio Aero 48 large format, 3-way line array elements—eight cabinets per side—that were accompanied by eight ST-218 subwoofers per side. The QSI team outfitted the ST-218 subwoofers with D.A.S. Audio's 18LX long-excursion low frequency loudspeaker and performed considerable equalization tweaks to each system. "In addition to being an excellent subwoofer," Estwick remarked, "these enclosures now have a lot of low end punch. I couldn't believe I was hearing our old ST-218's!"

Summing up this year's Crop Over festival, Estwick offered this parting thought, "Our D.A.S. Audio systems delivered in a big way. The sound coverage was excellent, the SPL's were exactly what was required, and the crowds loved it. This was one amazing party!"

WorxAudio Technologies the SONIC FORCE

at Carnaval Carolina 2010

Held at the Metrolina Expo this past June 27, Carnaval Carolina 2010 marked its thirteenth year and was the largest Latin American festival in the Southeast US with attendance in excess of 40,000 revelers. A huge roster of artists—both from the US and Latin America—provided music and entertainment this year.



carnavalcarolina.com
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To accommodate the long list of performers and the large, enthusiastic crowd, event planners erected three stages that consisted of two primary setups that stood side by side plus a smaller stage. Throughout the day and well into the evening, the music was loud and clear—thanks in no small part to the robust sound reinforcement systems drawn from the TrueLine catalog of Greensboro, NC-based WorxAudio Technologies.

Dave Barker, owner/operator of db Sound of Charlotte, a full-service live event production company that handles audio, lighting, and video for the special events and secondary level touring markets, was contracted to provide sound reinforcement for Carnaval Carolina 2010. He discussed the challenges of the project.

“We had two large stages side by side—joined with bridging and walkways—that served as the main concert area,” explained Barker. “Because of the large number of performing artists, the setup was designed so we could alternate each stage, as this enabled one act to perform while the next group of performers prepared for their turn. Since we were alternating between stages with each new performing group, it was critical to maintain consistent sound quality and level. For this reason, we required loudspeaker enclosures that were voiced identically. We also needed long throw capability and wide horizontal dispersion in order to properly cover a large area with 40,000+ people. To address these concerns, we deployed WorxAudio Technologies’ TrueLine line array systems and subwoofers.”

The Stage #1 (on the left when viewed from FOH) sound system consisted of eighteen WorxAudio TrueLine V10T-P powered line array elements, flown nine modules per side. These were accompanied by eight TL218SS-P subwoofers—ground stacked four enclosures wide and two enclosures high across the front area of the stage. Six WorxAudio 2MX ultra compact floor monitors (from the company’s Wave Series product line) were deployed as needed with each performing act.

The Stage #2 (on the right when viewed from FOH) sound system utilized twenty-four WorxAudio TrueLine V8T-P powered line arrays. These loudspeakers were flown twelve elements per side and were accompanied by eight TL218SS-P subwoofers—ground stacked four enclosures wide and two enclosures high across the front area of the stage. Like Stage #1, six WorxAudio 2MX ultra compact floor monitors were available as required for stage monitoring.

“With the use of the EASE Focus loudspeaker modeling software,” Barker reports, “we were able to calculate each hang across both stages to cover the audience with the same level and sound quality. This made for a seamless show when switching stages back and forth. WorxAudio’s flyware was an equally important factor that contributed to the success of this event. The hardware on the TrueLine boxes make for easy adjustments throughout the hang, so when it came time to hang and trim the boxes, the process was very efficient.”

At the third, smaller stage, the dB Sound crew flew two WorxAudio TrueLine X5-P compact, “all-in-one” line array systems. Incorporating five

modules, each with a medium format, 1-inch exit compression driver and dual 8-inch cone transducers, the TL X5-P has a total of five high frequency drivers and ten bass drivers—all housed in a single, rugged enclosure. These two line array systems were accompanied by two TL218SS-P subwoofers—ground stacked across the front of the stage. Four WorxAudio 2MX ultra compact floor monitors completed the system.

For a one-day event, there was a tremendous amount of equipment and accompanying logistics to make everything come together, but it all happened as expected. “This year’s Carnaval Carolina had a few hiccups, but ultimately, everything worked out really well,” says Barker. “With the two main stages side by side, we needed broad coverage. The wide dispersion provided by the TrueLine V10’s and V8’s delivered the seamless coverage we were hoping for. Best of all, we received several compliments from both the client and many of the acts about the overall fidelity and natural sound of the system. We’re now discussing next year’s event with our client. When the project leads to repeat business, that’s as good as it gets.”

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SOUNDCHECK says...

Thank You Nashville

As you all know, in May of this year all of us here at Soundcheck Nashville suffered a great loss and our amazing city of Nashville suffered an even greater loss. Our building, along with the Grand Ole Opry House, Schermerhorn Symphony Center, The Country Music Hall of Fame, countless musicians and artists sustained extensive water damage from unprecedented floodwaters.

My staff and I found ourselves rendered helpless as we watched in disbelief as the waters rose. Having always regarded the storage and safety of our artists' and facility's equipment as one of our highest professional priorities, it was a scene of indescribable heartbreak for us and something we will never forget.

During this time, before the waters had even started to recede, many of you were already calling to offer assistance. The speed in which we found our friends rallying around us was overwhelming and we truly could not have accomplished the monumental task of exiting, repairing, and rebuilding with the speed and efficiency in which we did without their help. Both old friends and new were lined up to offer compassion, encouragement, kind words, and prayers of support. To all of you that were there for us during this ordeal, we will be forever grateful. It would be impossible to thank everyone individually so on behalf of everyone at Soundcheck I am extending our sincerest gratitude to all those who participated in assisting us in our time of need.

We would also like to thank our sister companies, Soundcheck Austin and CenterStaging/SCLA for their backup support in making sure we were able to cover all our rentals, shows and artist support responsibilities during the clean-up process.

To all the manufacturers that work so closely with us day in and day out, who really stepped up for us when we needed them most, we extend our gratitude and appreciation for their continued support.

As we start to settle back into our Soundcheck home, we are reminded of those who have lost so much more and to that consideration we especially want to express our deepest and most fervent sympathies to the families of those 31 people who lost their lives.

On a very personal note, I would like to thank my staff, Mayor Carl Dean and NARAS/Musicares for their direct support in helping the everyday working musician.

Thanks again and again...

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S. Ben Jumper



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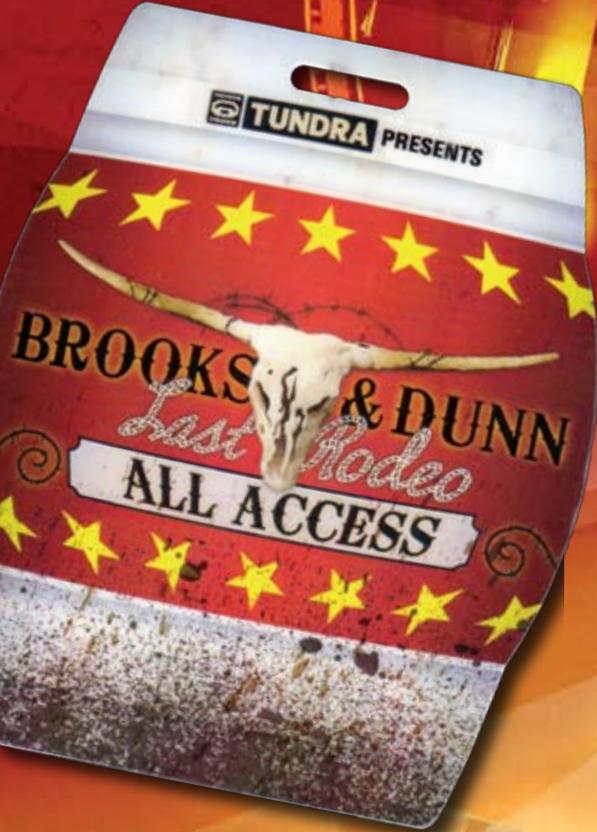
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Brooks & Dunn

The Last Rodeo is Over

BY MICHAEL A. BECK

Last



Band

Band Leader-Keys - Dwain Rowe

Bass - Robertson Harrington

Lead-Gtr - Lou Toomey

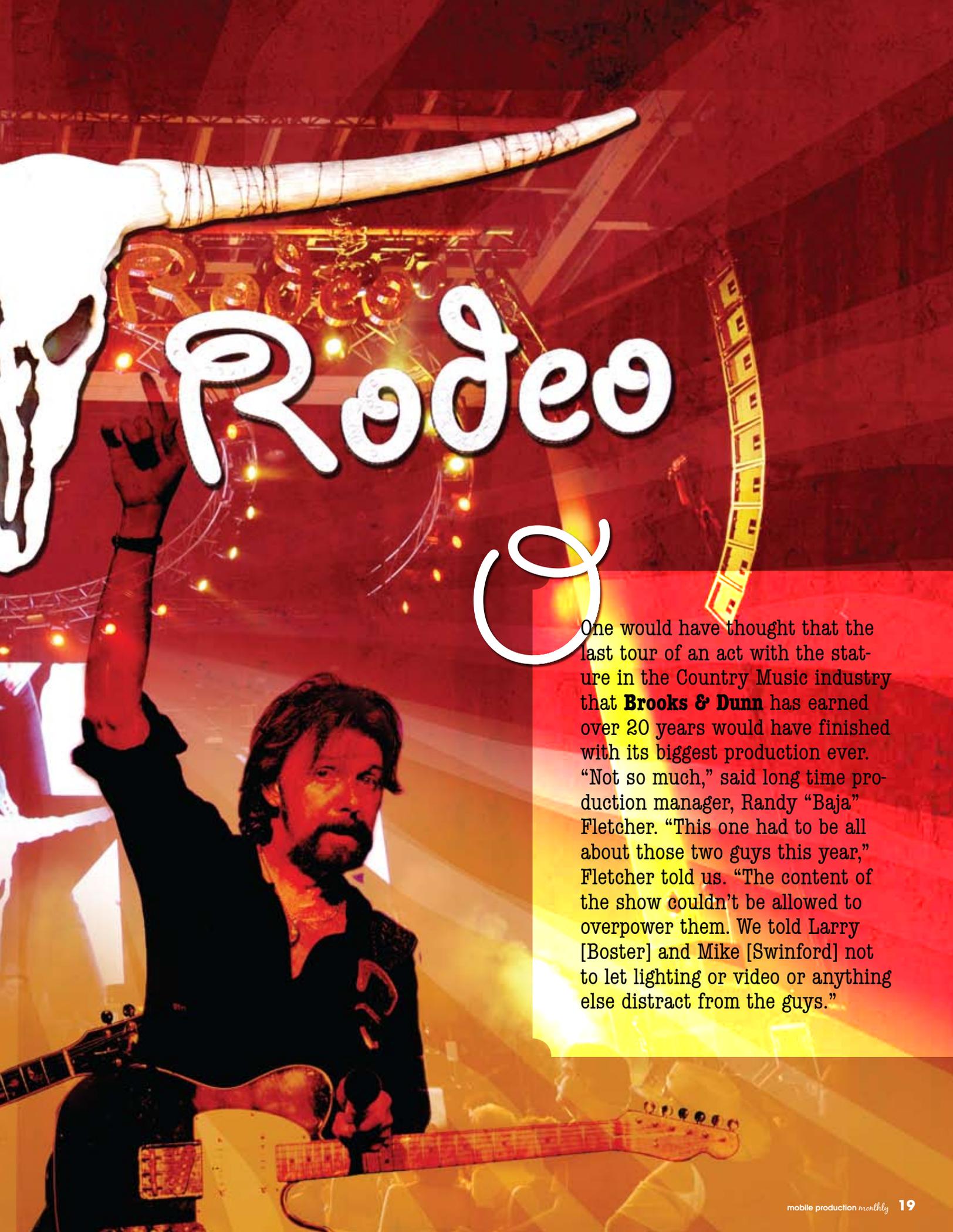
Drums - George (Trey) Gray

Acc & Electric Gtr - George (Tony) King

Steel-Lap Steel-Dobro - Gary Morse

Fiddle-Acc Gtr-Banjo - Jimmy Stewart

Background Vocals - Trez Gregory, Julie Downs, Kim Parent



Rodeo

Q

One would have thought that the last tour of an act with the stature in the Country Music industry that **Brooks & Dunn** has earned over 20 years would have finished with its biggest production ever. “Not so much,” said long time production manager, Randy “Baja” Fletcher. “This one had to be all about those two guys this year,” Fletcher told us. “The content of the show couldn’t be allowed to overpower them. We told Larry [Boster] and Mike [Swinford] not to let lighting or video or anything else distract from the guys.”



The show opened with the smaller walls covered by *drapes painted* with the image of a **woman riding a bucking horse**.





a unit flew in from above the rig that was made up of two steer heads mounted back to back and covered in small mirrored squares as on a mirror ball

Don't take that to mean that the production was in any way lackluster. With Production Designer Mike Swinford and Lighting Designer Larry Boster on the job, the show might not have been gag heavy as has been in the past but it certainly had the excitement and elegance that a "last tour" would call for.

The video display, which is discussed in detail in an article in this issue of *mPm* by contributor Michael Wharton, consisted of three high def vertical LED screens. The center display measured 20' wide x 27' high while the screens to its right and left were 16' wide x 12' high. The show opened with the smaller walls covered by drapes painted with the image of a woman riding a bucking horse. This made for a very big opening look. A few songs into the show the drapes dropped to reveal the LED display behind them and that was the upstage look for the rest of the show.

With two handheld cameras at the stage and two FOH cameras, it was a pretty straight forward video rig with the exception of a POV camera on the lead guitarist offering a great crowd shot. However there was one interesting departure, there was no barricade. The hand held cameras at the stage were used as much on dollies as they were hand held, but there was nothing protecting them from the crowd. While there was one instance on the last night where a fan rushed the stage, that was the exception and not the rule. Certainly that seemed to cause no physical impedance to the hand held camera operators.

The lighting rig was as tasty as anything seen in a long time. Although there have

been larger and more exciting rigs out this year, few have been better tailored to the needs of the production than this design. The rig was comprised of a 30' wide circular truss loaded with 24 Mac 600s that was centered over the stage. Offstage of the ring were two curved truss sections (one on each side) that contained eight 600s. There was a down stage truss loaded with Mac 600s as well for wash on the band.

On many occasions Lighting Designer Larry Boster was asked why he chose to use so many of the aging Macs and his answer was simple, "Are you kidding? I'd love to have used a bunch of [Vari-Lite] 3500 Washs. However, on this tour everything is budget driven, and this is what I could afford to get the coverage that I needed."

The surprising thing about the design is not that Boster used the Mac 600s but that the show looked as good as it did for his having used them. Nothing was over powered yet nothing was ever in the dark. In addition to the wash gear fixtures over the stage, each side LED walls had six VL3000s above and below the display.

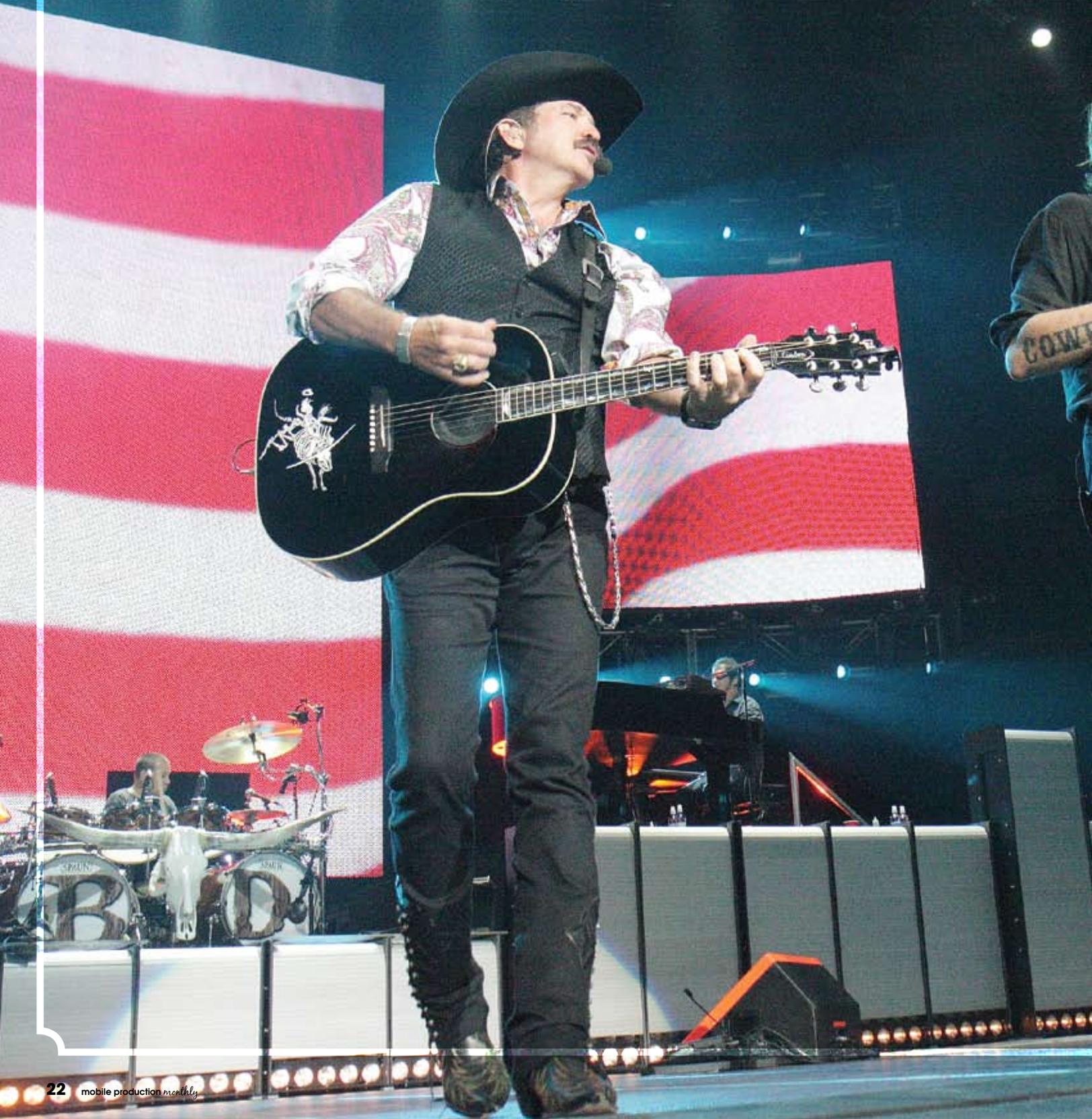
One very interesting design element was the Brooks & Dunn take on a mirror ball that was used during the huge ballad hit *Neon Moon*. As the song began, a unit flew in from above the rig that was made up of two steer heads mounted back to back and covered in small mirrored squares as on a mirror ball. As the video content played through beautiful night scenes the light bouncing off of the mirrors had a stunning effect.



photo by Michael A. Beck



Watching Larry [Boster] work that **show** was like watching *20 years* coming down to the very **last cue**. It was *truly bitter sweet*.



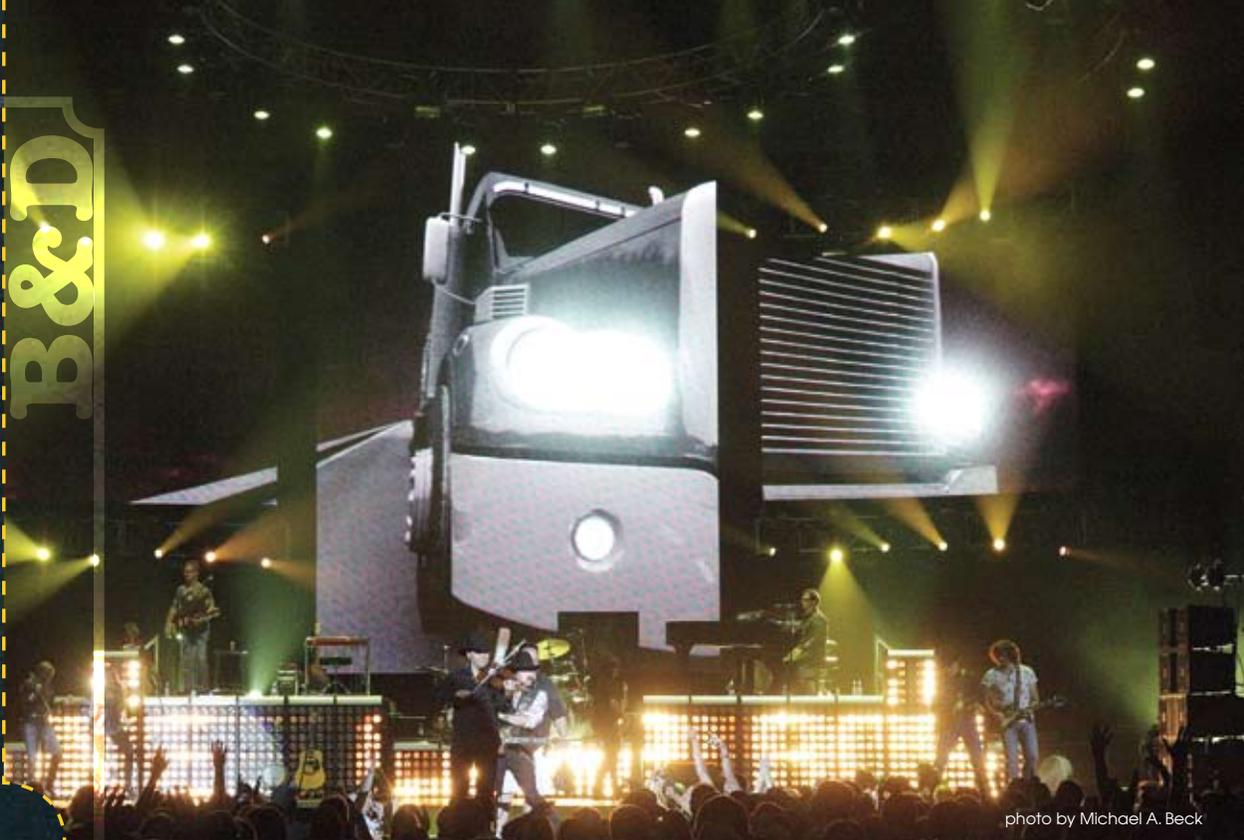


photo by Michael A. Beck

Another interesting effect in the show was a relatively new lighting element called JARAG. The JARAG is a square lighting fixture containing 25 independently controlled 75W lamps created by a French based lighting company called Chromlech. Thirty-seven JARAGs, which were worked into the design at the insistence of B&D Manager Clarence Spalding, were loaded in 21 housing units that function like (and thus were called) garage doors. They were positioned on the floor creating the fascia for the upstage risers and faced out off the stage toward the crowd. The primary function of the array was to scroll verbiage pertaining to the city or state the show was playing in on any given day such as city names in the state or sports teams, etc. When they weren't being used, the units were hidden from sight by the garage doors built by set builder Andy Akers for that purpose.

The audio presentation of this show was stunning with a band that has three guitars (not including Kix and Ronnie) as well as a steel guitar, piano, drums and three backup singers. There is a lot to pay attention to in order to keep it from sounding like a riot or a loud multi-car crash. In the case of this show it was no problem to look at any person on the stage and hear what they were doing.

The "X" Factor

It is easy to come in and do a story on this show from the perspective of who did what with what gear and even how well they did it. Larry Boster and Mike Swinford put up great lighting and production designs, which Sound Image, Bandit Lites, Media Visions Entertainment, SGPS/Showrig and Akers Theatrical Fabrication and the crew of the tour brought to life. But that's happened for as long as Brooks & Dunn have been touring.

So when the last show took place in Nashville on September 2 of this year, some expressed the desire for this show to be just like any other, but there was no way that could possibly have been the case. "While I was watching that very last show, I felt like I was watching my child go off to college," said Bandit Lites Vice President Michael Golden. "Watching Larry [Boster] work that show was like watching 20 years coming down to the very last cue. It was truly bitter sweet. I knew that I was watching the end of a 20-year body of work. And I'm sure Baja would agree that you can't count on 20 years in any line of work"

While the evening had something of a festive feel with the attendance of fam-

ily, friends and VIPs who have pulled up alongside and helped out along the way, there was the overarching notion that it had come to an end as of the last cue of this night.

When told of Golden's comments about watching him work, Boster took just a moment to choke back a tear, "When I stepped up to the board, I knew that it was going to be the last time," he told us. "I didn't think of it at the level of every cue because I was in the middle of calling the show. But I did think about it at the level of every song being the last one I would do out of 17 years of being with those guys. It was hard to keep my composure. I've never gotten bored with their songs. I've never gotten bored with their songs. I've probably done *Neon Moon* 1,500 times over the years, and I still just love the song and the way Ronnie sings it. The last time was as good as the first time. I didn't want it to end, but at the same time I'm looking forward to a new tomorrow."

Baja had a perspective that seemed to counter the bitter sweet feelings of many other on the crew. "In one word I would call it fantastic! It was like it was reading a book with 18 chapters and when it was done, I closed it and said, 'WOW! What a ride! Great book.' So you put it on the shelf and grab a new book and start in on it. I hear people talking about how sad it is and ask why? We all knew this was going to end and this just happened to be the year it happened. I had the time of my life!"

Baja recalled a conversation early on wherein Kix told him that there are only a few things that they can control in this business but one thing that could be controlled was to make sure that it is fun. And by all accounts that order was carried out from start to finish. Baja went on to talk about the crew. "I'm proud of all of the guys who rode this one out as long as they did. My wish for other people in this industry is that they could have a chance to do it just once like we did it."

Long time Brook & Dunn backline tech and studio engineer Jeff Kersey recalled the night the reality of the end of the road for this gig hit him. "The night after the ACM (Academy of Country Music)



My wish for other people in this industry is that they could have a chance to do it just once like we did it. ~Baja

awards show was shot in Las Vegas CBS shot a tribute show for the band with a bunch of artists from several genres came and performed Books & Dunn songs. Rascal Flatts sang *It's Getting Better All the Time*, and that's when it just welled up inside of me. I've been here more than a third of my life and it's going to end. I had to walk away. I was tearing up and that happened several times that night. That didn't happen the last night because there was so much going on, and I'd had time to process it. By then we saw it coming."

Many others chimed in on the subject of the end of an era (as it were) all of whom fell in line with the general theme of bitter sweet. Sound Image Nashville GM Everett Lybolt said, "It's like the saying, one door closes and another opens. You know something else is going to happen, you just don't know how or when. But these guys aren't just going to go away."

Tour Manager Scott Edwards, who will continue on working for Spalding Entertainment, was short winded and to the point on the matter. "I'm one of the lucky few who get to keep on working with both Kix and Ronnie. The part I'm going to miss is the interaction with the crew. I worked side by side with Baja for 18 years. I'm really going to miss all the guys."

The last song of the last show of the last tour ended and as Kix Brooks was giving Ronnie Dunn a playful shove to get off the stage Larry Boster was calling the final cue of his 17-year career with Brooks & Dunn, "Stand by house lights. Wait for the band to get off the stage... and... go on house lights."

And then it was over. 🎧





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B&D

photo by Michael A. Beck

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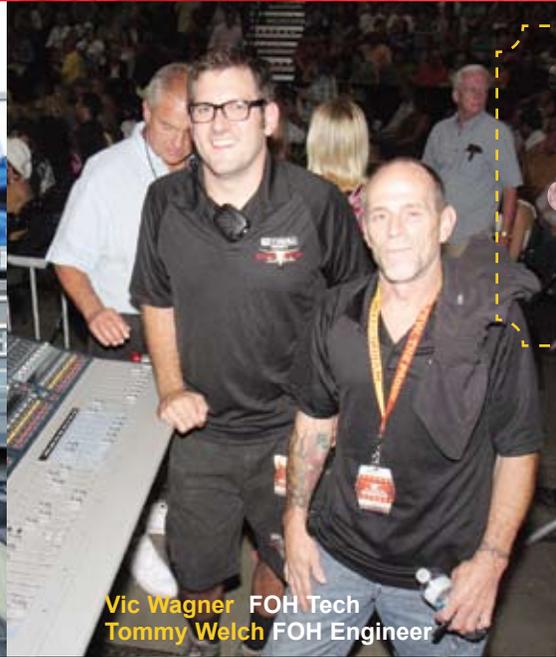
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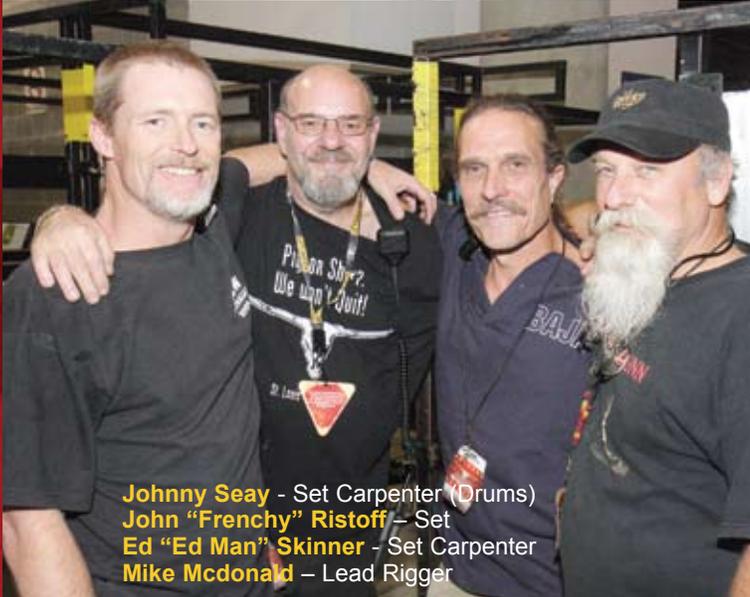
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Video Crew



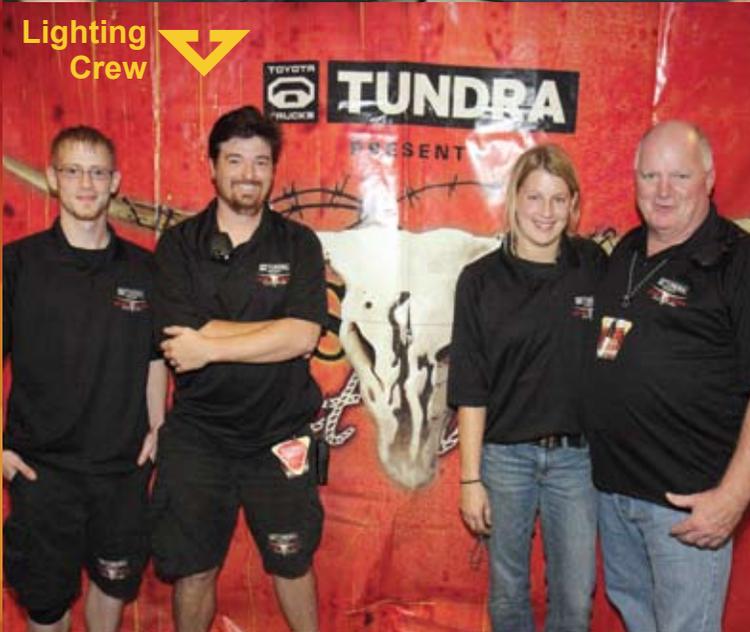
Vic Wagner FOH Tech
Tommy Welch FOH Engineer



Johnny Seay - Set Carpenter (Drums)
John "Frenchy" Ristoff - Set
Ed "Ed Man" Skinner - Set Carpenter
Mike McDonald - Lead Rigger



Audio Crew



Lighting Crew



Lonnie Taylor Stage Manager
Jeff Kersey Backline

B&D crew

Video Crew

front: Mike "Buzzy" Buswell - FOH-Camera, Wade "10-a-c" Slatton back: Lance Strader - Wall Tech, Dave "Shmba" Alexander - Stage Right Hand Held, Byron Fuller - Wall Tech, Mike Bischoff - Engineer, Brandon Lewis - Stage Left Hand Held, Dan Hanson - Director, Russ Spann - FOH Camera, Mike Forbes - Engineer

Lighting Crew

Cory Reynolds - Lighting Tech, Dave Langford - Lighting Tech, Jenna Rohrs - Lighting Tech, Larry Boster - Lighting Designer

Audio Crew

Jeremy Overall - P.A. Fly Guy, Matt Bock - Monitor Tech, Mike Adams - Monitor Engineer, "Just a Friend," Everett Lybolt - Sound Image Nashville GM

Manager - Clarence Spalding

Management

Tour Manager - Scott Edwards
Production Manager - Randy Baja Fletcher
Stage Manager - Lonnie Taylor

Audio

FOH-Engineer - Tommy Welch
Monitor- Engineer - Mike Adams
FOH-Tech - Vic Wagner
Crew Chief/Monitor-Tech - Matt Bock

Video

Director - Dan Hanson
Engineer - Mike Bischoff
FOH Cameras - Mike "Buzzy" Buswell, Russ Spann
Engineer - Mike Forbes
Hand Held - Dave "Shmba" Alexander, Brandon Lewis
Wall Tech - Byron Fuller, Rob Devlin, Lance Strader

Equipment Tech

Backline - Jeff Kersey

Merchandise

Swag - Bill Huntsman

B&D Videographer

Thian Phan

Audio Fly Guy

Fly-Pa - Jeremy Overall

Live Nation

Promoter - Brian O'connell
Driver - Brian Pittman

Truck Drivers

Jim Milton - Gak, Lyndel Cortez - Sound, John Cooper - Swag, Karla Bradshaw - Lights, John Lindner - Rigging, Ted Sandwell - Video, Tom Deinema - Jarag, Charles Scalf - Grid

Bus Drivers

Mike Leatherwood - Artist, Wayne Sullivan - Artist, Calvin Lee - Band, Curly Jones - Crew, Candace Lee - Crew, Van Coffee - Crew

Carpenters

Drums-Set - Johnny Seay
Set: John "Frenchy" Ristoff, Ed Skinner

Lights

Ld - Larry Boster
Techs: Cory Reynolds, Dave Langford, Jenna Rohrs & Andy Knighton (Split-Tour)

Riggers

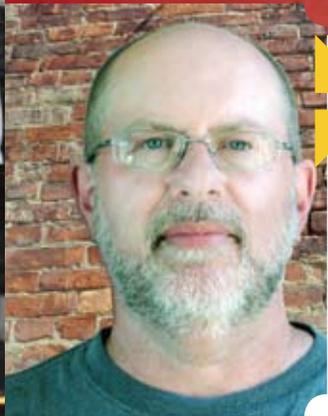
Lead - Mike McDonald
Sho-Rig - Mark Mckinney

Toyota Drivers

Truck - Richard Yuenger
Bus - Andy Birdwell

Toyota

Leader - Trev Wooten
Steve Shutts, Dammon Nemeths, Adam Gronze



Mike Swinford's Thoughts on His Time with Brooks & Dunn

In my initial meetings with Kix and Ronnie, it was decided that the tour would commemorate their 20th anniversary as a duo. We went through several designs around the

Roman Numerals XX to represent the 20-year mark. At a later date, the theme changed to "The Last Rodeo," and it became clear that this was not only their 20th year but also their last tour performing together. An entire new twist to the production design was needed.

One thing that has always been present in their shows has been the Steer Head logo. We decided to make it bigger and much more realistic than has been done before. Through the years, we had many versions from inflatables, the profile cutout in metal, to a giant mirrored head that laid on the floor. This year we had a dimensionally carved steer head 30' across and

almost 10' tall that hung as a head piece above the stage.

Hanging below the horns on faux barbed wire was an LED sign with the words "Last" on one side and "Rodeo" on the other. There were a total of 260 5W LED bulbs each controlled via a DMX relay. This allowed for lots of scrolling effects while the power supply needed was a single 20-gauge power feed. The relays lived behind the head.

I had pitched the idea of the JARAG lighting units early on without much acceptance from B&D. Bruce Rodgers had used them on their last CMA show, and they got to see firsthand how well they worked. Soon they wanted to incorporate them into the tour. The JARAGs are great units with an old school look that we all liked. My issue was not wanting to see them on songs when they were not featured. I had originally designed a horizontal blind flipper system, something like you might see on a Navy

signal light that was DMX controlled. After some test renderings it became evident that a lot of the bulbs would be blocked by the blinds from most of the audience. The next and final version was a tambour or "garage door" custom device that would roll down in front of the JARAGs to hide or reveal them. When closed they almost resembled an amp line of cabinets. This allowed us to reveal part or all of the units as it was all controlled by Lighting Designer Larry Boster at the lighting console. There was a DMX channel that would control the position of the doors and were written into his lighting cues.

Since the mid 90s I have designed many Brooks & Dunn tours. It has always been a pleasure to collaborate with Kix, Ronnie, Clarence Spaulding, Baja and their entire team. In the touring world, this is as good as it gets. I have many fond memories of the years we have worked together. I wish them the best of luck in their new endeavors. 🍀



Contact Andrew Akers
615-320-0440

AKERS THEATRICAL FABRICATION

photo by JA Cheong

Delivers Old School Style with Modern Techniques

Andrew Akers' namesake company presents stage scenery with a decidedly theatrical flair. BY LESLEY CUTLER

In his 20-year history of constructing staging scenery for roughly 75 percent of country superstars Brooks & Dunn's road shows and tours, **Andy Akers** had his work cut out for him in again manning that post for the duo's historic farewell tour, *Last Rodeo*.

The best-selling duo in the history of country music, with 23 Number One hits, sales of more than 30 million albums, and over 80 major music industry awards, Brooks & Dunn's final sold-out tour as a duo was indeed a must-see event and necessitated the creation of stage scenery to contribute to that significance. Working with Brooks & Dunn production designer Mike Swinford, Akers' full-time staff

of five built the tour's stage scenery complemented by Terry Smith of TFS Enterprises for electronics and Drops-Everything for painting and carving. Special labor-intensive creations such as a 10-foot tall by 30-foot wide steer head skeleton carved out of foam presented one of many challenges that were executed by Akers' staff and sub contractors. Complicated electronics in the scenery were also designed and fabricated in the aluminum Last Rodeo sign piece that hung below the steer head. This was comprised of 256 LED



lamps on individual circuits triggered by a DMX controller that enabled the signage to scroll, flash and chase in any order or direction. Akers' company also built from scratch custom roll-up doors for a wall of JARAG units, which were able to roll up and down to either reveal or conceal each row or a group of

rows of each group of JARAG units in whatever combination the lighting director chose.

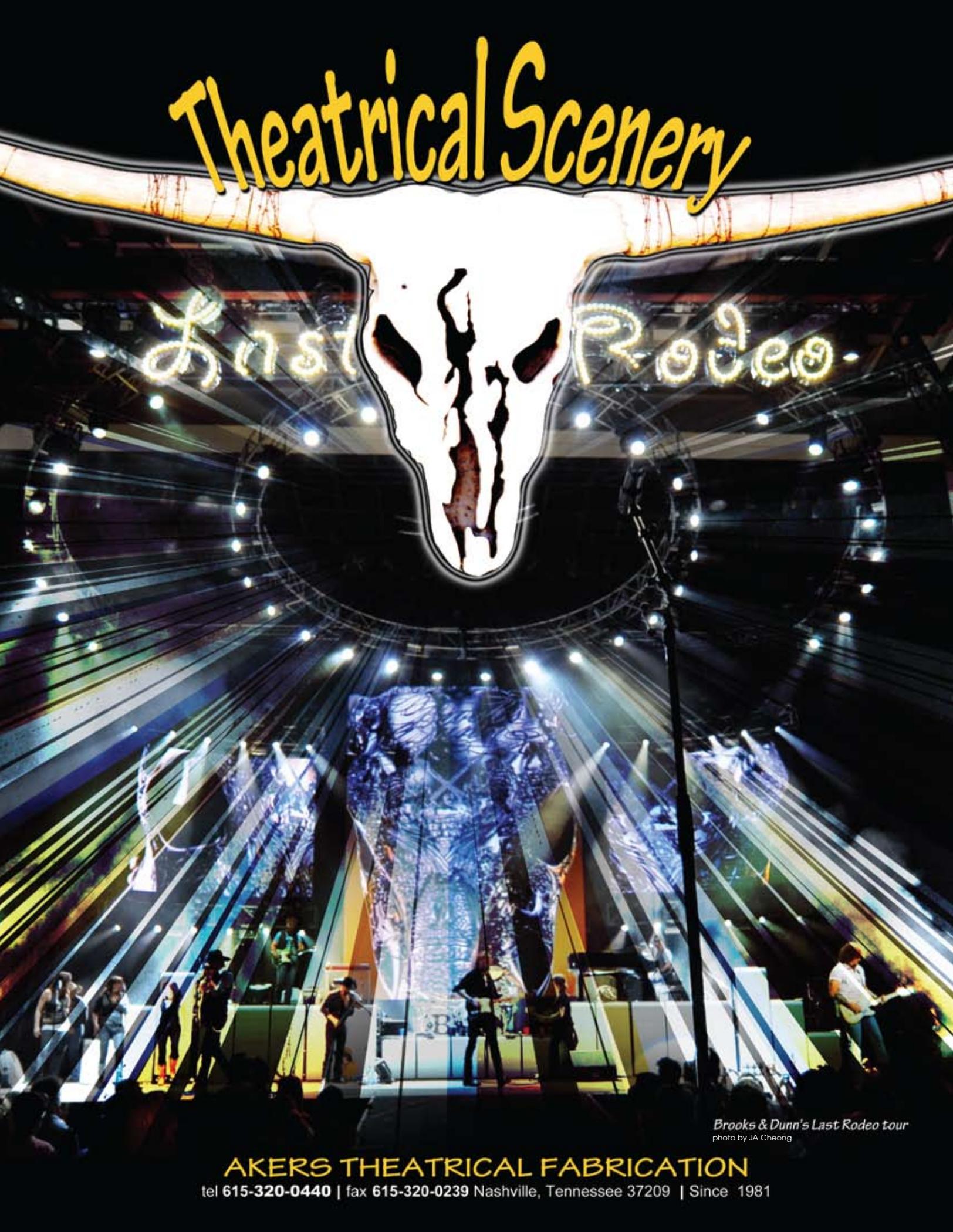
Akers Theatrical Fabrication's success and continued business has a foundation in its past performance via delivery of exceptionally fabricated scenery. The company utilizes traditional scenic painting, as well as foam and wood sculpting and carving, favoring the traditional methods over digital artwork. Akers feels an old-school technique gives a more exaggerated, hence traditional, look that adds more to the illusion imparted by the scenery. He notes that the key element differentiating his company from many others is his specialized skill set and unique combination of modern technical construction techniques with traditional theatrical finish.

Providing his personal touch in meeting client needs, Akers has developed and maintained relationships with numerous production managers and production designers though the years, such as the late Ian Knight, Tom

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Theatrical Scenery

Last Rodeo



Brooks & Dunn's Last Rodeo tour
photo by JA Cheong

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photo by Michael A. Beck

Media Visions

revealing a lifetime of memories with **Brooks & Dunn**

BY MIKE WHARTON

Brooks & Dunn performed their final concert September 2 in Nashville, culminating a 20-year career loaded with industry awards and sellout crowds. Media Visions, which has provided their touring video production for the last eight years, has played a large part in the duo's dynamic stage presentation. Created in 1993 by founder and President **Mike Cruce**, Media Visions was originally an installation and engineering company.

"That was my background, that was my dream," says Cruce. The seed of the dream was planted in 1980. His father, a minister of music at a local church, had rented a three camera production truck to broadcast services. This brought Cruce into contact with Trinity Broadcasting. Between Trinity and freelance work as a cameraman, the seed developed. His first remote shoot was a Firefall concert. "I jumped at the chance to do it," says Cruce.

When told what his day rate would be, Cruce replied in stunned joy, "You mean you're gonna pay me to do this?!"

He was off and running, winding up in southern Florida as Operations Manager for Telemundo for four years, and then doing a stint as Southeastern sales rep for Ikegami. A desire to return to Alabama, family drove him to negotiations with one of his Ikegami dealers whereupon he became head of National Sales in the Birmingham office. Shortly afterwards Media Visions sprouted.



Cruce quickly saw the necessity of expansion and opened offices in San Francisco to enter the corporate market. He met and then hired well known industry veteran Wade "Ten-A-C" (pronounced like Tennessee) Slatton. Slatton's nickname had been bestowed upon him early in his career by Steve Miller while working as a drum tech for Miller's band.

Moving from backline to stage manager, Slatton's path crossed with Brooks & Dunn Production Manager "Randy" Baja" Fletcher in 1992. Fletcher was putting together a headline tour for Brooks & Dunn and asked Slatton to be stage manager. A few years later while on tour with Kenny Rogers, Slatton was approached by Janet Smith, then GM of PSL Gearhouse, to come work for PSL.

"I told her I didn't know much about video," recalls Slatton. Smith persisted though, knowing the many relationships Slatton had established in the industry, and Slatton agreed to become an account manager. "The first call I made was to Baja," says Slatton. "We've been together ever since, and every year the deal was sealed with just a handshake from Clarence Spalding." Four of those years were under the banner of PSL as the video supplier. Media Visions owned all of its own gear and then hired Ten-A-C when PSL was going out of business and ended up buying the Brooks & Dunn rig from them. It was then that Janet Smith came on as GM. Slatton as account

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Last Rodeo



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photo by Michael A. Beck

TRAVEL for the Stars

A Full-Service Travel Agency Says Goodbye to Brooks & Dunn

BY JESSI WALLACE

Travel for the Stars is saying goodbye to their second longest client of 15 years: Brooks & Dunn. Since 1995, owner **Pam Keller** has booked every hotel, airplane ticket, personal travel and anything else needed for the tour.

mobile Production monthly got a chance to chat with Keller about Brooks & Dunn and learned how she felt about the group. "It's very sad; I don't know how we're going to fill the void. Scott Edwards was an incredible tour manager and was very easy to work with. We knew each other's likes and dislikes and worked together extremely smoothly. I'll miss them all. It was a nice tour to do for that long... I felt like I was a part of the team, although I was in the shadows a little bit. They were a great bunch to work with, and I will miss them."

While Keller will deeply miss working with Brooks & Dunn, she has a laundry list of clientele to keep her busy and a very interesting history behind Travel for the Stars. Everyone in the entertainment industry has a story

and Keller's happens to be one of the most unique. Before opening a successful travel agency, she was a dental hygienist, traveling with her dentist husband around North America teaching Dental Practice Management seminars. During this time, she was responsible for the travel and meeting plans for the seminars. Never did she think she would end up trading in patient schedules for artists' itineraries, but she knew that planning was what she enjoyed. In 1993, she started out doing personal travel for a very good friend, Reba McEntire.

As her travel planning skills grew, it was Reba who encouraged Keller to start an agency, offering to be her first client. In 1995, Travel for the Stars made Music Row its home, and to this day they assist with all travel plans for an array of artists such as Martina McBride, Tim McGraw and Faith Hill, Trace Adkins, Big & Rich, Blake Shelton, and so many more. The agency primarily serves the country music genre at the moment, but they are expanding as Music City itself is also changing into a melting pot of music.

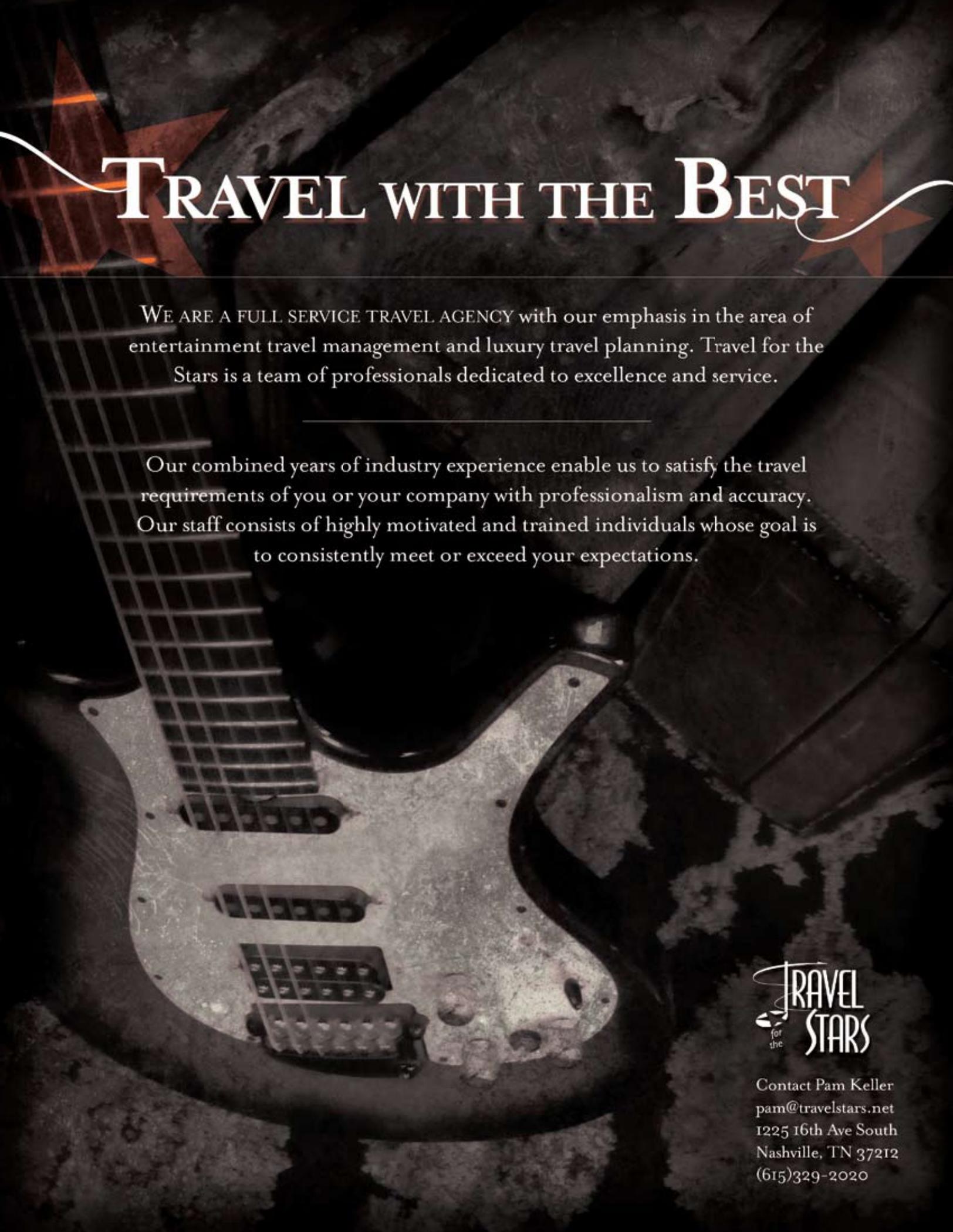
So what sets Travel for the Stars apart from other travel agencies? Keller shared, "We pride ourselves in delivering a level of service



Shelly Cullum - Agent, Frances Goodlow - Receptionist, Pam Keller - Agent & Owner, Beth Anderson - Agent, Jenna Atteberry - Agent (Not Shown)

uniquely ours. We treat everybody as if they are the most important in the world. We're on call 24/7... always available to help out before and after business hours. Our clients are very respectful of our time, but they know if an emergency comes up we are there to fix it. We also provide anything and everything they might need. We don't just book hotels and transportation; we also take care of other things like appointments and dinner reservations. It's really a full-service. We have very loyal clients because we work so hard to take care of them."

While Travel for the Stars is saying goodbye to Brooks & Dunn, they still have a bright and busy future ahead. They treat everyone like family and get the job done. For more information on Travel for the Stars and how to use them for your next tour, visit travelstars.net. 📍



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Bandit Lites



Mike Golden
Bandit Lites VP

photo by Michael A. Beck

A History of Concert Lighting

As the **Brooks & Dunn** phenom came to a close, there are a number of vendors that have been with the duo for many of the 20-year run. It's tempting to ask the question, "What now?". While that might be a valid question for the individual crew members, it's not so much with the vendors. Knoxville based **Bandit Lites** is one such company.

Company Vice President Michael Golden summed up the experience, "Bitter sweet is a good way to describe it, but it's such a great run that it's hard to feel totally sad about it. We just closed a chapter, and now we'll open new ones."

Bandit President and Chief Operating Officer Pete Heffernan explained it this way, "That was a really good example of a perfect account. In the beginning we figured out how to be the most affordable answer to their needs, and we kept pace with the size of the production all the way through to the very last show. It was a fun 20 years."

Indeed there is no time for sadness as there is always more to do especially with a catalog that boasts 48 touring clients in 2010 with genres and names ranging from the fore mentioned Brooks & Dunn to Alice Cooper to ZZ Top to Tangerine Dream and beyond. Of course that doesn't include corporate, installation and special event work that the company does out of offices in Knoxville, Nashville, San Francisco, London, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

This didn't happen overnight. The company

has been around since 1968 when it started with Michael Strickland providing follow spots for concerts as they came through his hometown of Kingsport, Tenn. Strickland had been involved in community theatre since he was five years old and had an understanding of stage lighting. Therefore, it wasn't necessarily a stretch to visualize using that technology (such that it was in the 60s) in a concert environment. "Back then concerts were performed in a gym or auditorium with the house lights up," Heffernan recalled. "To turn the house lights off and light the show with spots was an amazing undertaking."

"After a Beach Boys concert I approached the promoter and asked him if he would like to use lighting for his next concert," said Strickland. "The next month we took all the lights from the school theater, hung them in the gymnasium around the stage, and lit Paul Revere and The Raiders. Thus Bandit Lites was born, with borrowed equipment!"

At 12 years old he found himself in the enviable position of being a default innovator. He explained, "I didn't have any knowledge back then," he admits, "but neither did the people I was working for, so anything and everything I did was correct. The color I used was right. The mood I set was right. There was no wrong for these people, nor was there any wrong for me."

The promoter asked Strickland to name his price, and he quoted a modest \$25, which seemed like a huge amount of money to a 12-year-old in 1968. They agreed to the price, and the next month when another band came, he did the same thing. Word of Strickland's success spread and soon other touring bands

began requesting Bandit to light their concerts.

"We'd do a show one night for the Beach Boys, and they'd ask us to go the next night to another city. The first time they asked, I had to say no. I was 12 years old," he says. "I couldn't drive. I had no way of getting there, but I was ready the next time. I hired a friend with a car and a U-Haul trailer. When they asked if we could do a show the next night in Asheville, I said sure. I did not realize that after Asheville, he was going to say, 'Can you go to Charlotte?'. I had to go to school the next day and had to pass on Charlotte. After that experience, I hired two people with two cars so one could drive me home on Sunday night while the other stayed on the road."

"We worked most of the major rock concerts within 300 miles of Kingsport in the early years. We did it mainly to see free concerts and meet girls. Making money was never really part of the equation at that point. Most of the shows took place on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays so we were able to travel to them. All the equipment we used was borrowed from the local schools and theaters, hence the name Bandit!"

From 1968 to 1971, Bandit worked with a large number of national acts, including The Monkees, The Grassroots, Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons, Dennis Yost and the Classics Four, BJ Thomas, Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, The Beach Boys, Kris Kristofferson and many others. This laid a firm foundation for what would eventually become one of the world's leading lighting companies.

The 70s saw unforeseen growth for Bandit

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trusses. In the end Ryan settled on a truss grid that extended over the entire 60 x 70ft stage area as an advance truss. This was occupied by 2Kw Fresnels and over a hundred par-cans in order to provide an even 'TV' wash throughout the stage.

The set was hung from two dedicated trusses and was lit by Martin Mac 2000 Profiles, Mac 700 profiles, Mac 250 Beams as well as JTE 1044s. The combined effect was stunning with the director of photography commenting, "it doesn't look real". Ryan said afterwards that: "The Mac beams were purchased by Entec as an effect light, however they worked amazingly well lighting the set's 1m by 12m panels."

The set itself was installed by Hawthorn

Theatrical and was made up of spandex panels and fabric strips. This was hung at staggered depths, which allowed lighting elements independently. "The complexity and depth of this set allowed us to make many different looks which was crucial for such a long show," commented Ryan.

Filming the show for DVD added another challenge, as it required the audience to be lit throughout. This was accomplished with a series of house trusses covered in Vari*lite 2500s, 2 lite Mole-fays and City Colours. "The audience reaction to what happened on stage was vital to the DVD so the house lights were extremely important to our client." explains Ryan.

XL video provided several jibs and cranes as well as the hot-heads and four projection screens. The client provided over twenty cameras that were mixed by XL onto the screens and recorded for DVDs.

The final tally of 160 moving lights filled 8 universes controlled by a GrandMA Full size operated by Ryan, as well as two GrandMA lights, and two NSPs. Avolites dimmers and Entec's custom-built distros worked for the 24hours straight of rehearsals and show without complaint.

Simon "Boff" Howarth looked after dimmers backstage while Sudip Shrestha took care of dimmers in the house. A dedicated crew consisting of Crew Boss Simon Chandler-Honnor, Simon Baker, Andy Emerson, Stephen "Sven" Jolly and Michael Straun assisted them. Steve 'Clem' Clements was the Entec production rigger. Dave Raven and Richard Letchford looked after the in house followspots for the duration of the event.

After all was said and done, the client summarised: "We were very happy with the level of the production, especially the sound and lighting and are already looking forward to next year." ☺



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Akers Theatrical continued from 26

Strahan, Mike Swinford, Rene Lagler, Bruce Rogers and Anne Brahic. His signature style and specialty is reflected in the theatrical bent of the scenery construction, which is most akin to legitimate theatre and harkens back to Akers' college degree in Technical Theatre. In addition, assembly needs are a foremost concern, and Akers addresses ease-of-assembly with the same attention whether the staging scenery is intended for a one-time use or a hundred-time use. Whether constructing for a one-off or an arena tour, his approach remains the same.

Akers' first gig at Tom Field and Associates, a company providing staging and lighting rigs for touring rock 'n' roll shows such as the Rolling Stones 1975 tour, was followed by two years at Opryland USA. Eventually his purchase of an existing store display company led to his building staging scenery for the Opryland Theme Park, The Judds first tour in 1985, and many Alabama tours. The work snowballed from there, and Akers Theatrical Fabrication was

launched in the late 1990s.

Even the use of the words "theatrical fabrication" in the company name is indicative of its focus and facilitates a broad range of product in all media platforms and the flexibility to move from one medium to another with ease. In addition to those already mentioned, Akers notable client list includes the likes of country stars Randy Travis, Garth Brooks, Alan Jackson, Brad Paisley and The Doyle & Debbie Show; sports entity the National Basketball Association; cultural icon The Kennedy Center Honors; performing arts organization Nashville Ballet; television award shows for CMT, CMA, and BET; as well as corporate clients.

The company is ready for change and is versatile. The most recent example is the development and construction of carts for the transport and deployment of video cubes for Moo TV. Nevertheless, wherever the industry takes Akers Theatrical Fabrication in the future, one can be sure Akers' theatrical tradition will also be represented in his work. 🙌



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executive brought the Alabama and Brooks & Dunn accounts with him.

“Right out of the gate Brooks & Dunn were full on LED video,” says Cruce of the eight years they’ve supported the duo on tour. “The most challenging show was in 2005. They did not have a set so the LED became the set. It was a lot of movement with a huge look,” recalls Cruce.

The Last Rodeo Tour boasted a 53-foot truck which was dedicated to video equipment alone. Seventy-seven Daktronics PST12HD LED Panels with V-Link Control comprised the onstage center, left and right screens. Eight Custom Headers were designed and built by Showrig to give curvature for the LED Screens. Two Daktronics V-Link Processing Racks were used for control of the LED screens. Offstage left and right were two 15-foot by 20-foot Screenworks Projection Screens with custom Tri-Lite Screen surround. Two Christie LX1500 (15k) were used for projection.

Cameras and switching for the show were handled by four Sony DX50 Triax Camera Packages. Two of these were used for FOH with Fujinon 70 x 9 Sports Lenses, one handheld onstage and one pit camera on a Fisher Dolly Track. One additional Sony BRC 300 Robocam was mounted above the LED screens to provide reverse shots and band members out of sight of the handheld operator. Four Elmo CL-431 Lipstick Cameras are utilized for additional instrument shots. One Dynaspy 2.4GHZ Wireless Minicam captured audience shots from the artist’s guitar.

A Ross Synergy II ME Digital Switcher switches the side projection screens and house video feed as the Vista Systems 344 Spyder and Vista Spyder 380 Expansion Processor maps the images of the two Mac Pros running ProVideoPlayer along with I-MAG across the

LED walls. Five AJA Ki-Pro Field Recorder units with two Horita TC VLR-100 Time Code Generators iso record the concert for future use and archive. The use of the Ki-Pro makes quick reference and editing substantially easier than DVD or tape.

Media Visions uses Daktronics LED product exclusively for several reasons, besides the fact it’s made in America. “We corresponded with Daktronics quite a bit,” says Slatton,” about making the equipment road worthy for travel.” In fact he and Byron Fuller spent time at the factory in Brookings, SD helping to design the carts that the LED travels in so it would be truck and stage efficient. Previously Daktronics LED had been used for scoreboards and signage at car racetracks, something Slatton is very familiar with as he drives racecars for Brooks & Dunn, “to relax.”

The formation of the Concert Touring Division in 2003 diversified the company from its original scope of work, and in the last eight years this division grew with the addition of Slatton. They have pretty much worked with nearly every Country artist today either in touring or specialist entertainment events.

However, while the concert division of Media Visions may well be the sexiest and most high profile part of its universe of work, the company is not just a concert touring endeavor. Its scope of work has spanned meetings and events for corporate, religious, government and broadcast organizations dating back to Cruce’s fore mentioned background in those areas. The diverse background of the key members (Cruce - Broadcast, Design & Installations and Corporate, Slatton - Touring and Entertainment and Smith - Corporate, Film & TV and Entertainment) along with its audio and lighting department heads brings broad cultural and professional experience to every project. These assets allow Media Visions,

Inc. to offer a full complement of equipment and partnerships from some of the most recognized vendors in the industry today.

“I think it is important to realize that Media Visions is not a one market company,” Janet Smith told us. “It has a very successful and established client base in its core business of design and permanent installations. That work has always been a foundation of the business, and we usually have at least 4 to 5 installations underway at one time. And whilst budgets for all aspects of rental and staging are constantly being revised, we have been very lucky in sustaining this section of our business even with budget constraints. An additional production manager is on staff to handle all streaming and video transport solutions with Point to Point Management. Add to this, our corporate events and the increased production in our audio and video lighting departments in the last 12 months from our Birmingham base, we have a solid building block to take the company even further. We have a core team of project managers in house from all departments and a tremendous pool of freelance labor and resources we can draw upon whom we especially give thanks to for their flexibility and loyalty.”

She finally added, “Keeping our costs under control means we can be competitive for our clients, a formula that is critical in today’s market in order to compete nationally and internationally for our clients. The sharing of information and resources both internally and externally will greatly influence the success of future events in any scope of work.”

With *The Last Rodeo Tour* having now taken its final ride, Media Visions looks well suited to handle the future without Messrs. Brooks & Dunn. Let’s hope their wild ride continues well into the future. 🤖



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Lites as the company moved from high school to college and on to the real world. Michael Strickland and company built a solid client base while in high school with the current acts of the day, working with them when they visited the southeast. As college rolled around, Strickland chose the University of Tennessee in Knoxville to continue his education and hence took the firm there with him. The rest of the young men chose to go other directions so Strickland found himself alone in the endeavor. This led to hiring several new people in the Knoxville area and a rebuilding of the company.

Juggling the demands of adolescence and a budding company proved to be a bit challenging at times, but determined to succeed, Strickland pressed on – even through college and law school. Strickland ran Bandit Lites from his dorm room at the University of Tennessee while earning a degree in Business and then Law. Bandit worked with the biggest names in the music business, and few people knew that the owner was actually a college student. Black Oak Arkansas, The James Gang, Blue Oyster Cult, Conway Twitty, Loretta Lynn, Merle Haggard, Dolly Parton, Goose Creek Symphony, Dr. Hook, Pure Prairie League, Parliament Funkadelic, NRPS and many others worked with Bandit in the college years.

“While going to undergraduate and law school, the company experience phenomenal growth. All of the funding came from operations, and no outside financing was ever used. I am not sure anyone would have loaned us money even if we had asked. I was on the road more than in class during that time. During law school, I was lighting director and production manager for Kenny Rogers, and this was during his breakout period,” explains Strickland. The Kenny Rogers 1977-78 *Gambler Tour* was the biggest tour of that period, and it gained Bandit a tremendous national exposure to the highest profile tours on the road. Bandit and Kenny still work together today, some 32 years later!

Several high profile clients came to Bandit in the 70s, including Kenny Rogers, Eddie Rabbitt, Crystal Gayle, Blackfoot, The Outlaws, Charlie Rich, Ronnie Milsap, Pure Prairie League and the artist listed previously. Bandit formed a very firm footing heading into the 80s.

In July 1979, Bandit suffered a tragedy that nearly ended the company as the warehouse burned to the ground. With no insurance, Bandit was left with only two light systems that were on the road at the time. Bandit learned how to make two systems do the work of four and also learned the value of having insurance!

In the late 70s Bandit became one of the first dealers for both Genie Industries and EDI, relationships that would serve Bandit well for many years to come. It was in 1978 that several key people would begin the Bandit

experience. Brent Barrett, now the Director of Business Development, would start at Bandit while in college with Michael, a relationship that lasts to this day. In 1978, current Bandit VP Michael Golden and current COO Pete Heffernan joined the Bandit family, and they have been here ever since. Kent and Eric “Eroc” Shafferman began with Bandit in 1979. Eric is still at Bandit today. Kent was in the group for 26 years before he retired a couple of years ago. Michael’s brother Steve “Moose” Strickland was at Bandit for 27 years before he too retired. The ties are deep and strong.

When the 70s came to an end, Bandit was a small company with a very close, very dedicated group of over 30 people, mostly from the Kingsport, Tenn. area and all had a bond of brotherhood that could not be broken. The concept of paying people all year as well as providing health insurance and retirement were born and Bandit was the first company in entertainment lighting to treat the staff like people as opposed to like freelancers. This led to a fierce and proud company loyalty.

Little did the company know what explosive expansion as well as new challenges faced them in the exciting and wonderful “hair band” 80s! Bandit was yet to borrow a penny from anyone to fund its’ growth.

As the 80s unfurled at Bandit, the music scene was changing. Kenny Rogers had become one of the biggest artists in the business, and the movie *Urban Cowboy* put country music squarely at the forefront of the American pop culture. John Travolta and Debra Winger started an explosion of the Country genre and Bandit Lites lit almost all of the Country Music industry at that time. Soon Bandit clients topped the pop and country charts. As one could well imagine this lead to meteoric growth for Bandit.

However, country music was not the only big bang of the 80s, as the phenomenon known as “hair bands” came and went, and Bandit was in the thick of it all. Quiet Riot, Twisted Sister, Krokus, Ratt and many other heavy metal bands came calling on Bandit Lites for lighting services. The brief from the late Kevin Dubrow of Quiet Riot on their 1985 World Tour was “bigger than Van Halen,” and it was! Avo custom built the world’s largest (and only) 120-way console. It was a staggering 10 feet from end to end!

The southern rock genre was still in full bloom in the early 80s with stalwarts The Outlaws, Blackfoot, Molly Hatchet, The Johnny Van Zandt Band and others residing in the Bandit stable. The line between country and rock was blurred by one of the biggest acts in music history, Alabama. Bandit and Alabama linked up in the infancy of the band and together rose to the top of the industry in the mid 80s. Alabama was the first country act to take a huge, rock looking light system on the road, a trend many other acts would follow in the future.

In 1982, all of the metal bands and other rock acts Bandit worked with toured Europe and thus a European presence became a necessity. Thus Bandit set up a partnership in the UK with an English lighting company in order to provide a global lighting service for Bandit artists. Strickland met Graham Thomas and John Walters from Thomas Engineering in the UK and was immediately attracted to their “spun aluminum” PAR can.

English firms had begun using this new aluminum par can, but no American firm had embraced it. Bandit placed an order for several hundred PAR cans and introduced the Thomas PAR to the US market in full force. Strickland met with Walters and Thomas and struck a deal to represent Thomas Engineering in the US. Upon returning to the states, he employed Mike Garl to run Thomas Engineering in the US and the company is still in business today though Strickland sold it in the 90s.

Strickland kept his ownership quiet and grew it from a 2,000 square foot facility into over 20,000 square feet in the 80s. At the same time, he was introduced to the good people at Avo and brought Avo dimming and control to the US. By the mid 80s, Bandit used all Thomas truss and PARs, all Avo dimming and control and socapex cable. Bandit introduced these standards to the US, and by the end of the 80s most major hire companies had deserted their own style of truss, PARs and dimming and followed suit. English companies that opened in the US already used this technology, but it was the efforts of Bandit that helped make these household names in the US.

In his ownership of Thomas, Strickland and the staff at Bandit played a part in the development of many standard products on the market today. Elements of the revolutionary Thomas Pre Rugged Truss came from Bandit, as did the Thomas (and later Tomcat) roof system. In fact, the first roof system ever erected was done in the car park at Bandit in the early 80s as Bandit assembled a box of PRT on four Thomas Towers and then literally “put a skin on it.” Photos of the device were sent to the Thomas staff in the UK, and the world was forever changed! The 36 Lamp Pod and many other devices were also a result of the Bandit staff working with the Thomas staff to meet the needs of the market.

Bandit opened its first office in Nashville in 1982 to better service the Nashville market. It was a move that would prove to be beneficial to this very day.

A little old band from Athens, Georgia, REM, would grace the doors of Bandit in the 80s and together Bandit and REM would tour the world for the next 25 plus years. The late 80s brought Bandit another little act, one Jimmy Buffett. The Buffett-Bandit relationship continues, and the party is showing no signs of letting up. Several 80s mainstays such as Adam Ant, The Pretenders, Anita Baker, Billy Ocean and Cameo all had their heyday with Bandit.

Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young would also begin a relationship with Bandit. The late Dan Fogelberg was a Bandit mainstay from 1984 up until his untimely passing in 2007.

In the mid 80s, the Christian music market exploded, led by Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith and heavy metal band Stryper. All of these acts as well as many other Christian acts turned to Bandit for their visual needs as the genre developed. Bandit enjoyed a wonderful time with these acts as the new market emerged.

As email began to emerge, Bandit embraced it. At that same time Bandit discovered that being a trucking company and a lighting company was not something they enjoyed, and like most other lighting and sound companies, they got out of trucking. There was a brief 2-year relationship with Morpheus as East Coast Pan Command that eventually ended as Bandit began to purchase new moving mirror lights.

More elements of 'The Bandit Standard' developed in the 80s. Bandit was already known for fully pre-building systems, for silver aluminum flight cases, and for attention to detail. They added to the mix the case labels, P-Touch and Bandit Tour Books as well as extensive training of staff, full-time pay, health insurance and retirement programs. One of the biggest leaps forward was the Bandit Custom Motor Controller, an item that to this day only Bandit produces. The added safety of having the motor control switches laid out on a graphic of the lighting system makes it all but impossible to select the incorrect hoist for movement. This would lead eventually to another, bigger motor control device in the 90s.

One of the more notable items from Bandit in the 1980s was the Bandit Lites' Christmas Parties. Attendance reached over 4,000 people each year and the alcohol bill alone exceeded \$40,000 each year. The infamous events began at 7 p.m. and never ended before 8 a.m. the next day. This also started the tradition of taking care of underprivileged children each Christmas. Everyone was asked to bring a toy to gain admission, and each year it required a 24' truck to carry the wonderful gifts to the needy. Many manufacturers stepped up and simply sent in gifts just to be part of the giving. That continues to this day at all Bandit Lites' offices.

As the 80s came to an end, Bandit moved into a 30,000 square foot facility in Knoxville and purchased a good sized lighting company in Nashville to expand the presence in that market. The company was fully booked heading into the 90s with a great mix of all types of musical clients, corporate work and a new, growing sales division. Lee Anne Donaldson joined the family in the 80s and today is the Global Business Manager. Dizzy Gosnell met up with the Bandit team on the road with Iron Maiden in the 80s and would join them later in the 90s. As the famous 80s song goes, "The future is so bright we gotta wear shades!"

To be continued... ○

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The updated 2009 J4500 conversion shell shown with 2 optional slide-outs.

The number one selling Tour Bus in the USA continues to improve for the conversion market. The J4500c body looks great and rides smooth with our Wide-Ride Suspension featuring Koni FSD shocks. The MCI J4500 conversion shell comes standard with class-leading 89" of interior headroom and can be equipped with up to 3 slide-outs. For 2009, the EPA-compliant engine significantly reduces emissions, while providing great fuel economy and performance. To learn about the many 2009 improvements we've made with feedback from our customers, converters and operators, please call us at 1-847-285-2171.

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