

# CLAPHAM JUNCTION CULTURE

Catriona Forcer visits a newly-opened London venue

Not only had Vince Powers of The Mean Fiddler Organisation gained a respected reputation as the man who restored Reading Festival and Fleadh Festival but also as the main instigator behind the re-emergence of quality live venues in London. Already the owner of The Mean Fiddler, Subterranea and The Powerhaus, he has recently opened the new flagship of his organisation, The Grand in Clapham.

The Grand is an Edwardian variety theatre situated by Clapham Junction which hasn't been in use for over 12 years. The Mean Fiddler Organisation have bought it back to life using it for what it was originally intended - live music. Being a listed building, many of the original features have been kept or refurbished. The original architect was the rather eccentric Edward Woodrow who produced an eclectic building incorporating Japanese, Chinese and Spanish influences. Retaining the character of the place, the current architects Madigen and Donald, who were responsible for designing The Powerhaus and Subterranea, have entwined the old with the new. The result is a curious mixture of styles which, surprisingly, succeeds.

The renovation of The Grand was held up due to problems with some of the local residents who objected to a live venue opening in their neighbourhood. A music, dancing and liquor licence was finally granted after the opposition were placated by things such as sonic surveys. Due to the fact that people had to be laid off when it looked as if there wasn't going to be a licence, only the downstairs of the theatre is currently open. In July it is planned to open the two balconies raising the audience capacity from 650 to 1,600.

"Bands that you would normally see at The Astoria or The Town and Country Club will now be taking in this venue as a London date," explained David Phillips, the club's promoter. Acts already booked include Edwyn Collins, That Petrol Emotion, Fatima Mansions, The Godfathers and Soho.

Bryan Leitch of Art of Darkness was responsible for the lighting installation at The Grand, having already worked with Vince Powers at his other venues. A couple of years ago he rebuilt the system at The Mean Fiddler as well as designing rigs at Subterranea and The Powerhaus. Bryan has also worked extensively at the festivals as well as touring with bands such as The Manic Street Preachers and The Cranberries. Many people have not heard of him or his company as he admits that he loathes



The Grand, Clapham - dark for 12 years.

self-publicity (hence no photo of him) preferring his work load to grow with his reputation. "I've never advertised," stated Bryan. "I get the work because I enjoy it so much."

The budget for the light and sound installations was fairly generous as good equipment was needed for such a quality venue. It was also necessary to have a comprehensive range because the load in is very small. David Phillips was confident that there would not be the need to bring in much gear, other than backline.

"I've kept the rig fairly standard, although versatile," explained Bryan Leitch. "It's not too fancy and there are facilities to mount effects such as Golden Scans on it. There is also the room out front to bring your own lighting board, if that's required. Loading here is next to impossible. Even when we've been working here delivering, it's been a nightmare. I must have had about 16 tickets even though the wardens knew we were unloading. However, there's a big car park down the road for the punters."

"I've got 18 colour faders, mainly on Lekos, as it gives a lot of flexibility and I use them as an effect. A lot of people say colour faders are expensive but they aren't if you think what they can do, not just the colour changing but also the nature of the way they change. For the same

reasons I've got Wybron 8-lights. I know they are bulky but they provide a reasonable amount of washes: good, solid washes without buckets of lights up there. I prefer to invest my money in good quality equipment rather than enormous amounts of Cans. We're aiming at getting moving lights in here fairly soon but, again, not lots of them. It'll probably be Golden Scans or Intellabeams as I don't think anything else is realistic. I don't intend to use them as disco moving lights, I prefer to use them in blackout and bring them up in different scenes. I'm also using quite a lot of Par 36 ACLs as well as Par 64 ACLs to give a nice contrast. Alongside these are two Pani followspots. Control is a Jands Event 96 way and a Pan Command 'Colour Cue' both linked to a colour monitor. Bryan Leitch is a great fan of Jands boards, already owning five, and he insists that nobody who has ever used them has disliked one.

"The Event is really user-friendly," enthused Bryan. "We've got it on screen which has much more information than just on the board. There are an enormous amount of Jands being used throughout Europe. A lot of people insist on an Avo or Celco board only because that's what they are used to, or they feel that they should use them. The facilities on a Jands are really advanced and, above all, it's logical. Some people say that they are unreliable but none of



Edwyn Collins rehearsing, with rigging and focusing still to be completed



A view from the stage.



Pete Kellet of Encore (nearest camera) with Dave Freeth of The Mean Fiddler Organisation at the Midas desk.

mine have ever gone down.\*

The Mean Fiddler Organisation approached Encore PA early in the planning of The Grand stating their specific requirements for a large sound system that was reliable and simple needing low maintenance. It was necessary for the system to be good enough for any calibre of artiste. An excellent in-house system was needed because of the local residents and, also, it was thought unwise to move heavy equipment around a Grade 1 listed building thus minimising the risk of damage to the ornate interior. Pete Kellett, of Encore, worked closely with Vince Powers and Dave Freeth, the house engineer, in fulfilling these requirements.

Encore were pleased to take up the challenge of producing a powerful yet neat and tidy system, something that is next to impossible on the road. "When we originally budgeted for this job we decided to spend the money on the important things like the mixing desk, a good speaker system and amplification rather than on effects and gadgets," explained Pete Kellett. "We've supplied very high quality equipment which was really expensive. For example, the front of house mixing desk is a Midas XL3 400ch which is quite complicated for a house installation but justified because of the sound quality. There are enough channels to generally cater for two bands. It really does produce the best live sound and it is British built. I was a little anxious that it might be over complicated but now, after a few concerts, my fears are diminishing. There is a sophisticated five way system which already has house equalisation set

up for the room which is a good starting point for the engineers. We've made the effects rack quite simple by not supplying too many effects but adequate and good ones which are quality units.\*

The monitor system is quite powerful, in fact, there are more amps on the monitor than the PA and it provides a very good stage sound. There were a lot of sound tests to check the sound proofing which is so good that even with the sound on full blast it is barely audible outside. The monitors are all bi-amped except for the side fills which are tri-amped.

On stage there are no amplifiers; they are housed in the orchestra pit, so there is no speaker cabling. Encore also had a special plinth constructed for the monitor desk with a stage box built into it to make the cabling neater. The result is an extraordinarily clear stage compared to most gig situations.

A specific PA for the venue was built by Encore who initially had problems deciding where to place it. There wasn't much space between the proscenium arch and to stack the PA on stage would ruin the aesthetics of the room. It was also necessary to leave the attractive pillars at the side showing, rather than cover them with black boxes. There are no PA wings as the arch goes straight into the auditorium. Either side was a 7ft space, with height restrictions due to the ornate architecture, into which a large PA had to fit. Somehow Encore managed to install a neat, tidy 15kW PA system into that small space!

They supplied two megaphones which are built into the speaker system in case of a fire alarm. The PA can be switched off by remote from the box office in case of fire. Also, Encore built a specific portable disco console which, although at the moment is by the mixing desk, can be put on stage.

When the remaining two balconies open at The Grand later this year Encore will then install a flying system.

#### PA SYSTEM, THE GRAND

##### FOH & control equipment

- 1 x Midas XL3 40 ch
- 2 x Midas XL3 3 power series

##### Control rack containing

- 2 x KT DN 27 A graphic
- 1 x BSS MCS 200
- 2 x DBX 160X COM/LIM
- 1 x KT DN 60

##### Multi-core & stage box

- 1 x stage box
- 1 x multicore
- 1 x returns 12 channel

##### Rack containing FOH effects

- 4 x drawer gates (units)
- 3 x drawer COM/LIM (units)

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- 1 x Lexicon PCM 70
- 2 x Yamaha SPX 900
- 1 x Yamaha SPX 1000
- 1 x Dennon DR 44 cassette player
- 1 x Dennon CD player DCD 820
- 1 x 2 way intercom system
- 1 x Roland SDE 3000 delay
- F2 speaker system (ground stack)
- 4 x BSX sub-bass
- 8 x Martin Audio bass
- 2 x F2 special packs

##### Monitor system

- 1 x Soundcraft 8000 4Q/16
- 2 x PSU

##### Monitor rack containing

- 6 x KT DN 360 graphics
- Monitor speakers and wedges
- 10 x Martin LE 600 Bi amp wedges
- 2 x Martin Audio FR3 bass (side fills)
- 2 x M300 mid range (side fills)
- 2 x Martin Audio HF 2M (side fills)
- 1 x Martin Audio FA3 bass (drum fill)
- 2 x Martin Audio HF 2M (drum fill)
- 8 x MX4 crossovers
- 1 x cassette player

##### Microphone & D1 boxes

- 40 x mic stands
- 10 x D1 boxes
- 8 x Shure SM 57
- 6 x Shure SM 58
- 6 x AKG 451 + CK1
- 6 x Sennheiser MD 421
- 2 x EU RE 20
- 3 x EU N/D 457
- 8 x EU N/D 408
- 2 x AKG 112

##### Amplifiers

- 16 x Carver amps (monitors amps)
- 10 x Amcron amps (system amps)

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