

SIMPLE MINDS: GRAFFITI SOUL



THE SCOTS ROCKED ON PAST THE 30 YEAR MARK WITH THEIR LATEST TOUR, WHICH SAW AN ADAMSON PA CROSS THE BELGIUM BORDER. RACHEL ESSON REPORTS...

Scottish pop-rock band Simple Minds are one of many major acts from 'the decade of excess' to hit the road again recently following a break from the stage. An appearance at *Night Of The Proms* in Belgium, where the band were hugely popular in the '80s and '90s, fostered relationships between band members and the event's production team, which included sound rental company EML.

Thus in 2008, with a largely Belgian crew, Simple Minds embarked on a six-date sell-out tour of UK arenas to mark their 30th anniversary and give fans their first-ever performances of the entire 1982 multi-million selling album *New Gold Dream...* as well as new material.

The success of this tour was boosted by sales of their latest studio album, *Graffiti Soul*, which was released last May and became their first album in 14 years to enter the UK Top 10, as well as doing similar business in Europe.

Produced by founders Jim Kerr (vocals) and Charlie Burchill (guitar), along with Mel Gaynor (drums) and Eddie Duffy (bass), the album spurred Simple Minds on to book another tour for 2009, accompanied by Andy Gillespie on keyboards and Sarah Brown on backing vocals.

Following a series of festival dates, the

European *Graffiti Soul* tour launched on November 26 in Amsterdam, and reached the UK and Ireland in December.

TPI caught the action at Manchester's MEN Arena, where it discovered one of the two Adamson systems that were on tour in Europe (outside of Belgium) at that time, provided by EML Productions.

Tour manager David Yard (a.k.a. Zop) explained the Belgium link: "Simple Minds did *Night Of The Proms* a few years ago and it's a Belgian production so they got to know Belgian crew and started using EML. Their gear is great and they're nice guys to deal with."

The same video team from the previous *30 Years Live* campaign also returned to work on this tour, which was production managed by Derek McVay. Said Zop: "It's good to see the same faces and know that you're running an operation that people are pleased to come back to."

Zop, whose history includes working with Jamiroquai and Chris Rea, has toured with Simple Minds since 2006. After touring with one truck throughout the summer festivals, the production was upped to four trucks (from Starades), for the latest arena dates, which were supported by OMD and promoted by Kennedy

Street.

The Belgian crew included FOH engineer Olivier Gerard, monitor engineer Fred Pignatelli and PA tech Stephan Themps. EML's Patrick





Demoustier had been the band's FOH sound engineer since they met on *Night Of The Proms*, but Olivier Gerard replaced him 2008's *30 Years Live* tour.

It wasn't the easiest of transitions for Gerard, as he explained: "I used to work at Ancienne Belgique but have been back on the road since 2003 with the likes of Hooverphonic and Mylo. However, I'd never done arena shows before and I believe they had a lot more confidence in me than I did!

"We had a week of rehearsals planned but they didn't show up for the first two days and I had to programme 24 songs into my desk!"

The preparation time for this tour was no less hectic, said Gerard: "On the last day of the rehearsal Jim [Kerr] came to me and said there were 20 songs that weren't in the set but had to go in. I ended up programming about 50 songs and we're playing 25 songs each day."

Carried over to the tour was Demoustier's choice of desk, the 48-channel DiGiCo SD8 digital console. It was the first time Gerard had used the desk, having worked with a DiGiCo D5 the year before.

"It sounds really great," he said. "I have been on other tours using different digital desks, but this sounds better than any other I've worked with."

EML's PA tech Stephan Themps explained how the company chooses its brands: "Adamson is the best PA, DiGiCo have the best desks so that's what we buy; we don't go with the taste of the year."

ADAMSON SOUND

EML has headquarters in Brussels, Amsterdam and Madrid, and whilst most of its work encompasses Belgium and Spain, the company is looking to expand its work throughout Europe.

Said Themps: "It's hard to get into touring because of the pound, but we currently have two systems out in Europe and we're trying to get into the market."

Gerard commented: "The Adamson system is wonderful. Last year I was touring with Mylo and I used a lot of home PAs, but the Adamson is way above everything I've heard. I believe there's a way of working the system and EML really knows how to work with it. Stephan really knows his job."

The Adamson line array system was designed using Shooter prediction software and was configured as 12 Y-18s per side on the main hang, four Y10s on the underhang per side, with 12 Y10s on each outer array and eight Spektrix for frontfill above nine of EML's own S318 subs per side.

Centre fill was handled by two of EML's EMF speakers; amplification was managed by Lab.gruppen and processors were XTA DP448s, including two used at FOH as a matrix for the whole system.

Themps commented: "You don't need to worry about the Adamson system, you know it's going to deliver what you need."

Gerard used the DiGiCo SD8's on board effects, with the addition of a 430 producer pack and a Manley Voxbox for compression on the vocals, and a tube tech unit for the bass. "You have to control the power of the sub and



keep it warm. There are a lot of reverberations," he said.

Demoustier originally specified the mics for the tour — Beyers on the toms, as endorsed by Mel Gaynor, a Shure Beta 52 on the kick drums, Nordic Labs E5 on the snare, Neumanns on the overheads and hi-hat, Beta 57s on the guitar, Sennheiser 421s on the bass and Beta 58As on vocals.

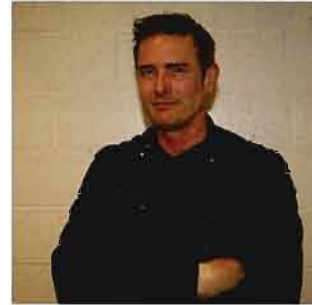
The sound crew was completed by drum tech Derek Paterson, guitar tech Hilko Nackaerts, keyboard tech Fons Ceuppen, and audio technicians Jeroen Temmerman and Kelvin Mac.

MONITORS

Over in monitor world, Fred Pignatelli was mixing on a DiGiCo D1 desk, sending to six of EML's

ON THE ROAD: Simple Minds

Below, clockwise from top left: Sound engineer Olivier Gerard; PA tech Stephan Themps; promoter rep Nick Robinson; lead singer Jim Kerr in front of the Adamson line array; LD Stephen Pollard; Pro Tools operator and keyboard programmer Roger Lyons; Andy Liddle.



own wedges for Burchill and Duffy, then to Sennheiser 3000 series IEMs for the rest of the band, who use Variphone ES-2 ear moulds. The system was also driven by Lab.gruppen amp and XTA processors.

Pignatelli had worked with the band since 2002, and converted to the DiGiCo D1 in '05. He said he liked the analogue sound that the desk created and added: "I must say the advantages of a compact D1 with almost no outboard are much bigger than the sound difference between [digital and analogue desks]. Also the features of a digital desk are now indispensable.

"It's great that I can use a separate reverberator for every backing vocal and still have one for the drums. I use the IPCs on the IEM mixes and the stereo master processor on Jim's mix. I control all MIDI patches on stage with my desk and with a single push of the button I can swap the two wedge mixes on stage when Charlie (guitars) and Eddie (bass) swap places. All stuff you can't do with the old analogue desks."

Support act OMD used a Midas XL8 at FOH and a Midas Pro 6 for monitors.

"The advantages of a compact D1 with almost no outboard are much bigger than the sound difference between [digital and analogue] desks..." Fred Pignatelli

LIGHTING

Perhaps influenced by LD Stephen Pollard's theatre and architectural background, Simple Minds' stage set was overtly dramatic, and was made grandiose by large cathedral like walls of Element Labs' Versa Tubes that colour-changed throughout the show.

A central vertical tower of Versa Tubes and a horizontal wall of the product that curved around the back of the stage dominated the set.

A series of trusses with Martin MAC 700 profiles moved between the walls of Versa Tubes added a fluidity of motion to the show. The lack of any front truss created an open look to the stage and allowed the lighting to project forward and the looming walls of Versa Tubes to be unobstructed.

"I consider the Versa Tubes to be a lighting instrument," explained Pollard. "I put video content into them but I try not to use them as a video screen. I use content and digital masking to create a variety of compositions that are integral to the rest of the lighting."

He also had each Versa Tube painstakingly covered with a neutral density filter to make the otherwise white tubes disappear when parts or all the tubes were not being used, something he considered one of his unusual tricks.

Toronto-born Pollard met Simple Minds in New York in 1981 and has been working with them ever since. He remembered: "In the '80s we briefly used Britannia Row and Light & Sound Design.

"I have fond memories of combing the

factories on the industrial estates of Birmingham with [LSD founder] Terry Lee discovering unusual stuff to create unique set pieces. We had a lot of PAR cans and great ideas. We did a lot of interesting things with floor lights, moving trusses and custom set structures built at LSD."

Neg Earth took over supplying the lighting in '95 and has enjoyed a partnership with Simple Minds ever since. Said Pollard: "Julian Lavender has been very supportive. Basically anything I

want, within reason, is mine to have. They are always very fair. I have an idea in mind, Julian tells me what's new in their stock and we all work together to figure it out. Their service and attention to detail is impeccable."

Pollard's approach to lighting and set design starts always starts with a concept, rather than leafing through catalogues looking for the latest products. He created a variety of "big looks", which were achieved by moving the lighting trusses with Liftket motors — "the upside to this system is the economical use of gear, and truck space."

Spread across the trusses on Liftket motors were 12 MAC 700 profiles, six Robe 2500E ATs and six Clay Paky Alpha Beam 1500s. In the upstage grid and side trusses were eight Robe 2500E ATs and two MAC 2000 Performances. On the floor were MAC 700 Washes, two MAC 250 Washes, 10 Robe 2500E ATs.

Said Pollard: "The Clay Paky Alpha Beam 1500s are new fixtures to me and I love them... I'm not using any moving LED fixtures, I'd rather have the colours and patterns of traditional automated fixtures."

Three followspots and the MAC 2000 Performances provided key lighting for the band. The rest of the rig, upstage of the band, was for all for effect. Atmosphere was provided by Martin ZR-33 smoke machines, DF-50 diffusion foggers, and DMX turbo fans. Source 4 750W Lekos, 8-cell blinders, Thomas 4-cell Moles fitted with ACLs and Neg Earth's PAR 64 bars of three rounded out the rig.

CONTROL

At FOH Pollard used grandMA consoles to control the show. As he explained: "I'm using two grandMAs linked in session; one I run during the show, and the wonderful Geoff Froud sits at the other to help with lighting

Below: Tour manager Zop in the production office.
Bottom: Jim Kerr; Charlie Burchill, Mel Gaynor & Eddie Duffy.



programming and video content. During the show I'll give notes and change things. He can edit it and update stuff, fix focuses and reset things as we go while I run the show. I'm also using a media server called ANiX built for me by my friend, designer A.J. Pen."

He said of the grandMA desk: "I'm from an era in lighting when there was a moving light desk with an operator and a 'furniture desk' for the conventional lighting.

"Christie Lites in North America bought the grandMA and my young programmers were doing great work with them. Unlike other consoles I looked at, I realised I could set the grandMA to suit my old school ways and include all the video and everything else. It's got a nice feel to it and a very colourful display!"

The lighting team also included Ian Lomas, Paul Saunders, Victor Livingstone and Darragh McAuliffe. Rigging was by Andy Chard.

I-MAG

Video director Chris Hilson made his Simple Minds debut on their 30th anniversary tour. He finished commitments in America and to

Bruce Springsteen 48 hours before the first show in Holland.

"We decided not to use any visuals or playback, just camera I-Mag from the stage. I think the best way to describe the look of the cut would be 'close up'; having everything very big, which worked very well, especially on the bass guitar as Simple Minds' music always has a very heavy bass undercurrent.

"The screens were hung portrait to frame the overall look of the stage and lighting to best effect."

XL Video supplied two 16 x 12 screens, three Sony D55 cameras (operated by Mark McCaffrey, Bryan Miles and Bruce Selkirk), two Christie 20kW projectors, with a Grass Valley mixing console for control.

Phoenix provided transport for the crew, ET Travel booked hotels and flights, Popcorn handled catering, SSE Structures built the stage sets and risers, Radiotek provided radio communication and Band Pass supplied itineraries and passes.

*Photography by
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