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Sound Art Tours With TRUE Mic Preamps

TORONTO, ONTARIO—Sound Art Touring is using 66 channels of TRUE Systems microphone preamplifiers for two of its major clients - singers Sarah McLachlan and Dido. McLachlan is carrying two TRUE Precision 8 eight-channel units and one dual-channel P2 analog unit. She is presently using them overseas, but will be bringing them to a North American arena tour that begins in July. Dido is now on a theater tour of North America using six Precision 8s.



Sound Art touring director Jeff Berryman explains why he recommends the use of outboard preamps. "We think that premium onstage preamplification represents the next evolutionary step in signal purity for live sound," he says. "When you start to think about optimizing sound quality, you soon realize that you don't want each microphone sending its tiny signal to multiple inputs through hundreds of feet of cable. You want first-class preamplification as close as possible to each mic, with line-level signals then distributed to the various mix and recording points."

"We first became aware of TRUE through Gary Stokes, Sarah's soundman, who has owned his own Precision 8 for a while," continues Berryman. Earlier this year he and Sarah's people got together at a rehearsal in Vancouver for a comparative evaluation of mic preamps. "The source material couldn't have been better," Berryman notes. "We were listening to Sarah herself!" The evaluation included a group of units that were of appropriate design for live use. The TRUE unit was the all-around favorite. People remarked that the sound quality was clean and clear without being harsh or edgy.

Meanwhile, Dido's sound crew were putting together their system design for her tour, scheduled to launch two months before McLachlan's. "Mark LeCorre, Dido's soundman, said, 'If you think the TRUEs are the best, we'll use those, and I want 48 channels.' So we bought him six Precision 8s," says Berryman.

"We were all pleasantly surprised," comments LeCorre. "The TRUE preamp is so linear and great sounding. When I listen to old rehearsal tapes we made before we got the TRUEs, it's obvious we've made a huge sonic leap forward - especially if you listen to the cymbals, the overheads, the percussion, and the drums."

The Dido and McLachlan preamp systems were both designed and built by the same people. Sound Art provided the client liaison and design resources. Audio Video Methods of Toronto provided financing and project support. And Ramtech Industries of Gainesville, Fla. constructed the transformer systems described below.

The Dido preamp system is a complete 48-channel TRUE-based "front end." It includes not only the six TRUE Precision 8 preamps, but also a line-level splitter using large-core Jensen transformers for distortion-free handling of the mic preamp outputs. Since the Precision 8s provide eight channels in a single rack space, the complete subsystem is compact and easy to manage.

LeCorre reports that he is using Neumann and Sennheiser microphones almost exclusively onstage with Dido. Dido herself uses a Sennheiser 5000 wireless handheld with 865 capsule. "The 865 is a good-sounding mic and it offers good rejection of the drum kit. She can sing pretty soft, and the drummer can play pretty hard!" LeCorre also uses Neumann KM 184s on drum and percussion overheads and a variety of Evolution Series mics on the drums and backline.

In contrast to the Dido kit, McLachlan's subsystem is designed for a different style of touring. Berryman observes, "Sarah is going to be doing a lot of international touring and will use various local sound system providers. She will carry her own microphones, in-ear monitor systems, and usually mixing consoles, but beyond that, things will vary. So, Gary has decided to carry 18 channels of TRUE Systems plus 24 channels of Jensen line level splitter in a little package that they can take with them wherever they go. They're even carrying their own small multi-cable, so they can control the sound of their 18 most

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important sources all the way from mic to console input no matter whose gear they're using."

McLachlan's professional relationship with both Gary Stokes and her mic of choice, the Neumann KMS 150, go back a decade or so. Both can be credited with helping bring her evocative, passionate songs to life tour after tour.

Stokes first encountered the Neumann KMS 150 in use with Canadian super group Rush. Vocalist Geddy Lee was a longtime devotee. "When I first started requesting the Neumann KMS 150 from sound companies, I found that hardly anyone had heard of it. Now Neumann mics are widely used for live performance," Stokes recalls. "It turned out the Neumann KMS 150 was the best thing for her." McLachlan's classically trained voice encompasses an incredible range of sound variances. Shifting effortlessly from the operatic to a throaty, R&B sound in a single lyric, capturing McLachlan's vocal range is like capturing the diverse tonality of an acoustic instrument. It's a task simply too complex for most dynamic microphones to handle. The condenser design of the KMS 150, however, is tailored to capture this dramatic depth and range with precision and clarity," he concluded.

The reports of Dido's concert sound have been outstanding, says Berryman, thanks to the combination of premium quality mics, high-quality onstage preamps, properly conditioned signal paths, well-clocked digital consoles, and high-quality loudspeaker systems. "People are going nuts about the sound. Dido herself has remarked about it," he says. "I've been doing this for more than 30 years, and I can't remember a tour where I've heard so much praise about the sound. And we expect to hear the same kind of news when Sarah opens in Seattle on July 5. It goes to show what happens when you do everything just a little better all the way down the line - the benefits add up.

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