

# Total Production International POOCH

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**Kenneth Van Druten, or 'Pooch' to his fellow crew and fans of Linkin Park, is the sound engineer whose career has come full circle. Mark Cunningham met him on Linkin Park's recent European Tour, for which Pro-Tools and Adamson Systems gave him the best of both worlds...**

A few hours before Agoura Hills' finest, Linkin Park kick up a storm at a certain dome-shaped live venue on London's Greenwich Peninsula, their FOH sound engineer, the hulk-like Pooch,

greet me with a matey grin. I'm surprised to find he is so animated. After all, this is a guy who spends most of his working day behind a mixing console, and then pushes the faders every evening for the benefit of audiences averaging 20,000. By all accounts, he should look shredded, but he's more energised than I am... which probably doesn't say a great deal.

For their current Minutes To Midnight tour, Linkin Park decided to make recordings of every show available to their fans by selling a blank CD-R at each venue's merchandising counter, complete with booklet, for \$11/10 euros. They are given a web link and a passcode along with the promise that within 10 days of the show they attended, they'll be able to download the audio and burn it to that blank CD.

They're by no means the first band to offer this. However, whilst most others provide a basic board mix, Pooch multitracks the shows via Pro Tools at front of house, and painstakingly creates a commercial quality product before it's time to pilot the next concert.

"We tend to focus in on nine or 10 tracks and really get the live vibe happening," he says. "For me, that means that I spend eight to 10 hours a day in my mixing room backstage, working with nearfield monitors, before I go out there to mix the live show — it's quite a contrast!"

Music has been a major feature of Pooch's life for as long as he can remember. Born and raised in Los Angeles, he studied classical piano from the age of three and was winning state competitions by age 10, whilst also learning clarinet and flute under the tutelage of the first chair of the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra. As soon as he hit his teens, however, Pooch gravitated to the guitar and was seduced by all things rock'n'roll.

By the age of 17, he was playing in L.A. punk band A.S.B. (The Anti-Societal Bastards) who won the prize of a weekend in a recording studio in a 'Battle Of The Bands' contest. This, he says, was the catalyst behind his professional career.

"During that session, I fell in love with the studio and spent more time watching what the engineer was doing than paying attention to my playing."

Pooch enlisted at Berklee College of Music in Boston, entered its Music Production & Engineering course and excelled. He spent his spare time at Boston's Newbury Sound Studio, where he worked his way up from runner status to the position of senior staff engineer.

When college came to an end, and having decided that the studio world was definitely for him, Pooch moved back to L.A. and began his career as a recording engineer, working in some of the

most famous studios in the world, including Ocean Way, Record One and A&M (now Henson Studios).

“I did a lot of good work that I am very proud of,” says Pooch, who earned several platinum and gold records, and a Grammy nomination, for his work with various artists, including Sheryl Crow, Dwight Yoakam, Kid Rock, Kiss, Everclear, Joe Walsh and Police guitarist Andy Summers.

“A few of the bands I was working for asked me to mix their live sound. Literally, one day I was working in a recording studio and the next I was a FOH engineer in an arena. I immediately fell in love with the instant gratification of 15,000 or more people screaming for something that you are mixing.”

From the time when Pooch first experienced the edge-of-his-seat thrill of live engineering, he’s never looked back. System Of A Down, Kiss, Kid Rock, Limp Bizkit, Earth, Wind & Fire, Guns ’n Roses, the Beastie Boys, Korn, Seal and Zakk Wylde are just a few of the acts on his impressive resumé.

“I occasionally do studio work now and then,” he says, “but mostly it’s all been live mixing, until Linkin Park came along. It has kind of come full circle for me, and I’m spending a great deal of time as a record mixer again. I am finding the joys of that again, and am liking the ability to do both worlds. Both are very different, but I find both very rewarding.”

#### THE WORKING DAY

Understandably, with the responsibilities of both FOH and recording mixer, Pooch has been listening to a lot of Linkin Park music recently. “I’ve been on this for about a year, mixing every show both live and recorded, and it demands a lot more discipline and focus than I’ve ever given to any other band in my career,” he says.

Inside Pooch’s backstage hideaway, there is an Mac Pro Tools HD3 rig with a Command 8 control surface, plus a second HD3 system for Pro Tools engineer Dylan Ely who carries out editing while Pooch mixes. “After each show, Dylan does a lot of cleaning-up of noise in between songs. We’re not doing any Pro Tools magic as such because the band are very clear about it being a genuine live document, but at the same time, of record release quality. Linkin Park fans are very tech-savvy, very computer-orientated, and they’re into sharing MP3s, so giving them this kind of product is ideal for them and there’s a lot of demand.”

Do the band members demand approval of every show mix? “No,” insists Pooch. “They did for the first three or four weeks, but they’ve trusted me to make those decisions. They do download a show every once in a while to check in with everything because they’re very

connected with their fans and like to get their feedback. They obviously advise me on any criticism and I'll address any issues accordingly."

The Pro Tools rigs are the first to come off the truck and Pooch religiously sets everything up at 9.00am. At which point does he allow himself a break? "I work for about two and a half hours solid, and then break for lunch, and try to get myself straight before returning to the mix. I listen at very low volumes on the nearfields, so it's not like I'm getting ear fatigue, but there comes a time when you have to remove yourself and stop using your brain, otherwise you'll simply lose perspective."

Back in the arena, Pooch's FOH assistant Brett Stec takes charge of the PA and control set-up. "I totally trust Brett — we've worked together for years. He's my eyes and ears out there when I can't be. And on the European run, we have David Nulli-Amadio and Julien Poirot [from Waveform Audio] who tune the system. I then walk out to FOH in the afternoon to listen and double-check everything. Some days, I'll use the nearfields out there to do a virtual soundcheck for about an hour."

#### CHOICES

Did Pooch's use of Pro Tools influence his choice of the Digidesign Venue D-Show console at FOH? "Well, to be honest, the reason I went with the Digi desk was my own familiarity with Digidesign and third party plug-ins through my experience as a recording engineer. Using Venue, I've been able to bring all that into live sound land and the interface is super neat.

"At FOH, there's only one rack of outboard gear, and all that's for is for the recording of the two-buss of my mix which becomes a back-up to this scenario. We have further back-up in Kevin McCarthy's monitor world where we have Tascam X48s recording with some Focusrite mic pre-amps. When you're selling CDs, you have to make sure that every show is recorded, no matter what."

Pooch's choice of PA for Linkin Park European dates is Adamson's Y-Axis line array system, supplied by the French rental company MPM Audiolight, which has stocked Adamson systems since 1999. The PA is powered by Lab.gruppen amplifiers and processed with XTA DP448/226/444 management systems.

"I really do think that Adamson's Y18 and Y10 boxes are superior and for a small company, their attention to client service is very good," comments Pooch. "It's my favourite line array, for sure. And for this band it makes a lot of sense. It's very similar to the top line arrays in the world, such as V-DOSC and some others, but where it really shines is in its coverage.

"Both the Y18 and Y10 have the same mid-range component. So when you're walking in and

out of each zone, the integration is virtually seamless and the consistency is fantastic. It's amazing that the technology has come that far and, for me, it's the only brand of loudspeaker to really do that.

“The Adamson T21 21-inch sub has been a tremendous addition. It's the most efficient sub that I've ever used. In fact, I find myself turning them down quite a bit and not using their full headroom potential. A lot of people prefer to use 18-inch subs because they believe they provide better punch but, believe me, these 21-inch speakers have punch to spare. They're Kevlar so they don't collapse or sound messy at the low end. I fly a lot of them and, again, the integration with the rest of the system is incredible. It's perfect for Linkin Park.”

Speaking after the first of two Linkin Park shows at the O2 Arena, Pooch offered his verdict on both the venue and the audio performance: “Sonically, it's a very acoustically-dead room, which is good for the most part, but I definitely found I had to wet things up a bit to compensate. It's a little sterile for me — overall though, it went well and the Adamson system gave me more than enough power.

“The first four songs were 105dB(A) at FOH and then I backed out of it and mixed happily at 103dB(A) for the rest of the show. As with any band, it starts with the source and if the boys are having a good show, I do as well.”

The trademark Pooch grin makes another appearance as we part company: “You know, I absolutely love what I do, and I know how lucky I am to be here. A lot of why I am where I am was because of the old adage ‘right place at the right time’, but I like to think that people continue to enjoy my work because it is good. I'll keep doing it as long as they let me.”  
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