

GENERATING SEISMIC ACTIVITY

Big sound for metal masters Slayer & Rob Zombie. *by Kevin Young*

Although **Slayer and Rob Zombie** have crossed paths on the road in recent years, the recent Hell on Earth co-headline concert tour of North American arenas and sheds marked the first time the two metal heavyweights have toured together in over a decade.

Slayer's musical style is defined by fast tremolo picking, double bass drumming, and shouted (or chanted) vocals, and they're recognized as one of the "big four" thrash metal acts, joined by Metallica, Megadeth and Anthrax. After first gaining fame as the long time frontman for metal superstars White Zombie, Rob Zombie has built a thriving solo career in his own right, and is noted for his work with iconic artists such as Alice Cooper as well as his burgeoning career in horror films.

The sound reinforcement system, along with technical support, was provided by Escondido, CA-based Sound Image. System tech Andrew Dowling of Sound Image worked closely with both front of house mix engineers, Joel Lonky (Zombie) and Tim Quinby (Slayer), to ensure the system was up to the task of reproducing each band's brand of live metal throughout the tour's successful run.

Horsepower Matters

The choice of Adamson Systems line arrays as the system's main loudspeakers came about late in the sound design process, but proved to work out well. "I'd never toured with an Adamson rig, but I've used it, so I had no qualms – I'm a firm believer in the fact that there are a bunch of great boxes on the market," says Quinby. "It depends on the guy setting it up."

That guy was Dowling, whose concerns were straightforward. "Headroom," he says. "Horsepower really mattered on this one." That's one of the reasons Sound Image specified Crown Audio I-Tech HD12000s amplifiers, he adds – three racks of eight I-Tech 12000s and another rack with four per side to drive 24 Adamson Y-Axis Y18 modules (3-way, dual-18) for mains, another 32 Y10 modules (3-way, dual-10) as side hangs, and 32 Adamson T21 SUB subwoofers (dual-21) per side.

Both engineers were pleased with the overall sound of the arrays, also crediting the efforts of Dowling and Adamson applications engineer Ewan McDonald, who traveled in



support for a portion of the tour. "It was pretty much on the money every night," Quinby says. "It had the gas it needed to have and, most importantly, it transferred the impact from the band to the audience."

That Big Rumble

Since ample headroom was most important in the low end, the subs (two stacks of eight T21s per side) were set up in an end-fire configuration. "In end-fire, the rejection behind the array isn't quite as good as a cardioid setup," Dowling admits, "but it gives me a little more positive forward gain and cuts down on rumble where we don't need it, which helps us toward more accurate low end."

The T21's Kevlar drivers also helped in that respect, he adds. "They're more rigid, so if you hit an impact with the driver, it puts that into the room. I think it translates to a more accurate transient response, which is exactly what Tim is looking for. In a mix like his, where there's so much fast kick, that for it to



not sound like it's washing together, he needs a tight, punchy sub, but it still needs to be full frequency because he wants that big rumble at 40 Hz and below."

"I use a tremendous amount of sub, but it's very accurately tuned," Quinby notes, adding that while the end-fire configuration did the job, he normally uses a cardioid arrangement. "I need a controlled pattern for the sub. We've got to focus it away from the stage, or the back wave from the left and right PA ends up meeting directly on our drummer's seat and he ends up nauseous."

Way More Detailed

While both Rob Zombie and Slayer offer up high-impact, high-volume shows, Quinby and Lonky's needs, in terms of low end, were somewhat different. "The number of subs we had was plenty for me," Lonky says. "Tim wanted to double them, but then he's all about knocking the rivets out of these arenas."

Quinby doesn't disagree. "If I can register seismic activity



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with a Slayer show then we're having a good day. That's what the band wants me to do. That's what their fans come to see. And I've become pretty detailed about it, but I can get way more detailed with more subs.

"We've done shows previously with Adamson rigs – the same amount of top end boxes in the air – but with 40 subs,"

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he continues. "I need a lot of output in order to cut problem frequencies using very narrow cuts, and maximum wattage to get a 60 Hz kick drum that feels like someone is beating you senseless. For what Joel was doing, it was great. For me, they sat on clip."

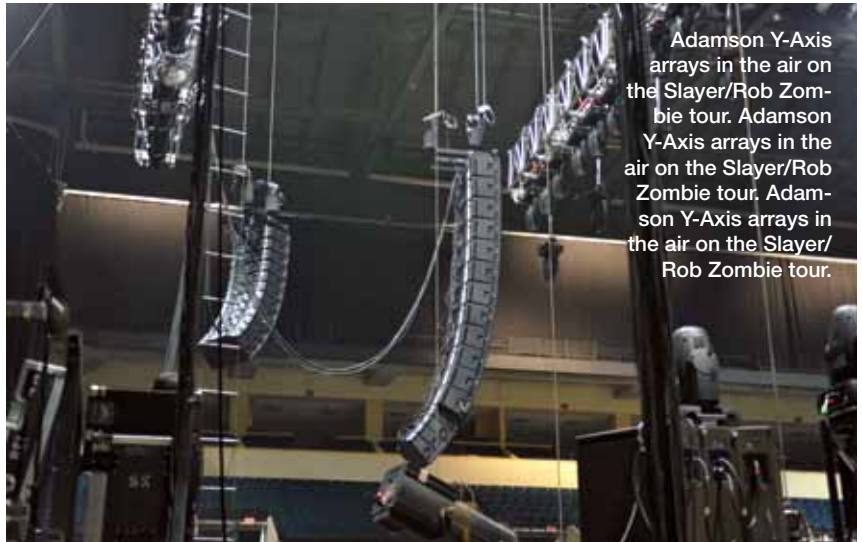
The I-Tech amps internal processing handled all loudspeaker crossover, with the exception of the subs, which were crossed over with XTA DP Series processors. Lake Mesa Quad networked processors (with wireless tablet interface) were applied to overall system processing and management.

I-Tech amplifiers also drove the large-scale stage monitoring system, which was comprised of Sound Image (dual-12) wedges, L-Acoustics ARCS loudspeakers for side fill and dB-SUBs (triple-15) for drum fill. The monitoring system was headed by a Yamaha PM5D-RH console manned by Jared Woods, who did double-duty as monitor engineer for both bands.

For lead vocals, Rob Zombie uses a Beta 58A wireless capsule and a Shure wireless system. Beta 58As are also used for background vocals. Lonky mics guitarist John 5's amps using a Heil Sound PR 31BW, a Shure SM57 and a Shure KSM44. Bassist Piggy D is taken direct.

"I use three different mics on guitar because they all have different tones," Lonky explains. "I'll pan them 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock, then put the SM57 up the center. I can pull it back and the left and right become less pronounced, or if I want to go with a big, in your face thing, I can bring the 57 up. I tune the left and right mics a little differently on the EQ to get a layered sound, like there's not just one guitar playing."

The drum kit of Ginger Fish gets the most mic attention - Shure Beta 91A and Heil PR 40 on kick, Audio-Technica ATM350 condensers on rack toms, Heil PR 28 on floor tom, and Shure Beta 56a (top) and Neumann KM 184 (bottom) on snare. More KM 184s



Adamson Y-Axis arrays in the air on the Slayer/Rob Zombie tour. Adamson Y-Axis arrays in the air on the Slayer/Rob Zombie tour. Adamson Y-Axis arrays in the air on the Slayer/Rob Zombie tour.



Slayer engineer Tim Quinby at his analog XL4 (above) and Rob Zombie engineer Joel Lonky with his preferred digital PRO6.

handled hi-hat, ride, and overhead.

"You can't go wrong with Neumann, it brings a lot of life to things having all them up there," he says. "I love the ATM350s - they're a great sounding tom and floor mic. The Heil PR 40 seems to translate the kick drum the way the artist wants it."

For Slayer, Quinby notes that "kick drum is the main source for Slayer." His approach is to outfit drummer Dave Lombardo's kit with two Shure Beta 91As for the interior and two Heil PR

48s for the exterior of the kick drum. Heil PR 31s (top) and PR 22s (bottom) are the choice for snare, with dual Sennheiser e609s and PR 31s for toms and PR 40s for floor toms. KM 184s do hi-hat and ride duty, and Shure Beta 98s are applied to each cymbal.

Guitar rigs for Kerry King and Jeff Hanneman have the same treatment: dual Radio JDX DIs, two PR 40s and two PR 31s. Bassist Tom Araya has a Countryman DI for pre-signal and another for post. Araya's lead vocals are captured with a Heil PR 35.

"I close-mic everything, making sure that the diaphragm of the mic is parallel to the source. The only mics that are away from the source are the external kick mics, and that's only because I can align them with the 91s in the kick drums using Radial Phazers," he explains. "Each of our guitar players has three heads and six live cabinets a side, so each head gets its own signal. I also align my guitar DIs and mics with the Radials, bringing them in to get a fuller mid-range sound."

Console Viewpoints

Transferring impact was also a key driver in each engineer's choice of consoles - a Midas PRO6 for Lonky and a Midas XL4 for Quinby - which led to an ongoing discussion of the merits of digital versus analog. While it's an old

debate, the co-headlining bill offered an interesting setting for it to take place in.

"You get to hear the exact same system, from basically the exact same starting place," Dowling says. "And because they both funnel through Mesa, you could hear the flavor of each console when they tuned. There is no right or wrong. They both played to their strengths."

"The PRO6 is one of my only choices," Lonky states. "You can drive the front end like an analog desk without the audio penalties of a digital front end. Put it in the red - it doesn't care." Automation also plays into his choice. "The Zombie show has a lot going on. I've got 40 scenes on the console."

Lonky utilized the onboard EQ to tweak the house as well as five or so other onboard plug-ins for most of his effects needs, including Midas' pitch shifter as a means of emulating the sound of an Eventide 533 Voice Doubler. He does



Monitor engineer Jared Woods during setup before an arena show.

carry some outboard gear, including an "old favorite" TC Electronic 2290 delay as well as two Eventide H3000s applied to Zombie's vocal because "he's been using them since the White Zombie

days and that's his sound."

Lonky also couldn't resist attempting to convert Quinby to the PRO6. "I was like, 'Look, I've got a 300-pound control surface, my stage rack, my little side rack, and I can do 90 channels. You've got a double 20-space rack and a thousand-pound console.' And the snake - I run two Cat-5 lines from monitors to front of house. One day our monitor engineer left the snake in the venue and I walked back in and carried it out in one hand - a 180-channel, 350-foot snake, and I'm taking it out to the bus in one hand."

Pretty Good Aim

Quinby was unmoved, however, and insists he does travel light when necessary, confident an XL4 will be at the venue when he gets there. The only thing he refuses to leave to chance is his compliment of Radial Phazer phase alignment tools.

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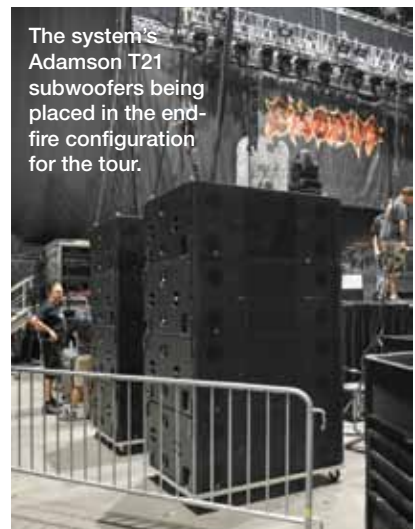
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“Even for festivals where I’m not carrying anything, I still walk in with six channels of Radial Phazers. I’ll put them in my luggage if I have to,” he says. “We have two kick drums, so I align each kick drum microphone with them, and also align my guitar DIs with their mics. Slayer’s a guitar and drum driven band, so the things that need to be the most accurately translated

are guitars and drums. Radial Phazers and Empirical Labs Distressors are my favorite things in the rack, by far.”

If transportation costs or availability were to become an issue, Quinby admits he might consider another console. “I will use an XL8,” he notes, “because it has 24 faders, but on the PRO6 there’s 12, so when I have 23 inputs of drums I can’t see my whole kit.”



The system’s Adamson T21 subwoofers being placed in the end-fire configuration for the tour.

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The issue isn’t necessarily a matter of sound quality, he adds, but workflow. “It’s not right for Slayer. I’ve carried the same setup for 10 years – the exact setup their previous engineer used. It’s been touring with them for 18 years. Realistically, as fast as they play, and running things at the gain structure that I do, I need to be able to make adjustments in milliseconds. The PRO6 sounds great, but it doesn’t have everything laid out in front of you.”

All that said, Quinby was prepared to switch over to the PRO6 if necessary, and carries a backup for whatever the second desk at front of house happens to be. “Kids at Slayer shows throw things. I’m going to make a show happen no matter what. I’m very aware somebody could take my desk out with a beer, but if someone takes out my XL4, I switch to the other console, the band still plays, and we still get paid.”

Given the potential for beer-related console damage, it’s worth pointing out that a desk like the PRO6 offers the additional benefit of presenting a much smaller target. “Maybe,” he concludes, “but Slayer fans have pretty good aim, and it’s getting better.” ■

Based in Toronto, KEVIN YOUNG is a freelance music and tech writer, professional musician and composer.