

# livesound **showcase**

## A *Symphony* of Sound

by Clive Young

**O**peratic superstars aren't the first people that come to mind when thinking of hardcore road dogs, but Sarah Brightman definitely spent her time pounding the pavement this past fall on the North American leg of her world tour, playing 32 cities in 48 days. The tour, her first since 2004, supported the Hertfordshire, England native's first studio album in five years, *Symphony*, which bowed at No. 13 on the Top 200 Album chart. Interest in the tour was particularly high as it followed in the wake of Brightman having sung the Olympic theme song, "You and Me," at the 2008 Opening Ceremonies of the Summer Olympic Games in Beijing.

Throughout the elaborately staged tour, Brightman delivered songs from *Symphony*, as well as such fan favorites as "Phantom of the Opera," "Time to Say Goodbye," and "Ave Maria"—but none of them would've been heard without Texas-based LD Systems. Supplying audio crew and gear for the jaunt, the sound reinforcement company began working with Brightman last fall as the tour set up shop in the Los Angeles Forum for a week-long set of rehearsals before heading to Mexico for the North American leg's kickoff.

Key to the production were Colin Boland, Brightman's front-of-house engineer of 13 years, and, at the side of the stage, monitor man Seamus Fenton. Each mixer used a Yamaha desk, with a PM5D with a DSP5D extender gracing the house mix position for a total of 96 inputs, while Fenton worked on a PM1D, configured as 96 x 48. The tour played larger arenas, such as Madison Square Garden in New York and the American Airlines Arena in Dallas, in order to accommodate the scale of production, but typically played for crowds of 8,000-12,000 nightly. Key to ensuring that Boland's mixes reached all those discerning ears was a sizable Electro-Voice X-Line sys-



**Sarah Brightman played 32 cities in 48 days on the U.S. leg of her North American tour, supported along the way by Texas-based LD Systems.**

tem with full DSP and remote control via NetMax with FIR-Drive.

Robert Ausmus, director of Production Services at LD Systems, noted that the company first used X-Line boxes a few years ago: "We started buying X-Line in 2004, and have been growing our inventory since. Initially, we first heard X-Line out with the Rolling Stones on their 2002-03 "Licks" tour, and then later heard it again overseas. We bought X-Line for a ZZ Top tour, and it was later utilized on numerous 3 Doors Down tours. An arena tour is typically somewhere in the neighborhood of 60-72 cabinets of that particular product, but few years back, when we decided to start using X-Line for the Houston Rodeo—the world's biggest rodeo—we had to increase our inventory considerably. The Rodeo requires 116 cabinets minimum to cover 'just' the lower seating bowl of Reliant Stadium."

Brightman's sound system, however,

consisted of 32 Xvls (16 per side), 24 Xsub (12 per side), and 12 XLE181 (with their own custom FIR-drive presets) for front fills, while 16 Xvls (eight per side) acted as side arrays and eight XLD281 were stage side fills. All DSP was run via NetMax, managed with IRIS-Net control and monitoring software, and the entire PA was powered by 80 P3000RL remote-control amplifiers serving up a secondary level of DSP for both time-alignment and finite EQ touch-up.

While speaker management and amplifier networking is still making inroads into the national touring market, its adoption is steadily growing, and to LD Systems, employing it on the Brightman tour was a no-brainer based on the demand for system performance on the tour.

Ausmus explained, "We were forced into networking primarily by our Houston Rodeo work, because everything is so remote there. With the amplifiers hundreds of feet apart and 220 feet in the air, every-

thing has to go on a fiber backbone. Copper would be fine for the touring that we've done, with bands like 3 Doors Down and Hinder, because everything's within a 100-meter run, but if we can use [networking] on regular arena touring, why not? We're enjoying not having to run a 32-pair drive line. We can keep everything digital, there's less concerns about line loss and ground loops, and there's just overall efficiency, too. Running a CAT-5 as opposed to a 32 channel drive started making perfect sense to us."

In fact, LD Systems is so into using NetMax that it's been steadily involved in its development, said Ausmus: "We work closely with Electro-Voice on product development and we've been using NetMax to continue to bring value to our investment in all our EV products. We, along with other key end users, have been giving the EV engineers solid feedback over the past few years, and

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# Brightman

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now feel like FIR-Drive is the absolute best processing for this speaker system.”

Over in monitor world, EV boxes were also readily apparent on the tour, as engineer Fenton mixed for a selection of XLDs used as side fills and d&b audiotechnik Q10s, which were employed as overhead fills for the dancers. Brightman and her various backing musicians also heard themselves via Sennheiser G2 wireless personal monitor systems.

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**Robert Ausmus, LD Systems**

While many tours’ wireless requirements expand during rehearsals, adding mics or monitors along the way, the Brightman production actually pruned its RF need as it became clear that some performers would be remaining stationary, making wired offerings a simpler option.

Ausmus recalled. “The production started out with about 16 wireless channels as far as vocal mics are concerned, and that went down to about eight; meanwhile, the personal monitors went from 16 to perhaps a dozen, with the remainder becoming hard-wired Shures.”

The U.S. leg of the tour passed without incident, becoming the latest cornerstone in LD’s on-going relationship with many of the production personnel involved with the Brightman camp. So just how did an SR company from Texas wind up supporting a British opera singer? According to Ausmus, it had to do with another English export: the Pet Shop Boys. While providing audio for one of the Eighties synth duo’s U.S. tours a few years ago, said Ausmus, “we met a lot of the key players—house engineer, monitor engineer and production manager—that they have in common with Sarah Brightman. It was such a posi-

tive experience that they decided they would give us another crack at it with another artist.”

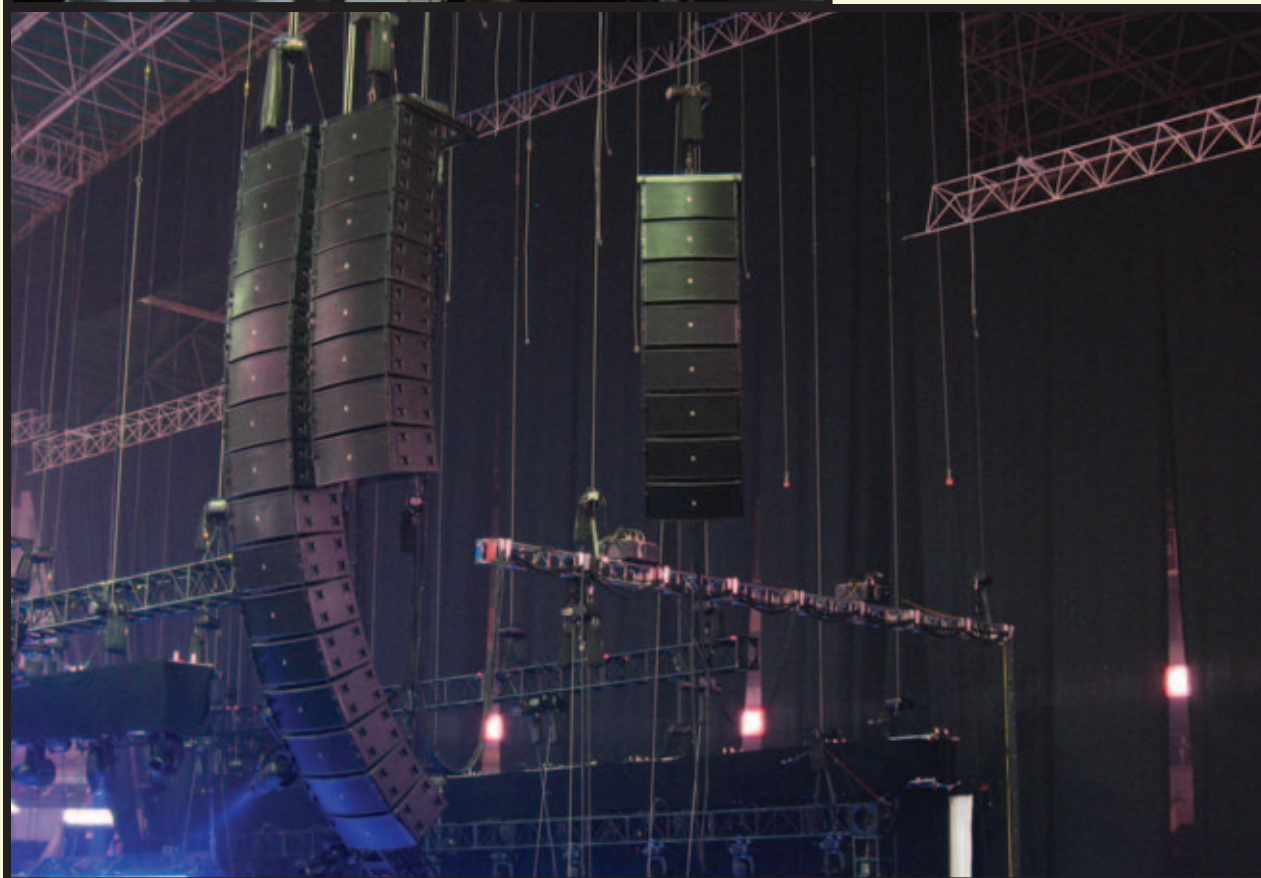
In the wake of that success, the company is getting yet another crack at the Brightman tour; with the Asian leg starting this month, LD Systems is providing techs, board groups, stage infrastructure, backline power, miking, wireless, and so forth, only picking up racks and stacks locally. It could be considered be a feather in the company’s cap, or a good account to keep going during a rough time in the economy, but at LD, there’s another upside that shouldn’t be forgotten, according to Ausmus: “It’s pretty exciting for the guys to get to go see the other side of the planet.”

**LD Systems**  
[www.ldsystems.com](http://www.ldsystems.com)

**Electro-Voice**  
[www.electrovoice.com](http://www.electrovoice.com)



**Left: On hand before the operatic fireworks were (l-r): EV tech support’s George Georgallis; crew chief Mike “Monk” Shear; and Matt Donarski. Below: The tour used a sizable Electro-Voice X-Line system, powered by 80 P3000RL remote-control amplifiers.**



## vitalstats

### Sarah Brightman

#### LD SYSTEMS

**FOH Engineer:**

Colin Boland

**Monitor Engineer/RF Tech:**

Seamus Fenton

**Monitor System:**

Mike Hawkins

**Crew Chief:**

Mike “Monk” Shear

**System Tech:**

George Olson, Renee Magdelano

**FOH Console:**

Yamaha PM5D with DSP5D extender

**Monitor Console:**

Yamaha PM1D

**House Speakers:**

Electro-Voice X-Line Xvls, Xsub, XLE181, XLD281

**Monitor Speakers:**

Electro-Voice XLD; d&b audiotechnik Q10

**Personal Monitors:**

Sennheiser G2

**House Amplifiers:**

Electro-Voice P3000RL

**Monitor Amplifiers:**

Electro-Voice P3000RL

**FOH Equipment/Plug-Ins:**

Electro-Voice IRIS-Net, NetMax N8000

**Microphones:**

Shure; Sennheiser with Neumann KMS104 capsule