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Redefining 'in the round'

Of the 600-odd concerts raunchy rocker and recording artist Luciano Ligabue has staged in his career, some have been really extraordinary: these include two gigs (see L&SI September 2002) in which he played across Milan's San Siro soccer pitch because his stage set was too wide to play down it; or the show in Verona Arena where he flew line arrays in over the wall from two truck cranes parked outside (to avoid spoiling fans' sightlines inside the famous opera shrine!).

This year, along with his manager Claudio Maioli, Ligabue decided to come up with another unique event for his tens of thousands of fans: an outdoor show in which he would perform on four stages, positioned around the audience.

The venue chosen for this memorable event, held on 10 September and produced by Barley Arts and Friends & Partners, was Campovolo airport (which also hosted a U2 concert some years ago) in Reggio Emilia, a town slightly north of Bologna (and perhaps known to L&SI readers as the home of RCF loudspeakers).

As well as the parts of show in which 'Liga' sang with his present band (La Band), the Main 240ft wide stage also hosted a series of support groups and artists, including Rio, the band formed by Liga's younger brother Marco.

This stage was connected on either side with a 100-yard catwalk leading to two identical 50ft wide stages: the Solo stage, where the artist sang a short acoustic set, and the Theatre stage, where he was joined by multi-instrumentalist Mauro

Pagani. Finally, opposite the main stage, at a distance of some 300 yards, the 180ft wide Vintage stage featured the artist with his original band, I Clandestino.

Music began at noon, with the producer Claudio Trotta of Barley Arts spinning sounds under his stage name, DJ Trot. At 3pm the first support band went on and when Maioli welcomed the crowd at 20.55, the main show began in effective style. Total darkness gave way to a satellite view of the earth on eight large video screens, rapidly homing in on the concert site and then switching over to shots of the crowd from the helicopter circling above the venue.

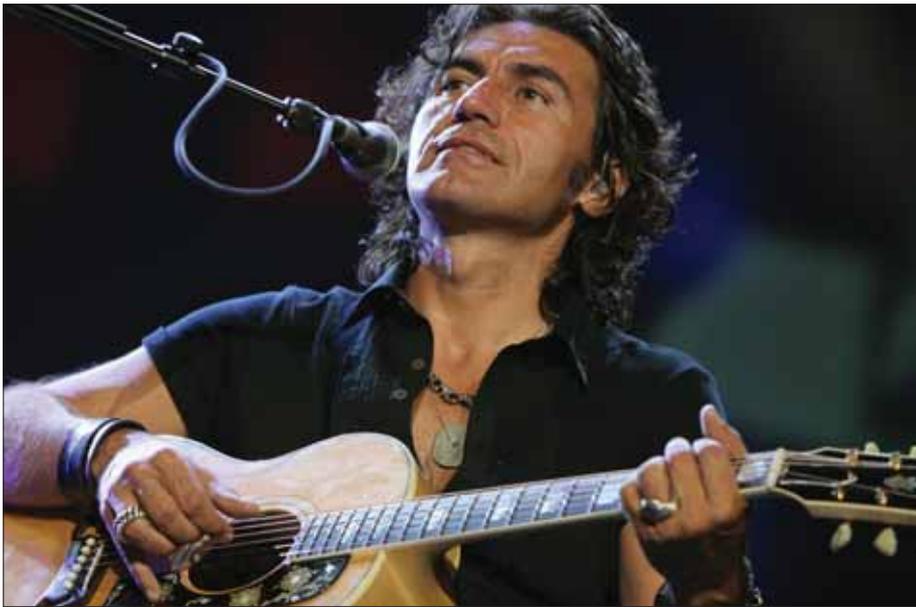
Sound

Located almost in the centre of the 180,000-strong crowd, FOH audio control was located on the "ground floor" of the large mixing platform and, as well as a Cadac R-Type live production console manned by Ligabue's long-time sound engineer, Paolo 'Red' Talami, a 48-channel Audient Aztec console was used by the support bands and supplied (as was the rest of the huge sound system) by Renato Fumasoli - the first rental company in Italy to buy a Cadac desk.

The R-type featured four 24-channel frames, plus a spare centre master module and handled 30 channels from the Main stage, 26 from the Vintage set and almost 30 from the two small stages. A veteran of Italy's live rock scene and the first to use the desk with an Italian artist, Talami explained: "I also used a Cadac D16 digital mix matrix on insert on the mix-down of the Vintage stage, so was able to take my Wi-Fi-connected

A crowd of
180,000
gathered to
see Italian
rocker Luciano
Ligabue break
new ground at
an airfield in
Reggio Emilia.

Mike Clark
reports from
Italy.



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From top,
 Luciano Ligabue in action;
 Optocore's product manager
 Luca Giaroli gives the
 thumbs-up to the system;
 FOH sound engineer
 Paolo 'Red' Talami.

tablet PC down to the stage and tweak the mix at rehearsals."

Fumasoli's team installed a large Martin Audio line array system, designed by the UK manufacturer's senior project designer, Jim Cousins, who explained: "The Main and Vintage stages were equipped with stand-alone systems, each comprising large (32 x W8L per side) left-right arrays in long-throw, wide coverage configuration augmented by six 16-cabinet line array delays - three in each direction."

These delays (which had W8LC compact 3-way line enclosures) were placed midway between the two stages to allow common towers to be used, which also provided a level of redundancy in the event of any of the delay tower signals failing. The Solo and Theatre stages each had local ground-stacked systems for the audience members nearest to them, which were delayed to the main systems, and the Main stage's rig had two additional delay towers, comprising 14 W8L systems, one on either side of the three dual-role central towers, to provide a strong directional source, as the audience space widened away from the main stage.

Although Fumasoli has the largest stock of W8L systems in the country, due to the size of the event, he was obliged to do a dry rent deal with other firms for the remainder: Capital Sound Hire and FX Music (UK), D-Rent and Ampco Pro Rent (Belgium) and Sirius (Holland) all contributed. The rig was powered by a combination of Martin Audio MA 4.2 and MA 2.8, plus Lab Gruppen FP 3400 and FP 6400 amplifiers, and controlled via 30 XTA DPA 224 and DPA 226 processors with two Audiocore networks.

Klaus Hausherr, on Main stage monitor mixing chores with assistant Giorgio Contaldo, helmed a pair of Yamaha PM5000 consoles, one of which was used for support bands and services such as talkback. He explained: "We started work a few months ago as far as the audio design was concerned, did a pair of small warm-up dates in clubs in Zurich and Munich, then came down to start set-up. We'd no IEM on the main stages,

just wedges - all biamped Martin LE12J, with XTA 224 crossovers and Lab Gruppen amps. IEM was only used on the theatre stage for sync problems, as the impact of the PA at such a distance could have created problems as far as delay was concerned with conventional monitoring. A few changes were made to the original project - for example, the desks were originally supposed to be below the stage, but I preferred to be up on top, in the wings. We also changed the side-fill set-up, which was originally to be floor-stacked, but was eventually flown to optimize their use, and we used Martin's compact line arrays, with which I was really satisfied."

David Bisetti, Hausherr's counterpart on the Vintage stage, manned a Heritage 3000, which controlled 26 Martin 12J and a Martin compact line array on side-fill duty. No IEM was to be found here either. Bisetti, who has worked with Iggy Pop and the Cure in the past, as well as large productions like the Rome MTV Day, was on his first outing with Ligabue. He said afterwards: "I really enjoyed the gig - the Vintage stage had plenty of rock 'n' roll punch and I seemed to get the sound the artist wanted."

The impressive audio setup was linked with a 1,300-yard Optocore fibre optics ring and the firm's product manager Luca Giaroli, personally baby-sitting the network, explained: "With distances like those at the Campovolo to be covered, fibre optics was the only reasonable choice for signal transport. Our systems are able cover up to 600 yards between units, as well as completely avoiding signal loss and interference.

"As far as the actual ring was concerned, out front, alongside the main desk, there were three LX4B 48-input FOH units - one for the Vintage stage, one for the support bands and the other for Liga on the main stage. The main stage had two 48in/16out LX4A stage units and the Vintage set another, whereas one of the two small ones had an X6 8in/8out converter unit a DD32 8in/8out digital I/O unit and the other an X6 8in, an X6 16in and a DD32 E. We also ran a 2-way line to the White Mobile."



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Broadcast

Backstage at the event, there was an impressive fleet of OB trucks, the largest of which were the Telerecord High Definition Unit 18 and the White Mobile, a familiar sight at high profile events requiring either mixdown of live audio for broadcast playout, or (as in this case) quality hard disk recording for DVD (or CD) release. Led by owners Amek Ferrari and Vanis Dondi, the White Mobile used 10 Alesis HD24 machines to record the event (after which the recording was converted to AIFF for ProTools post-production work. As well as the feed from the stages, Amek and Vanis also placed 12 of their own ambient mics (which included Sennheiser MHK 418 and MHK 70) strategically round the venue.

As well as coverage of the concert by Mediaset, which screened the show more than a month later on its Italia 1 channel and Premium Digital Terrestrial, an HD recording was made of the record-breaking event by Telerecord for the show's DVD release. The Tuscan firm was called in by Cinevideo Studio's Paolo Baraldi, the video's executive producer, along with Marco Salom of Angel Film, the DVD's production company.

Telerecord's Fabio Bertini explained: "We used our newly fitted-out Unit 18 with 12 HD cameras and Unit 12, the latest addition to our facilities, a small (3/4 camera) HD van. As well as these for the DVD work, we had a seven-camera SD truck, which gave the necessary feeds to specialist video projection firm STS."

Video

The use of video screens for IMAG purposes was essential for this huge crowd: a total of eight screens were installed by STS: a 66 x 33ft semicircular screen on either side of the main stage, two 39 x 30ft screens at the Vintage set, a 39 x 21ft screen midway along each catwalk and a 24 x 36ft screen at each of the two small stages at the end. The PVC screens were made from Luce, a PVC fabric manufactured by Peroni, chosen for its constant whiteness and the fact that it lets more air through than other types, so

ensures higher resistance and creates less problems with wind (the concert would have gone ahead even in the event of bad weather).

Three projectors were employed for each screen; the semicircular screens had Barco ELM R18 DLP units (18,000 ANSI lumens), while the remainder used Eiki XT3 LCD models (10,000 ANSI lumen). Alberto Azzola, in charge of the eight-strong STS team, explained: "We opted for video rather than LED screens because, apart from the considerable difference in cost, it would have been impossible to put together over 1,000sq.m of the same type of LED panels, and using different brands or models would have given a 'patchy' result. This solution also enabled the screens to be used at certain points in the show with the lighting fixtures, which couldn't have been done with an LED set-up."

Lighting

Lighting contractor was PRG Europe, and the visual impact of the event was controlled by lighting designer Graziano 'Billy' Bigliardi and desk programmer Mark Payne. Massimo Iacoboni of Red Music Service was head of lighting for the event and, although running a high temperature the night of the show, he explained the ins and out of an event of this size: "This is one of the largest events ever staged in Europe . . . we worked on-site for 20 days to put the thing together - I arrived on the 19th, the UK team on the 23rd and everything was up and ready for Mark Payne - in my opinion one of the world's best programmers - and Billy to start work at the consoles by the 30th. This was quite a feat, considering the size of venue, the weather, which wasn't always favourable, and the fact that, being turf, the crew couldn't push the flight-cases about."

On the subject of weather, never one to leave anything to chance, Iacoboni had his own small on-site Oregon "met station", to help with forecasting rain, but also useful for the wind, enabling the necessary precautions to be taken in time. Iacoboni was also responsible for 26 power generators, which had to run round the



From top,
The view of the main stage from behind the Cadac R-Type mixing console. The huge, semi-circular screens are visible on each side;

Main stage monitor engineer, Klaus Hausherr;
Amek Ferrari in his White Mobile.

Crew Photos: Mike Clark



Photos courtesy of PRG.



clock, as the fans for the fixtures fitted with 'Ecodomes' had to operate non-stop.

PRG lighting crew boss Peter 'Fats' Parchment is by no means a newcomer to 'Bella Italia': his first job was back in 1991 with Zuccherò. he says: "With two previous tours with Ligabue and other Italian headliners, I've worked quite a bit here, but was very surprised with just how together the Italian crews have become since my last visit, about three-and-a-half years ago - I was particularly impressed with Franco Comanducci and Paul Jeffrey, of custom staging company La Diligenza - they were absolutely fantastic and supported us on every angle. Massimo Iacoboni came up to the UK when we started designing the stages, then came back to work out the power requirements and all the relative paperwork."

PRG had a 10-strong crew and two riggers at the show, plus two top Italian riggers, Luca Giudolin and Matteo Abbate. Parchment, confirming things ran very smoothly, gave a brief breakdown of the gear installed at the main stage. The main elements included 80 Syncrolites (3k) - 12 of which, with nine VL3000s, were positioned across the back of the stage. There were also 60 VL 3000 Spots, 60 Mac 2000 Profiles and 60 Mac 2000 Washes up in the spider-shaped rig above the stage. Also up here were 16 Martin Atomic 3000 strobes with colour changers and 38 bars of ACLs. Along the front of the catwalks and across the front of the stage, there were 60 VL5 Arc fixtures and alongside the main screens were more VL3000 and MAC 2000 washes under Ecodomes.

The middle screens on the catwalks had 14 VL5 Arcs and around the vertical screens where Ligabue sang, were eight Mac 2000 Washes and eight Spots. Parchment says: "Mark Payne did all the programming with Billy Bigliardi, the concept designer of the whole lighting rig, and they operated the show together, using three Wholehog 3 and four Avolites Diamond 3 desks - all optically

linked with PRG's proprietary optical system and appropriate optical and DMX interfaces - It was hard work, but great fun and we got loads of collaboration, in particular from production assistant Fabio Colasanti."



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Bigliardi was also very happy about working again with PRG Europe. He said: "The last big event I did with them was Eros Ramazzotti's second last tour, and it was great to work with them again, as they're used to doing projects of this scale."

Bigliardi submitted the show's producers a design and the tender from PRG was accepted, after which he went up to Birmingham for four days and worked with Jeff Grainger, the firm's structural designer, and Massimo Iacoboni. Bigliardi continues: "After working on the designs with the load-bearing specs we got from La Diligenza, we put the lot together and the crew eventually finished the set-up in advance!"

Bigliardi had already worked with Mark Payne on a couple of tours and requested

him for the show: "He's very calm, but a fast worker and manages to put some order into my crazy ideas - he turned up at the gig with a lot of work already done from home with Wysiwyg, and his help was priceless."

The Ligabue event had several firsts as far as the lighting was concerned: the 72 Vari*Lite VL3000s, 32 DHA Digital Light Curtains, 80 3k Syncrolites, 10 Sky Art 6k units and colour changers for 48 of the 72 Atomic strobes were all on their first outing in Italy.

Bigliardi concluded: "Working with Mark and the crew was really fantastic and Dave Keighley, who was down on site for three days and caught the show, congratulated me on the results."

Although the sound was good from the positions that I and my colleagues of the Italian trade press were in, Jim Cousins said after the event: "Unfortunately, the asymmetrical crowd congestion caused by the sheer weight of fans in front of both [the largest] stages eventually took its toll. A local late-night radio 'phone-in started to get reports from fans who claimed that they couldn't hear part of the show - completely at odds with the crew's experience of sound coverage. It later transpired that a number of fans had turned right on entering the site and had ended up behind the Vintage stage apron. Others had turned left and ended up behind the side stage apron."

This, however, in no way deterred the majority of the crowd from enjoying this spectacular event, thanks to the hard work of a staff of 1,500, with a mammoth feat of logistics by executive producer Cristina Trotta (Claudio's sister). The two apparently tireless stage managers were Tony Soddu and Biccio Marchi.

The results of all this hard graft and no-nonsense rock 'n' roll can be seen and heard on Liga's DVD of the show, due out just in time for Christmas - for more news, check out www.ligabue.com

Mike Clark