



L-Acoustics and DiGiCo for The Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre

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Jackie Cunniffe, Director at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre

The Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal has upgraded its audio capabilities with a new L-Acoustics A10i system, featuring A10i Focus, A10i Wide, and KS21i Subs on each side, powered by LA4X amplifiers. Additionally, the theatre recently acquired a DiGiCo S31 mixing console. The equipment was supplied and installed by DWR Distribution. In a Q&A session, Jackie Cunniffe, the theatre's Director, shared her insights on the new audio

system and its impact.

What prompted The Sneddon Theatre to invest in DiGiCo and L-Acoustics?

The Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre had been served well for over twenty years by a JBL Array system, originally installed by the late and great Ron Selby. Although still working, it became imperative that we replace the system due to its age and the redundancy of many of its components. Our decision to invest in L-Acoustics was first and foremost because of the excellence of the product, but also because DWR has always offered us invaluable back-up service here in Durban.

Almost as old as our Arrays was our Soundcraft Vi3000 mixing console, which sadly developed start-up faults and became unusable during rehearsals for a new show. It was a great surprise when a brand new DiGiCoS31 arrived at our doorstep from DWR, for us to use as an interim measure and with no strings attached.

Within a few hours the little desk proved intuitive and easy to use – even for an old-school analogue person like me! This is an important consideration in our theatre, as we do not have a permanent sound technician and the desk would have several different freelance users, with limited get-in and rehearsal periods.

In addition, although fairly basic in comparison to our previous console, the S31 still has the necessary features to handle any show held at the Sneddon, and sounded as good as its mightier cousins in the SD range. With 24 Mic inputs and 12 line outputs available, we could also use our existing analogue cabling infrastructure, and did not immediately have to invest in a digital stage box. Another feature I personally enjoy is the easily customised bank and channel layout, with a total of 31 faders.

After using the desk for a few weeks on a Kickstart production of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” it seemed a no brainer to buy the S31. With budget restrictions a consideration it was excellent value for money, and if we are one day in a position to upgrade, it will serve as a worthy stand-by desk.

What L-Acoustics system did you choose and why?

It was still a pipe dream of mine to replace the PA system, when DWR brought Richard Smith down in March 2023, to assess the Sneddon auditorium and do an analysis and design. I deferred to Richard’s expertise, and he recommended the L-Acoustics A10i system with an A10i Focus, A10i Wide and KS21i Sub per side, and LA4x amplifiers. A year and a half down the line, and we have made the dream a reality, with the new system installed in September 2024. In the future, we also hope to replace our small fill speakers

and central cluster with L-Acoustics 5XT and X8 respectively.



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What is your feedback now that you've used the system?

The system was first put to the test with the recent UKZN Inaugural Music Showcase, when everything was thrown at it from pop ensembles featuring 12 vocalists and a full rhythm and brass section to Maskanda groups, iSicathamiya, classical instrumentalists and opera choruses. We have only had positive remarks concerning the new PA – it has an incredible sound with ample headroom, and even at its loudest remains contained and clean, with no harsh frequencies. I find that minimal EQ is needed on the desk per channel – often just select use of high and low pass filters.



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What makes the Sneddon Theatre so special?

In essence, live theatre is special regardless of where it takes place, but the Sneddon as a University theatre is lucky enough to host many world-class productions, as well as influence young minds and provide a training ground for a future generation of audience members, technicians and performers. None of this would be possible without the dedicated and highly skilled team of employees at the Sneddon, who have a deep sense of ownership, pride and passion in all they do. To quote DWR - "It's all about the people"!