

Luke Combs 2023 World Tour takes Klang for a full spin



Michael Zuehsow equips his SES-supplied DiGiCo Quantum7 console with a DMI-KLANG card for immersive ambience capture and IEM mixing. Photo courtesy David Bergman.

With his fourth and latest record, *Gettin' Old*, released this past March, less than a year after 2022's companion album, *Growin' Up*, Luke Combs is on top of the world. He's also all over the world with a global tour that is now carrying the country superstar across 16 countries and three continents, starting with his current sold-out North American stadium run. Once again, North Carolina-based touring sound company Special Event Services (SES) is supplying the control packages for Combs' worldwide trek. But this time, monitor engineer Michael Zuehsow has added a new tool to his DiGiCo Quantum7 console at stage right—a DMI-KLANG card for immersive monitor mixing.

Based in Nashville, Zuehsow joined Combs' crew in late 2018 and initially hit the road with him on his first headlining run, 2019's *Beer Never Broke My Heart* tour. Although DiGiCo Quantum7 consoles have anchored the artist's FOH and monitor mix positions since 2020, when the audio crew upgraded from an SD12 and SD10, the 2023 World Tour marks Zuehsow's first proper adoption of the KLANG platform into his workflow.

"I have dabbled on various KLANG systems in the past, but the size, power, and integration of the DMI card version is what captured my full interest, especially trying to not carry too much unique outboard or rack gear to make fly dates simpler and more stress-free and risk-manageable," he shares. "While the initial KLANG platform was an incredible innovation, scaling up for a tour of our size with the original :fabriks would have required carrying many units, so the introduction of the DMI-KLANG card and its exponentially increased capabilities really streamlined everything and made it a very viable addition.

"To me, KLANG is like installing a secret door where you normally 'hit a wall' trying to finesse an IEM mix to be the most useful, comfortable, and most importantly, inspiring and musical. Right where you think you can't do much better with everything going on in a mix, the KLANG door opens."



A view of monitor world from the Luke Combs 2023 World Tour, which is currently stopping at stadiums across North America. Photo courtesy David Bergman.

Zuehsow credits Beyoncé's longtime monitor engineer, James "Cowboy" Berry, for initially getting him to take a closer look at KLANG. "James spoke so confidently of his success using it to overcome some of his biggest challenges and I became intrigued," he says. "Previously, I had only been thinking of KLANG as 'all-in,' running entire mixes through it and every element being in the app and integrated, but this was the first time I had a lengthy technical discussion about utilizing KLANG as a tool for just some very specific implementations. He opened my mind to the idea that it could be used for one small thing, or entire huge immersive mixes, reducing the intimidation and translating it into creative opportunity."

The addition of a DPA 5100 mobile 5.1 surround microphone set up at FOH to capture crowd ambiance served as a catalyst for implementing the DMI-KLANG. "The DPA mic is deployed for post mixing captures, but I decided that I wanted to also use the opportunity to give an immersive feel of the vastness of the stadiums with more accuracy and realism. I use it for audience cheer pushes, and the way the crowd feels all around you is pretty sensational. It sounds like it looks—a huge stadium filled with 60,000 fans."



Photo courtesy David Bergman

In addition to capturing immersive ambience, Zuehsow also utilizes the KLANG setup to provide various widening for numerous stereo sources, keeping them from piling on top of each other. “The concept ‘If everything is stereo, nothing is stereo’ kind of challenges that more usable space has proven very valuable in making sure all of the elements—including certain reverbs, micro-shifts, and instruments like B3 and stereo guitar modelers—are heard and feel inspiring rather than cluttered and fighting for space.”

Broadcasting 18 wireless IEM mixes, plus feeding a number of other wired mixes for video, lighting, and other crew, Zuehsow keeps his Quantum7 and DMI-KLANG busy. “There are probably close to 30 ear packs in motion during a show, and there are no wedges on stage because no one stands still long enough!” he laughs, adding that his DiGiCo and KLANG tools help keep everything running smoothly. “Having an additional row of faders on the Quantum7 allows me to keep my 12 primary mixes up and accessible while still leaving me three banks of a dozen faders to mix on quickly. I have definitely utilized the console’s Nodal Processing, Mustard channels, and the Spice Rack pretty extensively. It’s just the best desk for mixing monitors at this scale, and now the DMI-KLANG has just added even more power.”



Luke Combs' monitor engineer, Michael Zuehsow, at the

2023 World Tour's DiGiCo Quantum7 equipped with a DMI-KLANG card. Photo courtesy David Bergman

Zuehsow is also quick to recognize and appreciate the sterling support that he's received from the people behind the products he uses: "Group One, DiGiCo, KLANG, and literally every person I have met with this group do what everyone in our industry should: perform at the highest level, continue to listen, learn, and improve, while also being a friend and an ally. I have felt so incredibly supported. I don't know how they do it because everyone I know gets the same support, and I always feel like they drop everything to respond to a text from me. They are superheroes of customer support, which is just the icing on the cake of having the best products out there."