"The Venue" that covers all bases…

The Venue25

Article courtesy Pro-Systems News Africa

Words by Greg Bester

To be clear, Tony Raciti's 'The Venue' in Melrose Arch is not a club. It is so much more which is exactly what has made its longevity in the business and its reputation for comprehensive event solutions a key part of the company's ethos and legacy.

The Venue prides itself as a one-stop-shop events locale with very little if not any need for outside assistance. This is something they're very passionate about because for them, it's all about meeting their client's needs to the highest degree. Indeed, while I was there during my research for this article, a client had walked in last minute because they had not received the room they had booked at another venue. The Venue and their staff bent over backwards to meet their needs and accommodated them immediately. This is their modis operandi. This is their ethos.

> "We are a corporate functions venue," says Marijana Abt, sales and function director at The Venue. "The key elements here are versatility, turnkey solutions and that we offer in-house technical support. It's all already here so that if you come to The Venue and you host a function you shouldn't have to bring anything in at all."

Following this philosophy, a recent and comprehensive overhaul of the entire venue took place including their sound, lighting and video systems which was paramount in tackling the future at The Venue.

The renovation took place from 17 December 2013 to 24 March 2014. Local audio equipment suppliers Tadco have a long standing relationship with The Venue going back many years so when Tony Raciti contacted his old friend and owner of Tadco Simon Oates, he was more than happy for to oversee the upgrade of the technical systems there. Tadco then brought in Andi Rodgers of Fifty South System Integrators – another long standing friend – to help with the installation which was by and large designed and facilitated by Tadco. Tadco supplied and configured the audio systems while DWR supplied the lighting and Electrosonic the video control equipment.

Image courtesy Tadco

Audio

The previous audio system at The Venue was completely analogue so to bring the venue into 2014 a fully digital migration was facilitated by Tadco under the auspices of Kyle Robson, head of operational support, while Rodgers performed the bulk of the installation. But that was just the beginning.

Starting with loudspeakers, the original stage system consisted of four Nexo PS15s, two PS15B bass extenders and four LS1200 subwoofers. All of these cabinets were re-coned and re-foamed, bringing them back to like-new condition. Additionally, new rigging frames were installed and re-aligned to maximise coverage and to lessen slap back on the stage that was previously experienced off the overhanging wall of the mezzanine, which is now fully covered in sound absorptive material. This change also caused the fortuitous knock-on effect of reducing feedback issues on stage and virtually eliminated the slap back.

A number of Quest HPI5s were installed in various zones throughout the venue for coverage and controlled by a Quest Q Matrix 88 which is also connected in tandem to a Symetrix Symnet audio matrix. The goal here was to create seamless intelligibility regardless of the listener's position; the main points of concern being underneath the balcony, the mezzanine areas to the rear and left side of the venue, the cigar lounge, and the pre-conference area. The mezzanine is an L-shaped balcony that extends from the back of the room around to the left side, past the pre-conference area and onwards to the cigar lounge which is situated behind the stage, one floor up.

Image courtesy Tadco

While Rodgers physically installed the HPI5s, Robson was the man who configured and time aligned the zones to tie in with the main PA and adjacent zones. The result was a smooth and seamless coverage of the entire venue. Raciti was ecstatic about the discretely installed speakers in the zones, saying that he was blown away by the clarity of an on-stage speaker at a recent event, particularly in the mezzanine zones. When you're handling corporate events and conferences, being heard is of paramount importance and the properly configured HPI5s delivered fantastically. Furthermore, increased flexibility in the zones was afforded by the installation of Quest control panels.

Robson comments: "This system has its own control panel (Quest QT IWML Remote Control) to select on the spot what they would prefer to listen to. On top of that they could plug a microphone or any line in source and run it from there."

The main conference system received Quest 2040 ceiling speakers to remain discrete and for even distribution.

This system too has its own Quest QT IWML Remote Control wall mounted panel. These panels include source select toggle switches, a stereo line input and source, music and mic level controls.

"This is mainly meant to setup a little mixing console which would feed into the wall panel enabling conference clients to run a private show without interfering with any other room," says Robson.

The foyer maintained the Quest MS801 speakers that were previously installed there. However, they are hidden in the roof to supply ambient source material upon entering The Venue. It too has a wall mount control panel that accepts a variety of inputs and offers source selection. The toilet speakers were also plugged into the Quest Matrix for additional zone control.

An interesting aspect of this installation is the inclusion of a paging system that feeds into the change rooms. Ceiling speakers were installed which are fed directly from the console's talkback facility and multiple comms points were installed for calling shows. This is helpful in maintaining a smooth program and works well for The Venue.

Speaking of consoles, the hub of this digital system is a DiGiCo SD11. All input sources are fed to the console which, in turn, feeds the audio matrix. The stage received an accompanying DiGiCo SD-rack for 32 inputs and eight outputs, along with a mobile PS10 monitor rack that offers two on-stage mixes. The monitor rack consists of a single Crown VS3600 and a controller.

"The reason for making this (the PS20 monitor rack) mobile is in case there needs to be a chunkier PA in the venue they would be able to set it up; in the conference room for example," says Robson.

He goes on: "The 'brain' is the SD11 so all inputs get fed through there. There are a couple of feeds that go directly to the matrix such as the radio, or background music. Whatever is happening in the conference area is also fed directly to the matrix so any zone you go to you can select what you want to hear. You can split the conference over the venue or you can split the stage mix over the entire building."

In the rack, there is a combination of new and existing kit. As mentioned, a Quest Q Matrix 88 was employed to manage zones and various inputs. The existing Symetrix Symnet 8×8 was tied in with the Q Matrix 88 for speaker zone management while a Symetrix 8in DSP and a Symetrix 8out DSP were employed to receive feeds from the matrix and send to the amplifiers, respectively.

A Nexo NX242 was then installed to turn the system over to an 'active' state, supplying "crossover, sensed-amplifier control and system alignment acoustically matched to each NEXO" component. Meanwhile, a Nexo PS15 TD controller was used as a crossover for the LS12000 subs.

For amplification, the pre-existing Crown amplifiers were used along with some new additions. A Crown MT2400 was utilised for the HF drivers of the PS15s while four Crown VS3600s were used for the PS15s, the PS15Bs and the LS1200s. Three Crown CH1 100V amplifiers were used for the ceiling mounted speakers in the conference, foyer and toilet areas. Finally, three Quest 3004 amps were used for all the HPI5s in the building.

Forming part of the digital migration at The Venue is the inclusion of a booth installed next to the main seating area in front of the stage that includes tie lines from the stage to both the booth and the upstairs control room. A CAT5 cable runs from the booth to the stage for any video, audio or lighting requirements in this digital era.

Lighting

Phase one of the new lighting system at The Venue was supplied by DWR through Schalk Botha and installed by Kevin Stannett and Ken Crossley under sub-contract to Fifty South.

The new additions included a combination of Robin 100 LEDBeams, Robin 300 LED Wash fixtures, Philips

Selecon PL1LED luminaires and Longman F4 high power LED parcans. An Avolites Titan Mobile lighting console and LSC DMX splitters were also supplied to cater for the distribution system.

Phase two of the installation will see a further six Philips Selecon PL1 RGBW Zoom Profiles installed into the roof of the mezzanine overhang.

One of the motivations behind choosing the Titan Mobile console is that it is easy to operate and poses no threat to any clients who bring their own technical crew. This was of paramount importance to The Venue as their vision was to create a system that can be utilised by both novices and professionals.

Rigged above the audience, the Robin 300 LED Washes create soft ambient light on the tables for seated guests however, should there be a need, they can also swivel toward the stage for front lighting. The LEDBeam 100s, on the other hand, will be used for effects and beam work. Notably, the PL1LED luminaires are the first light sources that can deliver full control of the beam colour composition despite the chosen intensity.

Schalk Botha at DWR says: "On behalf of everyone at DWR, it was a pleasure to be part of this sale and we wish The Venue everything of the best."

The Venue13

Image not found or type unknown

Video

The video system at The Venue, supplied by Electrosonic and installed by Andi Rodgers, is all digitally distributed by a Kramer KRAVS88HN 8×8 matrix on CAT6 cable. The goal here, like the audio, was to send any available source anywhere in the building, whether it's menus, conferencing, corporate, promotional or informational material.

Rodgers explains: "The video (system) is quite simple, actually. The Kramer 8×8 matrix has got eight inputs and everything runs off of CAT6 splitters. They're all discrete sends so they can be split physically if needed. You can put something different on every screen and projector and there are also four outlets for roving screens. Everything can go anywhere, and that's the point."

A Sanyo PLC-XP200L projector was installed in the main room while a Sony VPL-FX40 projector was installed in the conference room. Seven Samsung 32" flat panel displays were installed at the bars and two 55" flat panel plasmas were installed on the proscenium. Four further 42" plasmas were supplied for mobile use by plugging into any of the various CAT6 wall sockets installed throughout the venue, allowing optimal flexibility where displaying any and all client material is concerned.

To transmit the signals from the switcher over CAT6 to the displays Kramer TP-573 HDMI, bidirectional RS?232 & IR over twisted pair transmitters and TP-574 receivers were employed.

Regarding the versatility of the system, Rodgers says: "You can do HDMI over CAT6 from the stage; you can do VGA which up-converts to HDMI. We've got composite inputs that upscale to HDMI as well. But that's

emergency stuff for when someone brings something really weird in or wants to play off an old video camera or VHS machine. So everything ends up in an HD format, regardless of input."

This was a very specific vision on Raciti's part.

"If you go to a function and order, you don't know what's on tab or what's not on tab. This is what the screens are for," says Raciti. "If the client chooses a beverage list, we put it up there. That's the main core of the idea. If they want to put their logos up, we can do that too. It gives a bit of comfort to the client."

The wrap

A little goes a long way and attention to detail is what separates excellent service from the mediocre. All the newly installed systems at The Venue have been designed with this in mind because what Tony Raciti and his team understand, like everyone else involved in the upgrade, is that the client comes first. From the audio, to the lighting, to the video, The Venue is a welcoming locale for almost any client looking for a quality experience and, just like the rest of their departments, they cater to almost any technical need.