

MASQUE SOUND BRINGS ALIVE THE SOUND OF THE BEATLES FOR *BACKBEAT*

Custom Audio Solution Amps up Sound for Smash Hit Play about the Birth of the Band

LOS ANGELES, MARCH 6, 2013—When Sound Designer Richard Brooker was tasked with creating an unforgettable, authentic audio experience for *Backbeat*, a play chronicling the rise of the Beatles as one of the most beloved rock bands of all time, he turned to Masque Sound, a leading theatrical sound reinforcement, installation and design company, for the equipment he needed to turn his vision into a reality.

Backbeat made its United States premiere at the Ahmanson Theatre at the Music Center in Los Angeles on January 20, after playing to sold-out crowds at Toronto’s Royal Alexandra Theatre this past summer. Co-written by Iain Softley and Stephen Jeffreys, it is based on the 1994 Universal Pictures film by Softley, Michael Thomas and Stephen Ward. Five-time Tony Award nominee David Leveaux is the play’s director.

Backbeat marks the third time Brooker has worked with Masque Sound on a project. “Masque Sound did such a great job for me on the musical *Chess*, so there was no question I wanted them again for *Backbeat*,” says Brooker. “The main thing is that they’re a very professional and skilled outfit that provide not only the equipment and technical services that I require, but also offer what I find to be a unique level of support.”

In designing the sound for *Backbeat*, equipment selection was critical. According to Brooker, “*Backbeat* is an unusual show. I don’t consider it a musical but rather a play with live songs. This creates an interesting sound dynamic. The dialogue is less amplified, requiring us to reinforce the actors with sound gear to ensure the audience can hear them, but then the rock ‘n’ roll music the Beatles are playing in the clubs of Hamburg is very loud.”

In order to accommodate these varying sound levels and tones, Masque Sound provided a custom audio package featuring 24 Sennheiser SK5012 mics, a DigiCo SD10 console with Mac computers running the Q-Lab system for Sound Effect, Meyer M’elodies speakers for the main system, a Meyer M1D center cluster and Meyer UPM1P delays and front fields and Meyer 600-HP subs as well. The setup includes a large drop of M’elodies stage left and stage right and a slightly smaller drop of M’elodies on the sides covering the upper circle of the theater.

One of the challenges Brooker faced was establishing and maintaining the authentic feel of late 1950s-early 1960s Liverpool for the show. “We wanted to deliver a very raw, live sound to the music, as it would have sounded in a small European club at that time,” he says. “It wasn’t so much a sophisticated sound but rather something with raw guitar amps that were quite noisy and harsh and not as beautifully produced as music is now these days. In the sound design I was trying to create that feel and capture that moment at that time and make it sound edgy without making it sound horrible—that was an interesting challenge. Masque Sound was instrumental in pulling this off.”

In trying to keep the show as authentic to the time period as possible, the show also used vintage guitar amplifiers and some slightly non-traditional microphones for vocals. “Since it is very difficult to get a hold of the actual equipment that was used back in the 1950s and 1960s, that was a fairly unique

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challenge for this show. Masque Sound was once again extremely helpful in coming up with creative solutions to help overcome that issue.”

Brooker says he wouldn't be able to accomplish what he did on *Backbeat* without the people who worked with him to implement his ideas and designs into the show. “My associate sound designer, Poti Martin, and production sound engineer, Raf Rutgeerts, do a fantastic job. Also, the support of Masque is incredible. Scott Kalata from Masque Sound is always readily available on the other end of the phone or via email and usually comes out to visit the site as well. Masque Sound really provides great audio equipment, great backup and support and ideas as well. They are a great company and I look forward to continuing my relationship with them.”

About Masque Sound

Founded in 1936 by a trio of Broadway stagehands, Masque Sound evolved into one of NYC's most successful theatrical sound reinforcement, installation and design companies specializing in theatrical, house of worship, sporting, corporate, TV broadcast and live concert events. Celebrating more than 75 years in the industry, the company is lead by Geoff Shearing, the firm's 3rd generation owner, and General Manager Stephanie Hansen. The company also operates Florida-based Professional Wireless Systems, a leader in the development and implementation of wireless technology. Credits range from major Broadway shows and tours including “Phantom of the Opera,” “Mamma Mia!,” “Lion King,” “Jersey Boys,” “Memphis,” “The Book of Mormon,” “Newsies” and “Once” to yearly Super Bowl broadcasts and installations of varying sizes, including New York's New Victory Theater and historic St. Bartholomew's Church. Masque Sound's 70,000 sq. ft. corporate headquarters and main assembly facility is located at 21 East Union Ave., East Rutherford, NJ, 20 minutes from midtown Manhattan. For more information, call (201) 939-8666 or visit www.MasqueSound.com.

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