

livesound showcase

She's the Real Thing

by Clive Young

Her first album, released in 2000, was called *Who Is Jill Scott?* These days, people know: She's the three-time Grammy Award-winning R&B, soul and jazz singer, songwriter, actress and poet who's currently playing to big crowds across the country. Touring behind her latest release, *The Real Thing: Words and*

come into, but it's a good family."

His main concern, of course, is the stage full of performers every night, as the singer is backed by no less than 11 other musicians, including two horn players, a percussion player, drummer, keyboardist, three backup singers, a bass player and a guitar player. Despite having so many performers to keep track of—and having a Digidesign Venue D-Show console as his

exception. That said, however, Grabe is the first to admit that he's gone for "a really street, clean, 'add nothing' approach to it. I use the Digi Comp, and Revibe when it's a dry hall, but that's about it.

"Actually I've taken off the Smack and a lot of the different high-end ones. Jill's studio engineer, he's a big Pro Tools guy, so he's been listening to all these plug-ins for years; he's come in and we've worked on



STEVE JENNINGS

Jill Scott and her band hear themselves via Sennheiser personal monitor systems and Meyer Sound monitors.

Sounds Volume 3, the songstress is on the road with Masque Sound (East Rutherford, NJ) and bringing down the house at every stop, from Radio City Music Hall to the Greensboro, NC Coliseum.

Handling the FOH position for the journey is Lorne Grabe, a new addition to the singer's touring crew. While Scott has been touring regularly since her first album, Grabe joined her production during a European leg last fall, quickly finding his place: "Most of her crew and some of the backline guys have been with her since the beginning and they've all grown up together, so it's a tight-knit family to

disposal—the show boils down to 45 inputs on the desk. Grabe doesn't use any preset scenes for the act.

"We didn't get a chance to do any type of rehearsal, so I've been just treating it like an analog desk," he said. "I just mix it old-school style—which fits, because she goes into such a dynamic show. I really watch her and all of the band, because she'll change it up and play with things or pause on a moment—she can go anywhere at anytime."

Like many tours these days, racks and racks of outboard gear has been replaced with DSP and plug-ins, and this jaunt is no

what's best for the show. He'll say, "That one adds a little bit of fragments here, this one does this," so he's kind of steered me from the fancy plug-ins towards the ones that sonically sound the best and that will give me what I need for her sound. It's taken a lot of the guesswork out, which was great because I've been mixing theater and Broadway tours for the past eight years with Masque; I'm used to Cadacs and orchestras and area mics, so that got me up to speed fast."

Bringing every note to the crowds is a sizable PA based around 20 Meyer Sound

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Jill Scott

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Milo high-power curvilinear loudspeakers and four Milo 120 boxes, bolstered by a pair of 650-P subs and two CQ-1s. The bass is mainly propelled around the room, however, by a dozen d&b B2 dual mode subs; Grabe explained, "This band has a lot of 808 samples, a lot of different low-end stuff, so I wanted to choose to be able to control it, mold it and play with it a lot."

Although most of the musicians wear personal monitors, Meyer boxes also grace the stage with 10 UM-1P self-powered monitor speakers, eight UPJ-1Ps and a pair of USW-1P subs. A quartet of the UM-1Ps surround Scott in a semi-circle, though she mostly refers to her Sennheiser IEMs.

In order to capture Scott and her cohorts with the level of fidelity that will best benefit the music, Grabe has been selective in his microphone choices—a series of decisions made in part based on his background. "Since I come from the theater industry, I brought a very eclectic mic collection," he chuckled. "After I toured with them in Europe, I knew what they were going for, so before we headed out here in the U.S., I actually sat down in our mic locker at Masque Sound and matched the mic to the instrument to best capture what they're going for—and it's worked out well.

"I'm using lots of Neumanns—some

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Lorne Grabe, FOH engineer, Jill Scott

U87s and U89s, for instance—and all the singers are on KMS105s. Then, trying something a little different, I'm using the Blue Dragonfly cardioid condenser microphone for the guitar. I saw it the mic locker, and I was like, 'Man, I want to give this a try.' It's

E908s on the toms. "I like them a lot," said Grabe. "They're a lot warmer than other mics I've used—not as 'condenser-sounding.' I also like the 441s—they give the bottom snare a thick, nice tone if he's going for it."

Despite mixing an eclectic, 14-piece



Handling sound chores are (l-r): monitor engineer Jim Roach, system tech John Graczewski, FOH engineer Lorne Grabe and monitor tech James Good.

turned out to be a beautiful thing."

Drum mics out with the production include beyer M88s, Audix D6s on the floor toms and kick drum, Sennheiser 441s for the snare, top and bottom, and Sennheiser

band, Grabe's found that his theatrical background has stood him well; the group might head off in new musical directions from time to time, but mixing 45 inputs is easy compared to a few of his previous gigs.

"Touring theatrical shows are hard work, and you learn fast," he recalled. "You're dealing with a whole orchestra, and it's a lot of effort—I've moved theatrical shows where I've had 18 feet of console with two S-Type Cadac consoles, with almost 196 inputs, every day. I've had 57 live wireless mics that I had to actually tune and know everybody's line daily. With 42nd Street, I had 115 live inputs—and 47 of them were wireless lapel and head mics and tap mics. It's horrid, but once you can control that many little mics, anytime you're in a band situation, it's all cake."

That's not to say Grabe is strictly a theatrical mixer, having paid his dues in the late Nineties on the Warped Tour, as well as mixing and tour managing classic hardcore act, Glassjaw. Even his theatrical work has returned to pop music on occasion, because while there's traditional Broadway-

style fare like *The Music Man* and *Peter Pan* on his resumé as well as having worked with Michael Crawford, there's also the responsibility for the sound design for the Japanese production of *The Who's Tommy* as well.

Given that broad background, he likewise has wide-ranging advice for those looking to break into the business: "Work for free. Go out and be an intern—push boxes around, hook the cable and be ready to learn everything, because you can learn anything off of anybody. In this business, everybody has a new approach or new idea, so you have to be open-minded about it. This industry's not that hard—you can succeed."

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Jill Scott

Masque Sound

FOH Engineer:
Lorne Grabe

Monitor Engineer:
Jim Roach

Crew Chief/System Engineer:
John Graczewski

System Engineer:
James Good

Tech:
Matthew Denne

FOH Console:
Digidesign Venue D-Show

Monitor Console:
Digidesign Venue D-Show

House Speakers:
Meyer Sound Milo, Milo 120, 650-P, CQ-1; d&b B2

Monitor Speakers:
Meyer UM-1P, UPJ-1P, USW-1P

Personal Monitors:
Sennheiser G2

Microphones:
Neumann U87, U89, KMS105; Blue Dragonfly; Beyer M88; Audix D6; Sennheiser 441

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