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Product Spotlight

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Working with an ICON:
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Digidesign Hybrid
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Capturing

KONG



LIVE ARCHIVE RECORDING

with Pro Tools and VENUE

There are a number of features that set the Digidesign VENUE live sound environment apart from its competition. One notable example is its ability to integrate with a Pro Tools digital audio workstation so you can multi-track record a live event without interrupting the workflow of front-of-house mixing.



The concept of live recording, whether in multi-track or two-track form, is an ever-evolving process. When I look back on my earliest days as a mixer, I marvel at all the different ways that I've attempted to record live performances, whether in the studio, a mobile truck, or even as a front-of-house mixer/tracking engineer during large concerts. I have certainly tried everything in one form or another, from simple XY or ORTF pairs of microphones to huge multi-track scenarios with one track per input.

In this article, I'll concentrate on multi-track archiving for live events, which involves recording and logging shows with the intent that those recordings might someday be used for a future commercial release. I've archived nearly all the tours I have mixed over the past 15 years, using one recording medium or another, from Sony 3348 open-reel digital tape to modular digital multi-tracks (MDMs) such as the Tascam DA88, DA98, and Alesis ADAT. Some of these systems exceeded 80 tracks. Fun! (NOT!) Afterwards, many of these recordings would be transferred to—you guessed it—Pro Tools.

At some point around 1996, it seemed logical to cut out the middleman and start recording live events directly to Pro Tools. It was a novel concept at the time. I had recently purchased a *Pro Tools MIXplus TDM system with the maximum 888|24 I/O, and with that, I set off to record and archive shows. I contacted Digidesign to get some guidance on using the system to record shows. I told them I was going to be

recording 64 tracks for about two-and-a-half hours at a clip. There was a long pause on the phone, a little giggle, and then the tech support guy said, "I don't actually know what's going to happen if you try this!" I started laughing as well, and then got really excited at the prospect of trying it.

Making it Simple with VENUE

Hundreds of recorded shows later, Pro Tools is still my first choice for recording live events for archiving and remixing purposes. And with the introduction of the VENUE live sound

of typically expensive audio interfaces for the DAW. You'd also need a FOH console comprehensive enough to offer a dedicated set of direct outputs or taps from the console's mic preamps. That doesn't even take into account a return path for the recorded signals to check or monitor them. Even when successful, the whole process was very complex, expensive, and both time- and space-intensive.

Integrating VENUE with Pro Tools

There are two options for integrating the VENUE live sound environment with

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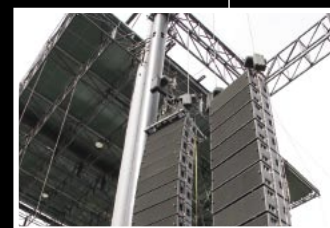
environment from Digidesign in February 2005, it's a brand-new day. A once arduous and technically challenging process just got downright sexy. Consider the previous challenges versus the new paradigm offered by Digidesign.

Before VENUE, recording high-quality audio at a live performance without the aid of a remote recording truck meant either acquiring a complete second set of preamps and another paid engineer whose only task was to track the event, or constructing a very complex technical interface between the recording system and the front-of-house (FOH) mixing console. This could involve thousands of dollars in cabling and connectors alone, not to mention cases, plus a large number

Pro Tools: the FWx card (which connects VENUE to Pro Tools LE software) and the HDx interface (which makes the connection to Pro Tools|HD).

With the FWx option, you can connect the VENUE system directly to any FireWire-equipped computer that has Pro Tools LE software installed. No need for even an Mbox 2 here—VENUE is the audio interface. You can bus 18 tracks to and from a Pro Tools LE session. Assign any output from the D-Show patchbay via the FireWire bus to any of the tracks on the session.

The patch might be as simple as eight stereo subgroups of instruments and audience mics, plus the two-bus mix





of the actual event. As you Pro Tools users know, you can very easily edit the two-bus mix and export it as an MP3, or possibly do a quick re-blend of the groups or stems and burn those to CD or MP3 for artist review. This is a very compact and efficient way to achieve high-quality recording while also enabling nonlinear editing and remixing.

For Pro Tools|HD users, there is the VENUE HDx card. As I mentioned earlier, linking a Pro Tools|HD system to a FOH mixing position used to be financially and technically challenging. With the

THERE ARE TWO OPTIONS FOR INTEGRATING THE VENUE LIVE SOUND ENVIRONMENT WITH PRO TOOLS: THE FWX CARD (WHICH CONNECTS VENUE TO PRO TOOLS LE SOFTWARE) AND THE HDX INTERFACE (WHICH MAKES THE CONNECTION TO PRO TOOLS|HD).

VENUE HDx option, just choose a computer and then add the appropriate Pro Tools|HD Core and Accel cards, a set of DigiLink cables, hard drives to match your track count, and you're off!

Using only two HDx cards, you can route 96 mic pres automatically and directly to the Pro Tools Record bus.

An additional 32 tracks are available in the VENUE digital patchbay and can be sourced from any output on the console for recording stems or other sources. Again, consider what this actually means: There's no need for an expensive analog cabling interface. And more importantly, there's no need for any DAW audio interfaces, because once again, VENUE is the audio interface.

The combination of the VENUE FOH interface rack and a Pro Tools-equipped computer, plus external

drives, only takes up about 18 rack spaces. Before VENUE, an equivalent recording system of 128 tracks would have taken nearly 40 rack spaces just for the Pro Tools system! The cabling interface and rack system alone would have likely cost more than the Pro Tools computer and PCI cards currently needed to achieve the same track count with VENUE.

And of course, recording to Pro Tools is only part of the integration story. You can also use your integrated Pro Tools rig to play back recorded tracks through VENUE to augment live performances or even to conduct "virtual soundchecks," which I'll cover in depth next time. Like I said—it's a brand-new day. <<<



➤ The VENUE system's Pro Tools integration options make it easy to produce a professional-quality multi-track recording of any live performance.

