MUDSLIDE RELIEF

Ed Roland of Collective Soul

Local Production Community Rallies For La Conchita

By Terry**Lowe**

The most dreaded three words a production professional ever hears are, "It's a benefit." However, there are those moments when gear, time and money take a second seat to a community in need. As the world turned their eyes to the devastating tsunami disaster halfway around the world, a small community in Ventura County—La Conchita—found itself victim to a devastating mudslide, the result of a 10-day torrential downpour in Southern California. Ten people lost their lives and 15 homes were destroyed in this beautiful surfing community just south of Santa Barbara.

Far from the television lights of the tsunami relief telethon, the Santa Barbara production and music community came together to produce a star-studded show that rivaled any Hollywood gathering. A truly collective undertaking, everything was donated, from the theatre to catering, and of course, all of the production.

"It has been an accumulation of people who were willing to help in so many different ways," stated Alan Geer of Audio Geer. It was Geer who coordinated the audio production needs for the show. "Apex Audio of Huntington Beach, Delicate Productions, High Tech Audio, Electronics in Camarillo, Rat Sound of Oxnard, TC Electronic, Lab.gruppen and Luner's of Santa Barbara all donated gear to make the show happen."

With an amalgamation of gear from a variety of resources, pulling into the 2,200-seat Arlington Theatre wasn't quite as easy as pulling the truck up with a prepared system right out of the shop. Stage manager for the event Ed Simeon, longtime spokesman for TC Electronic and Lab.gruppen amplifiers, explained, "Alan Geer asked if I could mix and help coordinate audio for a small acoustic benefit show being produced by Chris Pelonis. We received a proposed artists' input requirements two days before the show and eventually met in the parking lot during the load-in, where we pared down the input list to a manageable size.

"We were able to employ top-of-the-line gear: Yamaha PM5000, EAW KF730 line array powered by Lab.gruppen fP6400 amps, Midas XL250, Radian RMW-1122 wedges... All mics were supplied by Shure, including a full rack of U Series and ULX series wireless mics, which worked very well throughout numerous set changes, as each artist was designated a specific wireless mic for the evening. Fiberplex was kind enough to donate a Lightviper digital snake, but as the show grew to 50-plus inputs, we also had to employ a traditional copper snake as well.

"To support the PM5000, we added a host of TC and Tube-Tech equipment: System 6000, MOne XL, DTwo, LCA-2B and two CL-2A compressors. On the input side we ran the bass DI through a Tube-Tech MEC-1A preamp and utilized the new MMC-1A multi-band compressing mic-pre on Jackson Browne's vocal. To sweeten the whole mix, the console output was run through a Tube-Tech SMC-2B stereo multi-band compressor, then on through a TC EQ Station. Bringing together all that tube gear and TC effects with Yamaha's flagship analog console proved to be a winning combination."

Monitor engineer and system designer John Schirmer noted, "The fun part of this event was the lack of information available going into it. When I arrived on Saturday morning, all I knew was the list of artists, and that I was using an XL250 and the EQ Station. That's all anybody knew.

"I based my monitor positions upon the 'Anything that can move will move' festival belief. I ran four mixes across the downstage, figuring it was where most of my movement would occur. I also ran four floating mixes for backing musicians, which ended up being used for Michael McDonald's band and the encore more than anything else. And, of course, sidefills and drumfills were based upon the obvious best possible solution.

"Raz (Rasmussen, at FOH) and I tried to create an input list that would mirror that of a festival, with one major difference: we tried to leave as many dedicated channels for the artists as possible to avoid complications after soundcheck. One of the factors that made our lives easier was that we were using all wireless microphones for vocalists. This allowed me to color code the 10 channels of wireless we were using for each individual headlining artist, and designate a number of wireless that would float through each artist's background vocalists.

"I had 48 mono inputs and eight stereo inputs at the monitor console, for a total of 56 inputs. To maintain all these signal sources, I used a Midas XL250 with an EQ Station 8 and an EQ Station 4 to control 12 mixes consisting of nine Radian 12-inch microwedges, EAW LA215 for drumfill top, EAW LA118 for drumfill sub (run on its own aux send) and a stereo pair of EAW LA325s with EAW LA118s for subs. I was also using one MOne XL for my main reverb.

"Instead of using the supplied eight channels of gating and compression I asked
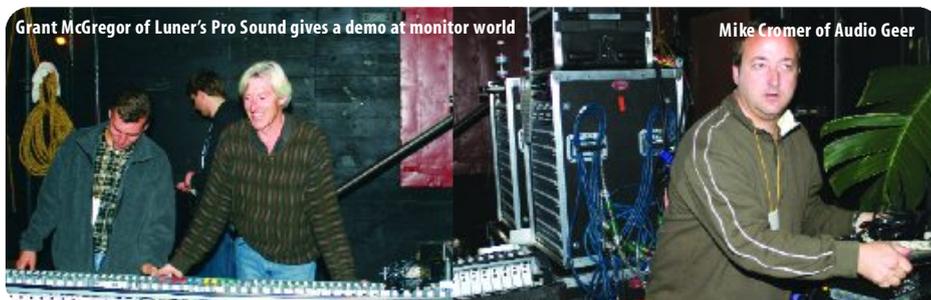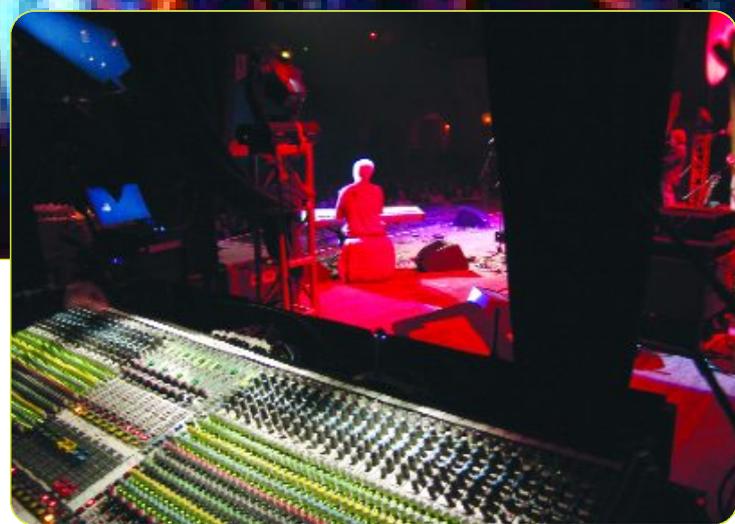
Grant McGregor of Luner's Pro Sound gives a demo at monitor world

Mike Cromer of Audio Geer

John Anderson of Yes

Crew

FOH Engineer: Raz Rasmussen
Monitor Engineer: John Schirmer
FOH System Tech: Criss Niemann
Monitor System Techs: Ian Messecar, Dan Housel
RF Engineers: Alan Geer, John Stack
PM Engineer: Mike Cromer
Stage Manager: Ed Simeone
Guitar Tech: John Stack

for, I opted to use the Dynamic EQ in the EQ Station to compress what I felt would be frequency-dependent problem areas in each individual mix during the performance. That's the beauty of the EQ Station. In a gig like this one, it is important to draw from your experiences and be prepared, because anything that can happen will happen.

"What made this show a success was the calm cool collectiveness of the whole. I was proud to work for a crew that could maintain a professional environment at the most demanding and under-planned event in my 12-year career. I believe we had the best possible crew for this gig.

"Mixing monitors for a show such as this one is a tremendous accomplishment. These are the types of shows, in my opinion, that define who you are as an engineer. I say this because you volunteer for shows such as these knowing they are usually in very undesirable conditions. But for the good of the cause, you as an engineer do what you can to make it the best possible event. Would you expect anything less from professionals?"

Raz Rasmussen, Michael McDonald's FOH engineer, mixed the evening at Front of House. "It was total mayhem technically, but even though it was crazy, I had a great time mixing all those acts. Even though it was piecemeal, the system was tremendous. I was really impressed with all the tube tech stuff, especially the Tube-Tech MMC-1A preamp. The high end was so smooth it sounded like Jackson Browne's voice was coming right off the album. Keeping track of everything was a real challenge with this many acts and no recall. Of course, we didn't have an intercom and that made things more difficult, but all in all, with this many stars singing all their well-known hits, the show was easy to mix once it started."

Even with a variety of gear assembled and put together for the first time, the audio quality was pristine. EAW KF730s with SB730 as well as SB1000 subs served the audience heartfelt performances by a cast of artists who live or have ties to the Santa Barbara community. The list included Jackson Browne, Michael McDonald, Christopher Cross, John Anderson of Yes, Jimmy Messina, a cameo video appearance by Kenny Loggins and Jeff Bridges. Even Collective Soul made it out from Atlanta, because their road manager, Robert Rubb, lives in Santa Barbara.

The concert was conceived by longtime audio guru Chris Pelonis of Pelonis Sound and Acoustics. "Having been washed off of my own ranch, I knew something had to be done. It started out being just a small acoustic gathering, but as word grew, so many people wanted to be involved. We could have done three days' worth of talent. The tsunami was a horrible disaster, but when something happens in your own backyard, whether it affects 100,000, 250 or just one person, you have to try to help."

The night hosted a standing-room-only audience and an exceptional audio system as the Santa Barbara community came to see their own perform to help their neighbors. As Jeff Bridges stated, "It was a show that will never be duplicated." From those on the stage to those behind the scenes, everyone was proud to have participated in this rare opportunity.

Those of you who would like to contribute the La Conchita Relief fund can make donations out to: The American Red Cross Santa Barbara Chapter, 2707 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93105.
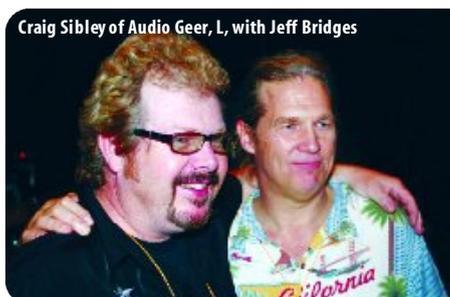
Craig Sibley of Audio Geer, L, with Jeff Bridges
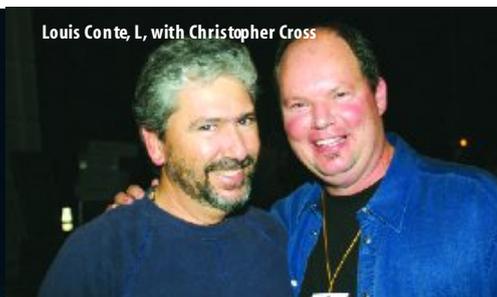
Louis Conte, L, with Christopher Cross

Alan Geer of Audio Geer, L, with Michael McDonald

Christopher Cross, L, with Wes Geer of Audio Geer