

Welsh National Opera upgrades with Riedel Bolero



Based in Cardiff's landmark Wales Millennium Centre, Welsh National Opera (WNO) is one of the most prolific operatic ensembles in the UK, with a national and international touring schedule that consists of an average of 120 performances per year. In need of a new in-house communication system, WNO recently invested in a full Riedel Bolero digital wireless intercom system, specified by Autograph Sound.

"We spend around 5-7 weeks, twice a year, at our home in the Millennium Centre, producing our operas. From there, we head off on tour for around 7 weeks at a time," explains Benjamin Naylor, Head of Lighting and Sound at WNO. "We're on the move a lot and require a communication system that works for us, not against us."

Prior to the upgrade, the team at WNO were using an outdated digital wireless system, which had served them well for around 7 years but had run its course as upgrade requirements and maintenance began to incur considerable costs. "The old system was liable to a lot of interference on the line, and from a health and safety point of view we needed a system that provided clear communication," explains Naylor. "Range is also important for us - our team covers a lot of ground."

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Autograph recommended a wireless system from Riedel, a clear choice that fitted WNO's critical needs. "Welsh National Opera stressed the fact that they wanted a system that was quick and efficient to set up when they go on tour," explains Nacho Lee, UK Sales Manager at Riedel. "Clarity of communication was the second most important requirement. Riedel Bolero ticks several boxes for systems that move around a lot: clear communication, ease of use and incredible range, no matter the venue. So, we recommended Bolero."

The system was commissioned in August 2022, with both Riedel and Autograph in attendance to ensure WNO were confident in setting up and using the Bolero system. "In total, the system consisted of three wireless antenna w/PSU, fifteen Bolero belt packs, three 5 bay chargers with rack mount kits, an NSA-002A interface box with rack mount kit and the standalone licence for the system. A network switch for communication and supplying POE to the antenna and NSA units were also part of the package," explains Will Cottrell, Technical Sales Engineer at Autograph.

Once installed, the system was put to the test both at home and on tour. "We implemented a soft introduction of the system, to ensure everyone was confident using Bolero," explains Thomas Roberts, Lighting Supervisor at WNO. "During the first season, we configured the Bolero system like our old system before rolling out more features throughout the company."



“We use 2-4 channels at a time, with roles defined per department plus separate chat channels alongside the main channel, to avoid overloading any one channel,” continues Roberts. “Not only does this system provide the best audio quality I’ve ever experienced, but it’s also much better at dealing with distances between team members than our previous system. It’s like having a normal conversation with someone – you can hear the inflection in people’s voices so it’s easy to determine who is speaking.”

The intuitive user interface of the Bolero system has also improved WNO’s communications. “The user experience couldn’t be simpler. The screen is easy to understand, and the buttons are much nicer than competitors’ offerings,” confirms Roberts. Stage Manager, Amy Batty echoes these sentiments and adds, “The ergonomics are good and the buttons are intuitive and easily accessible. You forget you’re wearing it and it becomes part of the day, part of the routine – there’s no thinking, we just use it.”

One of the most crucial requirements of the system was its portability. “With the new Riedel system, we just pack the system in a flight case and take it with us,” explains Roberts, who is responsible for maintaining and managing the communications systems. “Once we arrive at a venue, we unpack the system, install two antennas and we’re ready to go.”

The project has been a success for all parties involved, and WNO can now rely on the system to support them throughout their touring season. “It was great to work with a company as well-known and historic as Welsh National Opera,” reflects Cottrell of Autograph. “The end result of this project is a very reliable, clear and

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portable system which allows the same excellent levels of communication whether at home in Cardiff or on tour.”

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