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TORI AMOS

22live supports the singer's latest European tour with a d&b audiotechnik solution

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TORI AMOS: OCEAN TO OCEAN

As 22Live supports the singer-songwriter on her latest tour with its new d&b audiotechnik XSL line array, TPI pays a visit to the Royal Albert Hall to meet the crew behind the latest production.

Words and Photos: Rob Speight

She began creating Little Earthquakes, went To Venus and Back and is currently travelling and touring Ocean to Ocean. Tori Amos has always stunned audiences with her unique, often quirky but always exquisite style, musicianship and expressive lyrics. Lockdown was a tough time for the live performance and events industry. Amos herself, according to her website, "...descended into an emotional state lower than she had been for a long time." From this emotional turmoil came her current album Ocean to Ocean, which she is currently touring across Europe and the USA.

The show, which had been in production and performer rehearsals for three weeks, had already completed three dates in the UK before TPI caught up with them at The Royal Albert Hall. It was then to embark on a string of European shows, postponed due to the pandemic, before continuing to the USA.

Alex Penn of 22Live, the audio vendor for the tour, explained some of the more unusual aspects of the project.

"We are doing the European run now and then the American run as well. We basically put the truck into a shipping container, with a few minor tweaks, say bye and see it in four weeks," he explained of the decision to ship the entire system across the Atlantic. "It's a complex system the way that it's put together

and everybody's comfortable with it. Tori Amos has always carried the same kit from Europe to America, and we actually have several other tours now doing the same".

With Amos having such a long and successful career, the tours have an illustrious lineage when it comes to some of the crew.

From the early days, the Amos camp toured with what was SSE Hire and their crew, many of whom are still with the tour. Everyone is very close and was described as "a family" on more than one occasion. In fact, FOH Engineer (and later to become Amos's husband) Mark Hawley, was part of those original tours, as was Andy Yates who continues to work as Monitor and Stage Tech. When Penn and Spencer Beard moved to join up with 22live and their newly formed group of directors; Simon Gladstone, Stefan Phillips and Paul Timmins, they launched 22Live, and the Amos tour followed at the beginning of 2023.

"We assert ourselves as an experienced newcomer, a reliable alternative and aim to appeal to people looking for boutique service from an independent company. We want to be a provider for people who are passionate about audio, system delivery and the production industry as a whole," Penn concluded. System Technician, Miles Barton spoke of the challenge the wide variety of venues across

both sides of the Atlantic presents. "It can be very different every day. I don't often do the same configuration twice in Europe," he revealed. "America is a bit more standard and we play more standards of 2,500 to 3,000-capacity theatres, and then a few small sheds. It's a real mix of venues in Europe. In Brussels, for example, we're doing a smaller red velvety round room. Then we've got old white concert halls such as Hamburg Laeiszhalle. Then we do some of the more modern classical concert halls where they've got no parallel surfaces. It's a real mix, so I'm ground stacking some days and flying others, flying fills off trusses or putting speakers on poles to fill balconies," he continued.

To accomplish all of these requirements, 22Live provided a brand-new d&b audiotechnik XSL line array as the main system, comprising 20 XSL8s and 12 XSL12 boxes, along with a collection of T10 and YP boxes for out-hangs, front and balcony fills. Barton then utilises an Outline Newton 16+8 packaged in a 22live drive rack, equipped with all the usual tools to manage the system.

The entire audio package runs on a tightly integrated Dante system. "The FOH and Monitor consoles both share inputs over the Dante network. PA returns encompassing the Outline Newton and d&b DS10 are over Dante.



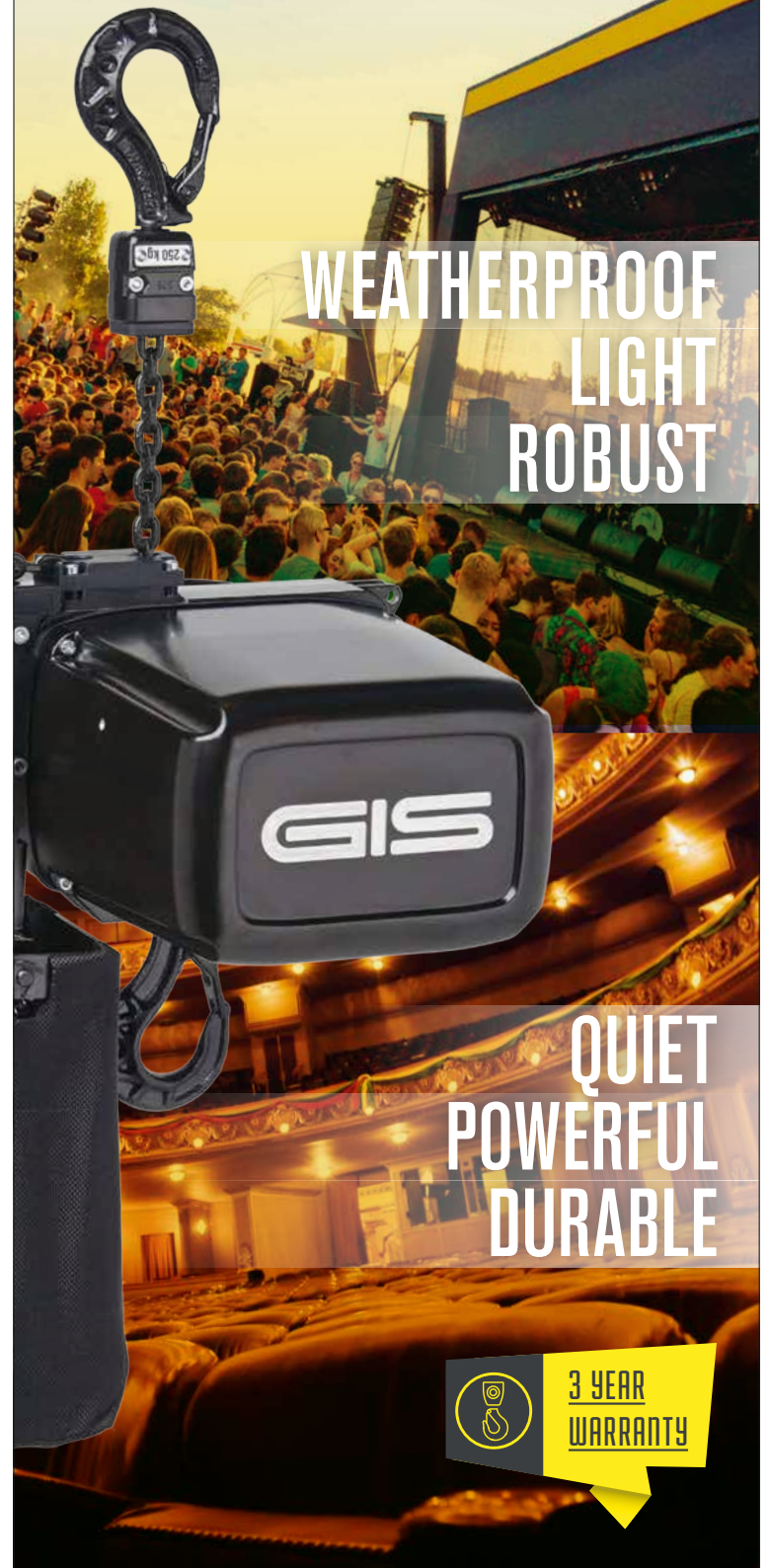
We've also got a Green-GO comms system including Dante bridge, and for the first time we've supplied a single package for the tour for all; lighting has got its own party line, audio has its own party line. There's another party line that we're both on with the stage manager. And if there's a house lighting or something additional, we can pick that up anywhere there is a network switch," detailed Barton.

"If it can be networked, we've networked it. With the distro we've got, I can log in from FOH and see what we're pulling on each leg, and if we're stable on the voltages," he smiled.

According to Penn, this tight integration, attention to detail and rethinking of systems and packages for the modern touring environment is one of the main reasons that 22Live stands out. Being a relatively new business they are not bound by having legacy infrastructure and have designed, in-house, items such as flight cases, modular rack input/output and patch systems, as well as their own range of stage boxes, which all go towards creating a robust, integrated and modular ecosystem.

Behind the SSL L200+ at FOH, Mark Hawley is one who definitely appreciates the boundary pushing. "When Alex joined 22Live, no one was surprised that we went with them and now partnering with 22live has enabled us to push further than before. I've always embraced technology," he explained. This love of technology and learning new things is something that is very evident, as Hawley is known for using a different desk on each tour, enabling him to learn new equipment and ways of doing things. That said, Ocean to Ocean is the second tour in a

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row on which the SSL has been his weapon of choice.

Hawley's background as a studio engineer can also be seen at his FOH position, as an imposing pair of Genelec 8351Bs and Pro Tools rig allow him to refine his mix for every show.

"Because I am from a studio background, I find fine-tuning compressors and all the rest of it much easier. I don't know how live guys do it when they've had no experience in studios. I find it really difficult to judge compression and stuff in a big room. There's a lot going on there. So, I spend most of my time in the day working on the band and the loops and sorting out her vocal effects. Then I spend the whole show really keeping my eye on her," he explained.

"No two shows are the same, with a back catalogue the size of Tori Amos' we have so much material changing every night, it's a lot to stay on top of. We so far have around 100 tracks programmed on the tour and the list grows daily!"

It raised the question to whether Hawley was trying to achieve a studio mix or was the show a purely live experience? "It's purely a live scene because the versions are so different," he confirmed. "I work like I'm in a studio, but I'm not trying to recreate what we did in the studio – I'm just trying to get the best out of what they're playing. Also, some vocal effects for example,

are a signature part of the song, so I recreate that, but mainly it's just getting the best out of what they're doing on stage," Hawley said.

As well as relying on the onboard SSL processing and FX, Hawley has a raft of outboard including UA LA-610 and 6176 pre-amps, SSL Bus+, GML EQ and an SSL Fusion, which he has across the master buss. "The master bus goes into my old crutch, which is the GML EQ. I could probably do away with it now, but I've used it for so many years. The Fusion is great – it's one of those mystery boxes," he said with a grin.

At the next stop on the Dante line was Monitor Engineer Neil Heal, who took over from 17-year tour veteran Monitor Engineer Marcel van Limbeek. "I think I got put forward because I do more FOH than monitors," he explained.

"Her mix is very much a FOH mix. She has delays spinning in, spinning out, chorus coming in, coming out. She has EQ changes on her vocals which are specific to musical notes that she's pitching to," he continued. "I'm using the UA Teletronix LA2A as the vocal compressor, and a mix of supporting effects come from both my Eventide Eclipse and Bricasti M7."

Heal moved to a DiGiCo Quantum 338 for this tour. "We switched to Quantum this time because of the changes in the EQ on her vocal from song to song. Some of it can be fairly

extreme. So, instead of having to duplicate the channels, I can send to the drummer and the bass player her vocal pre-EQ, pre-dynamics on the same channel without having to duplicate channels," he detailed.

The stage is, like many these days, a pretty quiet affair, with Amos and drums on the fairly niche Albatross Audio PH9B hardwired ears and two, "very low level" d&b M4s for bass. The change of PA to the cardioid d&b XSL system, has also improved our quiet stage which was another motivation of Hawley to use it. The only other noise source is Amos's Leslie speaker.

"The piano gets sent to that but from a send from my desk. So, it turns it on and off for me, for FOH, and for her. On some songs it's on all the way through, on others it's only on in the choruses or for three lines. It's fairly unusual," Heal concluded.

For a show which features the dynamic delicacy of a grand piano, the intricacies of Amos's music and vocals, coupled with the modern workflows and technology, the show was an intimate and accurate portrayal of the sound that the singer has become famous for. If that wasn't enough, the production also boasted one of the happiest and warmest touring families either side of the Atlantic. ●
www.toriamos.com
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