

Sound reinforcement

Conchords Tour Takes Flight

by Clive Young

NEW YORK, NY—Bret McKenzie and Jemaine Clement, better known as Flight of the Conchords, have had a good few months. They recorded their second album for Sub Pop, due out in September; the second season of their HBO series was nominated for six Emmy awards, including Outstanding Comedy Series; and they spent the spring touring the U.S., playing 4,000-8,000 seat venues—not bad for a band that refers to itself as “New Zealand’s fourth most popular folk parody duo.”

That billing is a bit disingenuous, of course; for starters, their songs are just as likely to send up disco, ‘70s R&B or present-day hip-hop. Then there’s the fact they have more than two people on stage when touring, since they’re backed by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (i.e., multi-instrumentalist Nigel Collins).

The spring tour used local PAs each day, but carried an FOH setup and complete monitor system supplied by Clair (Lititz, PA). Keeping track of the 24 inputs coming from the stage was FOH engineer Ryan

Pickett, who mixed daily on a Midas. “I had the choice of picking a small analog desk or a small digital desk; I prefer the sound of analog, so the closest thing I could get to a Heritage 3000 was the Midas Sienna that we’re using—which is really a monitor desk. On the other hand, even though it’s a small desk, I’m beefing up the front end with Summit DCL-200 compressors and I brought out a little API Lunchbox to beef up the signal path for both Jemaine and Bret.”

Pickett found that using a variety of PAs clarified for him what he now expects from a system. “I’ll have a Nexo one day, a JBL VerTec the next, an Adamson the day after that, but I’m used to most of the rigs to begin with,” said Pickett. “I’ve realized that I like bigger boxes no matter what the application is. We were in Chicago using an EV rig that had 15-inch drivers in it; most people would say that’s too much for a acoustic folk duo, but I say they don’t know what they’re talking about. A big part of the whole diction factor is just how in-your-face can you get the vocals—and a

small box with small drivers and a very short throw is just not going to do it. I never touched the amp, nothing got heated; I ran everything clean and loud, and that’s what produces the best diction, in my opinion.”

Diction is a crucial ingredient of a Conchords show—since they’re a comedy act, hearing the lyrics is imperative; throw tricky New Zealand accents and the need for au-

ral legibility becomes even more pronounced (so to speak). As a result, miking on the tour was a big concern—and most of it was handled with Shure gear. Vocals were captured with Beta 58s, but the main go-to mics were 40 numbers up: “We use Beta 98s on all applications,” said Pickett. “They’ve got a toy steel drum with a 98 on it, and that works real well with good rejection. We’ve put the 98 in between the two bongos, and we mount a little 98 on the inside of the bridge of the cello, along with a direct line with that.”

A Sennheiser MD 421 was used capture a variety of instruments like a shaker

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