



Outline GTO arrays were used at the Royal Albert Hall gig

UNITED KINGDOM

Mike's mechanics

Mike & the Mechanics are on the road again. As **Kevin Hilton** reports, the tour uses the latest in loudspeaker and computer technology to get the songs across

Quintessential '80s/'90s pop/rock merchants Mike & the Mechanics are back after a seven-year absence with a new line-up, a recently released album and a European tour relying on line array loudspeaker technology to reach fans old and young in a variety of venues.

Led by Genesis guitarist/bass player and founder member Mike Rutherford, the band now features vocalists Andrew Roachford and Tim Hawer, taking over from Paul Carrack and the late Paul Young (ex-Sad Café), who shared vocal duties during the group's 1985-95 heyday.

The Hit the Road Tour 2011 came to the UK in May, playing arenas and theatres around the country, with a centre-piece gig at the Royal Albert Hall in London. This featured an Outline GTO line array, while the other concerts have been using the smaller Butterfly system.

Front of house engineer is Italian producer and studio engineer Matteo Cifelli, who also tours with many of his artists, although he did not work on the Mechanics' latest album, *The Road*. Cifelli recommended the Butterfly system to Rutherford but is quick to emphasise that this had nothing to do with national loyalty. "Using it is absolutely not because it's an Italian system – it's because it sound good," he says.

Being a studio engineer, Cifelli observes, influences his work on the road, making him more conscious of frequency response and details in the sound. "I find all these things in the Outline systems," he says. "They respond very well to the EQ and the compression. I understand why because I had the chance to visit the factory and see the way they work. I have other PAs that I use and I like but Outline is really my first choice."

Cifelli began following the development of the GTO system during his trip to the Outline facility outside Brescia. He says the last time he heard the box in 2010 it was an array of six loudspeakers. This year he had a demo of what became the final version and was surprised by how it sounded. "I was expecting it to be much harder and mid heavy than the Butterfly but it sounds even cleaner and more defined," he comments. "It has the big energy in the low mid, which the Butterfly is missing."

The majority of venues on the tour are small to medium-sized arenas, such as the Brighton Centre, and theatres, including the New Theatre in Oxford. For these 24 Outline CDH 483 Hi-Packs, eight Manta downfills, 12 SUBTECH 218 subwoofers and four DVS 15 in-fill cabinets were used. The Royal Albert Hall is noted for its intimate atmosphere but is still substantially bigger than the other spaces the band is playing, so a larger GTO rig was brought in.

This comprised 30 GTO cabinets and four Mantas for the main rig, the entire Butterfly FOH touring system as side hangs, although Cifelli says this was nearly redundant as he used only one-fifth of its power, eight Mantas for the rear sides, six CDH 483s as ground stacks and eight SUBTECH 218s. All touring equipment is supplied by hire company Britannia Row Productions.

Cifelli has worked at the Royal Albert Hall with other systems and found it a difficult space to mix in. He says using the GTO helped solve some of the problems he had encountered previously: "The GTO responded better, the directivity of the speaker is better than what I used before. In a venue like the Albert Hall you don't really mix, you compensate for the room, which

has a very long reverb that create a confused sound, so you don't want to push the level too much. We were very careful in pointing the PA right in front of the audience to avoid reflections. I've noticed that other people like to fly the PA very high in the Albert Hall but I asked to have it as low as possible, so we could have the speakers really facing the audience because I hate to see the band on the stage and have the sound coming from the roof, I find it very unnatural."

The out-front console for the tour is a 96-channel Digidesign (Avid) Profile running a Pro Tools card. This allows the big Genesis Pro Tools system to be connected to the live set-up during performances. Cifelli says that because there are still some plug-ins that cannot be ported directly into the Profile he is using the DAW to run four processors for main effects on the guitars, which are routed using assignable HDX cards into the desk.

Further computer contributions come from two Apple laptops (one main, one back-up), which work with a MMC (Mini Machine Control) interface commissioned by programmer and keyboard technician Kevin Jacobs to trigger loops and additional keyboard effects. Each laptop is controlled and running individually so that if one fails the other is still operating.

Cifelli adds that although the Profile is not the best sounding desk it gives him a lot of flexibility, particularly with Pro Tools and laptop interfaces.

The Mike & the Mechanics Hit the Road Tour is now in Germany, returning to the UK for the Isle of Wight Festival and Hard Rock Calling at the end of June, with European festival dates during July. 📍

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