

Martin Audio WPL at DelFest



One of the premier roots festivals in the US, DelFest has steadily evolved the technical infrastructure at its Allegany County Fairgrounds site in Cumberland, MD, since the event was originally established 17 years ago. Supporting the multi-stage event with sound reinforcement from the very beginning has been Martin Audio partner Southard Audio. This year they fielded three Wavefront Precision systems - a WPL rig and two WPS hangs.

“We only switched to WPL and other Martin Audio systems at DelFest post-Covid (from 2022) and it really shines for these applications,” notes Southard managing partner, Jason Misterka. Their three-stage Martin Audio deployment was headed by the large-format WPL line array. The Grandstand system used 24 WPL for main PA (12 a-side) with eight WPL outfill stage right (to cover the grandstands), four XD15 frontfills, two CDD15 for outfills at the VIP tents, SXH218 subs, IK42 amps, THS sidefills, LE200 wedges and Linea Research monitor amps.

The large, covered Grandstand, set at an odd angle along one side of the 750ft flat field, provided the real challenge. According to Misterka, “We need to rig to a tall stage in order to cover the field, and when we do, the Martin Audio rig really does an amazing job. We also use an 8-box outfill array to cover the Grandstand, hung on our Applied LA12-25 towers. That also does a surprisingly excellent job, sounding like nearfield monitors in a space 500-plus feet away and at an angle!”

Meanwhile, the Potomac stage was populated with 16 WPS (for main PA), four

SXH218 subs, iK42 amps and a pair of CDD15 frontfills. This stage, in particular, has developed over the years into a full music stage (from little more than a band competition stage). Unlike the other two stages, The Music Hall was set indoors, featuring a main PA comprising 16 WPS (eight per side) on lifts, with eight SXC118 subwoofers, four Martin Audio FlexPoint FP12 as frontfills, driven by Martin Audio iK42 amps.

Being a roots festival, focused on Old Time, bluegrass and string band music, the McCoury family are one of the main partners. The Del McCoury Band themselves are led by the bluegrass legend, reappearing, and as the Travelin' McCourys (along with guest musicians). The quest for supreme sound control and optimisation took high priority. Southard Audio's Matt Hudson spent considerable time on the prediction for the large field as well as the outfill prediction for the Grandstand itself. "When dealing with an audience area as large as that, part of the magic is making it sound great at 500ft, and not like an AM radio," observes Misterka.

The 'Hard Avoid' function was used on the stages of all three venues to keep it as quiet as possible for the string bands, while the SXH218 at the Grandstand stage was used in a in a L/R cardioid configuration. In the Music Hall, the tech team again activated 'Hard Avoid' for the stage but also put more emphasis on avoiding 'Non-Audience' areas and focusing the PA away from the back wall of the room given the reflection concerns. "We also used SXC118 and really enjoyed their inherent cardioid characteristics at Music Hall," reported Jason Misterka.

But above all, it was about respecting the authenticity of the music. "Our company has had a long history with acoustic music," he said, emphasising their credentials. "Mixing bluegrass and Old Time music in the traditional style typically involves a number of hot microphones used to amplify mostly fairly quiet acoustic instruments. The less bleed there is from the main PA system, the cleaner the microphones sound and the more gain-before-feedback you have to work with.

"It takes more experience and skill than most people understand to mix acoustic music without the instruments utilising pickup systems. We are still seen as one of the premier provider of production services for acoustic music festivals on the Eastern side of the US." This was endorsed by Key Chang, who mixed the Del McCoury Band and the Travelin' McCourys among others, "At DelFest we cater to lots of acoustic / string bands as well as large scale rock bands. Mixing a string band, through multiple large diaphragm condenser mics, at concert level, can be a daunting task; but the extremely focused WPL made this almost effortless and handled it all with ease."

"I've never heard a PA sound as full at the back of the listening area (200+ feet). The low-mids in particular were very impressive. This frequency range can be especially challenging with miked string bands, and often needs to be cut out due to stage bleed. My main EQ was hardly touched." The event's production manager, William Kesler, agreed that DelFest is a challenging setup for audio reinforcement, with music ranging from traditional bluegrass around a single condenser mic to full

bands. “This year, with Martin Audio rigs deployed on all stages, I was impressed with the smooth and even coverage across the entire site. I received several positive reviews from touring engineers who had never mixed on the WPL system before. I look forward to using Southard and Martin Audio for this and other projects in the future.” Southard Audio’s crew included Matthew Hudson, Chad Wyatt, Tim Reckley, David Pelikan, Bob McNichols, Phil Speiss, Michael Stover, Sven Giersmann, Tim Turner, Eric Shy, and Slim Prescott.

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