

Martin Audio MLA Conquers The Notorious Hill at Historic Leeds Castle Concert



Organisers of the annual Leeds Castle Concert, worked tirelessly to reschedule this year's event, featuring the world-famous Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, following the easing of restrictions - staging it later than normal, on September 4th.

Leeds Castle is amongst the many long-standing clients that have relied upon RG Jones Sound Engineering for decades. In the case of this beautiful site, the company has been providing sound systems since the very first show way back in the early 80's. It's a tricky site to cover well, and for the highly popular concert fielded a classic system of its own - Martin Audio's original award-winning ML - to overcome the coverage challenges.

Although this historic Castle site in Kent is isolated, imposing no restrictions on sound levels, the contouring leaves much to be desired from an acoustician's perspective, with a steep hill on which many of the crowds up to 10,000 congregate to watch the performance. "It measures around 210 metres from the stage to the top of the hill, and it was important to get enough up-angle on the PA," reveals RG

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Jones' MLA tech Sam Millen, while highly experienced classical music sound engineer Phil Wright, adds, "It's almost like playing Red Rocks [amphitheatre]."



The sound company's team had drawn on the optimisations created by Martin Audio's Robin Dibble for the 2019 event, which featured Martin Audio's WPL line array. "But due to having different PA towers this time we needed to make a few tweaks," said Millen. He and fellow MLA tech Graham McGarrick also needed to time-align for the changing humidity and temperature.

But in setting a single delay tower of 12 MLA elements, Sam Millen's masterstroke was to add three MLX subs, in broadside cardioid at this position. "I would really recommend that for next year as it made a real difference and provided a necessary low-end boost," he said.

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The main Left/Right PA comprised two 16-element MLA hangs, with a single stack outfill of eight MLA Compact, while eight ground-stacked MLA Mini elements provided infill. Subwoofers comprised nine MLX in a reverse cardioid broadside set up. To this, Millen added an arc pattern into the optimisation software “to bend the sound around the front.”

But the necessary rear rejection afforded by this inventive sub design tells only part

of the story. As Phil Wright points out, while a PA system can be more forgiving when reinforcing a rock band, purity is the watchword when it comes to classical music.

“I have 150 mics open, which are often parked in front of quieter instruments. Therefore transparency and lack of colouration are vitally important. The aim with a classical concert, he says, “is for the music not to sound like it’s coming through a PA system.

“This is why MLA is my system of choice for orchestral events, for how little sound comes off the back. Because with MLA you have a ‘Hard Avoid’ function [in the DISPLAY software] you can get a much cleaner sound off the stage begin with.”

Continuing, he says, “I can’t think of another system that would get you up that hill. It worked fantastically with one hang of MLA Compact and another for the VIP area off to the right. The site ‘hooks’ round and you are playing almost through 180° in terms of site coverage.”

Sam Millen was equally effusive about MLA’s dexterity. “I was extremely happy with the way it covered up the hill,” he said in conclusion. Other members of the RG Jones crew included Becky Pell (monitors) and Rosie Tarrant (stage and RF)

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