

THRIVING IN COLOMBIA

A look at C. Vilar and their recent work for Sting in concert.

by Keith Clark

Above: Adamson Y-Axis and SpekTrix line arrays in place for Sting at Corferias Auditorium.

Below: At left, Cesar Vilar flanked by sons Mauricio and Leonardo. At right, Howard Page mixing Sting on a Studer Vista 5.

In 1994, **C. Vilar Amplificacion** became the first sound company in the nation of Colombia to bring in a full professional PA system with structures and rigging capabilities, capable of supplying a name-brand system large enough to provide reinforcement for large-scale events as well as international touring acts visiting the country.

And they've stayed quite busy ever since, and then some. Recent tours and events the company has supplied sound reinforcement and production support to include Elton John, Cold Play, Latin superstars Juanes and Carlos Vives, and even the annual Cartagena Classical Music Festival. Most recently, they provided sound for several thousand at a sold-out concert by Sting at the Corferias Auditorium in Bogota.

It all began about 25 years ago with a former musician and a couple of small loudspeakers. That musician, Cesar Vilar, started his business in 1985 and has helped his company evolve into a thriving sound and production entity in the South American market. Along the way, he has been joined by his sons Leo and Mauricio, who have taken their roles in the growing enterprise seriously from the start.

Leo studied at Columbia College in Chicago and graduated with a degree audio/acoustics degree, while Mauricio gained his formal education at Full Sail University in Winter Park, FL. They continue to expand their knowledge base, attending SynAud-Con classes and attending educational sessions and lectures by noted live and recording



engineers such as Robert Scovill, Bruce Swedien, Roger Nichols, Salvador Castañeda (Sonotribe), and Buford Jones.

C. Vilar Amplificacion's business continues to grow, with the company also providing full-scale installation services in addition to video, lighting, programming, backline and more. Recent big projects on the install side include the much-lauded Mediatorta Theatre in Bogota, the Gaira Cafe owned by Vives, and some of the largest churches in the region.

A Big Change

Interestingly, in the earlier stages of the company's development, they were able to acquire all mixing consoles, microphones, amplifiers, electronics and other components, but not complete loudspeaker systems. The drivers were imported, and then the C. Vilar team had to build the cabinets and perform final assembly in their shop. The approach was not unusual - due to high transportation costs and the taxes on goods brought in from outside the country, virtually every other sound company in the region did the same thing.

That changed in 2002, however, when the company made the decision to update its "A-line" loudspeaker rig, and began investigating the merits of the various line array systems on the market, attending a number of product demos

at the invitation of manufacturers. This first round of evaluation didn't really nudge the decision-making process.

"The first line arrays that we listened to did not impress us," notes Cesar Vilar. "To us, they performed better than a conventional system, but not enough to make us feel as though we needed it in our inventory." Progress was made at the AES Convention that year in Los Angeles, however, where months of research and discussion led to selection of an Adamson Y-Axis line array system.

"We ended up with a smaller system in terms of scale, and it turned out to be the smart choice."

"Every audio professional we spoke with - particularly those without an interest in selling us anything - had nice things to say about this line array system," comments Leonardo Vilar. "It was very curious to us how many people bought a particular system because it was the easiest to rig, or the lighter one, or the easiest to truck, or the one from the company they used before, or the one from the company with better credit options, or the one their favorite band just toured with. We just wanted

to get the best-sounding system."

Less than two months later, the company took delivery of 20 Adamson Y-18 main line array loudspeakers, as well as four Y-10 down fill boxes, to be powered by a new amplification package including six Lab Gruppen fP 3400s for mids and highs and 18 Lab Gruppen fP 6400s for lows and subs.

Since then, C. Vilar Amplificacion's inventory has increased considerably, now encompassing a wide range of product series, include various sizes of Y-Axis, SpekTrix and Metrix line arrays, subwoofers and more.

"We like Adamson because it's very powerful, versatile and easy to use, and it supplies exceptionally even horizontal coverage," explains Mauricio Vilar. "Our systems sound and perform just as the optimization software predicts. I like turning on one of our systems, running some noise or music, and having it already sound great without needing hours for tuning."

Exact Parameters

For the recent concert by Sting at the Corferias Auditorium, the C. Vilar team was most concerned about the poor acoustics in the highly reverberant space. They deployed Adamson Shooter Prediction software to assist in devising the line array structures, placement and aiming.

"Our experience is that this program comes very close to what you're dealing with in the real-life environment," Mauricio says. "It's very easy to use, with the key being to provide it with the most exact parameters possible in terms of height, length, distances and so on."

The house system included main left and right line arrays hangs flanking the stage, each comprised of 10 Adamson Y-Axis Y-10 compact, 3-way modules supplying 100-degree horizontal coverage. The Y-10 is marked by a drive module and trapezoidal cabinet design create a smooth, slightly curved, seamless wave front with no gaps between cabinets.

"Initially we thought about going



Sting in concert using his Sennheiser E865 condenser, with one side of the Adamson line array hangs visible.

with larger Y-18 boxes, but in really studying what was needed for the concert, and in talking with various production people, we decided to go with the smaller footprint," says Mauricio, who served as a system engineer for the concert. "So we ended up with a smaller system in terms of scale, and it turned out to be the smart choice."

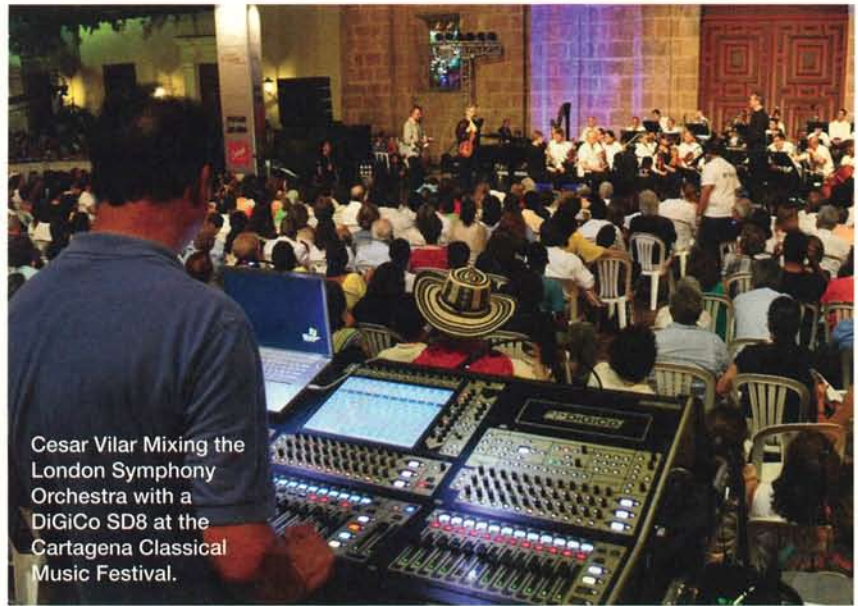
The side regions were covered by arrays made up of 12 SpekTrix 3-way line array modules offering 120-degree horizontal coverage, with a drive module chamber lending a slightly curved isophasic wavefront comparable to that of Y-Axis. Four more SpekTrix cabinets supplied front fill, and two Adamson T-21 subwoofers per side, each dual-21-loaded, delivered plenty of low-end presence.

"We really like the T-21 because it has tons of headroom and sounds great as a complement to Y-Axis arrays," Mauricio notes. "These subs are very efficient, and just a couple of units can replace several dual-18s. When he first looked at our sub arrangement, the engineer for the opening act, Beto Cuevas, told me that at least 12 more subs were going to be needed. After hearing these subs, though, he quickly changed his mind."

All loudspeakers were driven with C. Vilar's complement of Lab.gruppen fP 6400 and fP 3400 power amplifiers, joined in the racks by XTA DP448 digital processors. Mauricio notes that the DP448 is the preference for several reasons, including "its very gentle and musical limiters."

Sting's Front of House Engineer, Howard Page, requested a Studer Vista 5 digital console for the show, and he provided the C. Vilar team with a look at its specific operating parameters. Page applied little EQ for the show, other than high-pass filtering on some instruments, overheads, and vocals. He also brought in two TC Electronic M3000 digital processors for certain effects.

All stage monitoring gear for the show was supplied by Sting's organiza-



Cesar Vilar Mixing the London Symphony Orchestra with a DiGiCo SD8 at the Cartagena Classical Music Festival.

tion. A Yamaha PM5D digital console headed this system, serving Clair 12AM monitor wedges combined with Sennheiser in-ear monitoring systems on the performers.

The Key Factor

Sting's vocal mic was the Sennheiser E865 condenser microphone he co-developed with the company, and it was hard-wired. Shure Beta 52, SM57 and KSM44 mics were disbursed for instruments and drums, joined by beyerdynamic Opus mics on toms. The bass for Sting was linked via a Sennheiser wireless beltpack, giving him some additional freedom of movement during non-vocal passages.

"This venue is tricky, but the show worked out well, and our preparation in optimizing the system ahead of time really paid off," Mauricio notes. "Sound was very natural, and definition was the key factor. You could understand absolutely everything Sting said and sang."

"When Howard arrived, he analyzed the system and ended up only taking down 1 to 2 dB at 400 Hz. This tells me we did a good job for our client as well as the paying customers."

C. Vilar Amplificacion's scope continues to grow. A DiGiCo SD8 digital

console is one of the latest pieces to enter their inventory, and like everything else in the company's supply, it's already seeing heavy usage. The SD8 was originally required for a Carlos Vives tour, with Rob "Cubby" Colby doing the house mix.

"We really like the sound of the preamps of the SD8, as well as its overall audio quality," Mauricio says. "The signal path is clean because there's just a MADI connection between the stage rack and console. We've used this board for rock, pop, classical and tropical music, and it's worked out nicely with all of it."

The association with Colby stretches back a few years, with C. Vilar supporting his engineering work in the region with tours by Shakira, Luis Miguel, Juanes, and most recently Vives, where Mauricio joined Colby to serve as monitor engineer. "Cubby is detailed in everything he does, very professional, consistent and focused," he concludes. "It's fascinating to work with one of the top engineers in the world, and it's only a benefit to our company in so many ways as we continue to move forward." ■

Keith Clark is Editor-In-Chief of Live Sound International and ProSoundWeb.