

The Cure on VENUE in Australia

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Stephen Bruel

Performing for three hours from a back catalogue of material spanning almost 30 years to an appreciative expectant audience packed into Melbourne's Rod Laver Arena on a Sunday night - mixing The Cure is a major gig. For FOH engineer Michael Brennan, the decision to use a Digidesign® VENUE D-Show® system for the show, and indeed the whole tour, was based simply upon constantly striving to improve the mix within a comfortable simplified framework.

"It's brilliant. I can go wherever I need to go, hire a VENUE board, load up my mix and I don't need any external gear as everything I need is on board, and away I go," Michael said. "Therefore each night the mix is constantly improving as I add more and more to the sound within Robert's (Smith) parameters, smoothing and massaging the sound."

Michael said The Cure have 77 rehearsed songs for the tour, which they can call upon on any given night, spanning their entire career from 10:15 Saturday Night right through to modern releases such as alt.end. With such a diverse range of material incorporating elements of three vastly different musical decades, Michael used the VENUE system in attempt to try to emulate the tonal qualities of their recordings.



The Cure @ Rod Laver Arena Aug 12

"I try and match the tonal qualities of recordings, particularly the early ones, as I first heard them on my stereo, as that's what the crowd wants," Michael said. "With the onboard effects, scene recall and using pro tools (Digidesign® Pro Tools™) as a guide I was able to achieve this, and more."

Michael spent two weeks on pre-production with The Cure in a film studio in London working through the show. Each day Cure frontman Robert Smith wrote up a set list with information regarding beats per minute (bpms), instrumentation and general pointers and highlights he thought was important in each song.



Michael Brennan FOH

"You need to figure out what is driving the song, whether it be the bass, digital drums, guitar melodies or vocal melodies," Michael said. "Once this feature is identified you need to then underline this with a good quality mix so the main hooks can be heard."

The band would then work through the material with Michael, constantly tweaking the sounds until they were happy. Michael said once a song or element of a song was completed the settings were stored as a scene to be recalled later, and they moved onto the next song.

The VENUE is so versatile as you can change anything at any given time with a scene recall," Michael said. "By the time the tour started we had 80-90% of all the mixes down."

Michael said Robert is heavily involved in the production process at all levels, is very professional and has a great set of ears. Monitor engineer for the tour Rob Elliott confirms this.

"Robert is very hand on and has great ears," Rob said. "He sometimes comes over to the monitoring board and adjusts the EQ on his vocals during sound check."

Another feature important for Michael was the seamless integration with Digidesign® Pro Tools™. While in pre-production, Michael would record everything into Pro Tools™ for Robert to listen to. Michael said this was an invaluable tool to help Robert and himself tweak and attain the sounds they were after.

"We got sound up on the board and recorded straight into Pro Tools," Michael said. "I would tweak things on my laptop later, or in front of Robert there and then so he could hear it. We would then arrive at a sound Robert was happy with and we would create the scenes."

Pro Tools™ is also used at each live gig. Michael said he records the FOH mix of each show in Pro Tools™ every night then hands a CD of the show to Robert each night to listen to and they discuss possible improvements.

Michael said the comprehensive range of plug in effects available on the VENUE was very helpful in running such a big show. For example, Michael set up 4 bass lines and ran Joe Meek plug in compressors across all 4 lines.

"I found the compressors available on board sound fantastic," Michael said. "I've tried a lot of external compressors while on tour and they all do nice things but there is no point as I get everything I need on board."

Spotted by Robert while mixing a Mogwai gig six months ago, Michael has come along way with the band in a relatively short time with the VENUE system.