

A 'SPRAY-ON PA' FOR THE SHARP-DRESSED MEN: BRITANNIA ROW BRINGS ELECTRO-VOICE® X-LINE™ AND X^{LC}™ LINE ARRAY LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEMS ON THE ZZ TOP 'XXX' EUROPEAN TOUR

LONDON, UK (November 5th, 2002): Premier UK Sound Production Company Britannia Row (www.britanniarow.com), were recently hired by mythic Texan blues rockers ZZ Top for their European tour, which began in Helsinki, Finland, on October 1st, and drew to a close in London exactly one month later. The 22 date 'XXX' tour, which picked up where the bearded legends left off on their 2000 tour (when bassist Dusty Hill became ill on the road), and celebrated both their RCA release 'XXX', and their commitment to the fans who missed out on their last outing due to postponed shows. The tour covered Finland, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, France, Belgium, Austria, The Czech Republic, Switzerland, Croatia, Holland, Italy, and the UK. Brit Row's FOH engineer Jock Bain and system tech Simon Travis accompanied the bearded boogie merchants on their riff ride through Northern, Central and Eastern Europe, stopping at venues of all shapes and sizes before ending at London's famed Hammersmith Apollo. Brit Row took their Electro-Voice X-Line and compact, full-bandwidth, X^{LC} line loudspeaker systems along for the journey, and Jock Bain was impressed enough with their performance to report back to EV with a tour diary that described the EV loudspeaker arrays' acoustical, mechanical, and electrical versatility, advantages that led Jock to call his system a veritable "Spray-On PA" that could be easily predicted and installed for each night's different venue.

Along with Jock, the sound quality certainly left its mark on the thousands of fans who attended the successful tour, which has received rave reviews (see www.zztop.com). Jock himself checked out the fan feedback on the official band website: "time after time you see 'fantastic sound,' 'stunning sound,' 'best sound I've ever heard,' etc, etc." Jock also added his own superlative endorsement of what the UK's Guardian newspaper called the awe-inspiring "sonic excess" of the final British shows: "They were the two smallest shows we did on the tour, the Manchester Apollo and the Hammersmith Odeon (now also called the Apollo). At both of them it was the best, seriously the best, sound I've ever had, and I've done that place since dot. The Hammersmith Odeon I've done for fifteen years now; I've done Midnight Oil, Crowded House, and a ton of English bands. This was just brilliant. The X-Line really cracked it. I'm really digging it as a PA. I love it. After years and years of using other brands it's just a revelation."

And in Jock Bain's own words here are a few reasons why that's the case, drawn from the ups and downs of the rock n' roll road:

So Finally a real day off! We've been out for 3 weeks now, and the ZZ Top machine has been hard at it: a mixture of Old School Rock, Texas stylin', and Nu metal technology. The System has changed with every show: we've done a variety of venue sizes, from enormodome German arenas, to a small theatre in Copenhagen. We've drawn our plan from a toolbox of 24 'S' boxes (X-Line Xvls), 20 Subs (X-Line Xsub/f), 6 'T' boxes (X-Line Xvlt), a half dozen Xi-1152's and 4

flying grids. Our secret weapon? 2 arrays of 8 X^{LC} 127+ compacts – our side hang and small gig PA in a can!

After the first few arena gigs, ZZ Top's engineer, Toby Francis (Aerosmith, Kiss, Puddle of Mudd), decided to keep the subs on the floor and only use the flying subs in high-sided venues like Munich Olympia Halle, so our work load became much easier. Simon Travis, the system tech who takes measurements each morning with EV's line array prediction software (LAPS), would begin his voodoo while the lighting truck tipped, and after I'd consulted the local promoters about seat sales and venue restrictions. I'd get the sound truck tipped while the tour rigger, John Maxwell, the legendary Mad Max, would plot and start hanging the lighting points. He would turn his attention to us by 1000 hrs and we would then discuss the PA *de jour*!

The mixture of 'S' and 'T' boxes often balanced on the load weights in the roofs of the smaller European venues, and sometimes the rigging heights would be an issue, but the predictor software (and an old timers view of the gig) would always work out a way to array the system to the maximum available. We would swing from a 10 x 'S' and 3 x 'T' array in the Gigantium in Aalborg, Denmark, to a 6 x 'S' low hung array at the Grugahalle in Essen, Germany, which was so low you could touch the lowest cabinet with a raised fist full of beer!

And every day it would do the trick. High power, full frequency response and a shed load of output made the system very user-friendly, and especially engineer friendly. There is nothing as beloved by system techs as a PA that sounds good when you turn it on, before you start weaving the magic EQ, and the X-Line has provided that with a vengeance, program after program. In combination with the 127+ compacts, we have had an almost spray-on PA, doing 270-degree seating with no add-on system, much to the delight of the European promoters!

The 4 high stacks of boxes, traveling on dollies, proved to be very versatile. The subs remained on the dollies underneath the main hang, allowing for floor clearance very soon after the show came down each night, and the 1152 in-fill boxes sat atop the 2 x 4 high sub dollies to provide cover for the very front rows, allowing the 'T' boxes to fill the main front floor.

What other gear did we bring out with us alongside the loudspeaker arrays? We had a Midas XL4 out front, talking directly to the soundweb program in stereo, and I sent the program to the 8 zones from the drive rack's computer. We ran 8 outs, a stereo main hang, a mono main sub, a stereo X^{LC} 127+ sidehang with a reversed stereo image for the punters 'round the side, another mono sub send for when we split the subs up and down, a stereo Xi-1152 ground fill for the infill, a couple on their sides in the front center of the stage, and 2 a side standing up on the 4 stacks of subs filling the 3 or 4 meters before the 'T' box program kicked in. We ran a Cranesong compressor over the original stereo out of the XL4, and I personally think that is a BIG plus in the control of the X-Line in the big rock mode. It helps the overall dynamic weight of the system; the quiet songs recede from the coalface and give you a breather, if you get what I mean. LD systems

from Houston, a company I believe has a history working of with ZZ Top, supplied the control and monitors for the tour.

In some venues the lack of a forklift would give us a brief headache, but a combination of a good local crew and a long ramp off the dance floor of our PA truck driver John Long's truck, a typical Edwin Shirley Trucking 45' trailer, would allow us to move the dollies, even under the worst conditions, and believe me, Central and Eastern Europe provided every possible combination of those. Load-ins like a one car garage, concrete ramps at 40 degrees, rough ground, ice rink floors, undulating rubber matting like you were tripping *tres* badly? We've seen the lot. Simon and I would just have to start drinking earlier, but the system dealt with it. Or, more accurately, the stagehands dealt with it.

So, to finish the first ZZ Top European tour diary page, I have toured many systems, both with Britannia Row (Turbosound Flashlight systems, and MSI before them) and other UK and Australian companies, and the X-Line is as easy and as foolproof a system as you could wish for in the day to day touring world. It's easily the best line array available, with the weight and surplus of headroom that other line array manufacturers can only dream about (in their sleep, not in their gigs!). I am looking forward to tweaking the system, making it useable in any of our day-to-day operations, from theatres with the X^{LC}127+ compacts, to enormodome main hangs with 12 'S' and 4 "T" arrays. I'll keep you posted, if you don't hear me coming!

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The EV X-Line™ and the new, compact X^{LC}™ full-bandwidth line array systems were designed to provide wide horizontal dispersion (Xvls 90 degrees, Xvlt 120 degrees, X^{LC} 127+ 120 degrees) from a single vertical line while providing exceptionally coherent wavefront summing in the vertical plane. At the heart of the X-Line and X^{LC} line is a newly developed high-frequency wavefront alignment and summation device – the Hydra™ - that provides planar and time-coherent signal addition. The broad bandwidth vertical planar summing provides uniform sound field distribution throughout the listening area. Both systems feature one-man rigging and employ EV's Line Array Prediction Software (LAPS).

For detailed information on the Electro-Voice X-Line and X^{LC} line loudspeaker array systems, along with other EV products, please visit www.electrovoice.com