

Insight From Some Of Canada's Revered Remote Recorders

From major musical performances through to live sporting events and just about anything in between, capturing the aural excitement of a live event is as vital to achieving an in-the-moment broadcast experience as that of its visual counterpart.

Between the focal action on the stage, podium, field, or floor through to the cheers and jeers of a capacity crowd, the holler of a hot dog pusher, or the impact of a ball hitting a backboard, it takes top-tier technology and, even more importantly, an experienced engineer to properly set up for, capture, and mix the audio that will reproduce a live event for audiences to experience (or re-experience) themselves. Compounding the complexities of the capture is the fact that, in live recording, there are no second takes.

Understanding the necessity of that know-how, many television and radio broadcasters, record labels, filmmakers, and event planners around the world have relied on Canadian remote recorders and broadcast trucks to deliver a premium sound product, and over their decades of combined experience, those specialists have delivered time and time again. But while their reputations and the quality of their product have risen steadily over the years, that's one of the few consistencies this industry can count on.

Fully-Loaded

"Experience, quality, and dependability," quips Guillaume Benge of Montreal's Le Studio Mobile about the specialized services he and his rolling contemporaries can offer potential clients. "Remote recording is what we do. Our systems are doubled for redundancy and

every piece of equipment in the line, from microphone to recorder, is chosen for its reliability and sound quality."

One of the key advantages to having a truck onsite is that they offer a familiar, consistent, and isolated listening environment for the engineer to make educated and effective mix decisions. According to Wayne Hawthorne of Ottawa's Click Track Audio, "Even if the job at hand is only to record tracks, the smallest issues can be heard and fixed before the recording begins, saving significant costs in the post-production stage of the project." At times, simply moving a mic at the source can save hours of work later, though as Hawthorne attests, "The change can't be made if you can't hear the necessity."

With an increasing number of events being broadcast live in 5.1 surround, that dedicated listening environment is even more attractive. The LiveWire Remote Recorders truck, a Toronto-based mobile headed by Doug McClement, for example, had its control room designed by well-known acoustics firm Pilchner-Schoustal, resulting in a reputedly accurate mobile mixing space for live-to-air events.

As Benge touched on, another of the major selling points for a remote recorder is and has

In an effort to provide current and prospective students an opportunity for a head start in the mobile broadcasting industry, Toronto's Humber College has invested in a mobile broadcasting truck to offer intuitive, portable technology for mixing audio for broadcast.

Students interested in the industry can now enroll in a 2-year Technical Broadcasting Videography program through the school. Every aspect of broadcast is covered in the coursework, from traveling to events and setting up live feeds to mixing and distributing the media.

"We saw a great opportunity to offer our students a program specifically designed for the mobile aspect of broadcasting, as it is a craft in high demand around the world," says Michael Wright, Broadcast Manager with Humber College. "The Humber College School of Media Studies' HD mobile is a stepping stone for covering media, sporting, and school events on campus and around Canada. The students are impressed when they walk into the broadcast truck and see how much we've invested in their education."

www.humber.ca

Mobile Broadcast Studio Goes Live At Humber

always been the peace of mind provided by built-in redundancies. As McClement offers in jest: "As the late Roger Nichols (Steely Dan's engineer) once said: 'Nobody who was wearing a belt and suspenders ever had their pants fall down!' These redundancies mean the client is covered should any problems arise. Shares McClement: "Reliability trumps everything; you need a Jeep, not a Mercedes. The client won't care that you used an amazing tube mic on the lead vocal if the recorder crashes."

Even with their more attractive offerings stripped away, Canada's remote trucks still boast quality basic components with more versatility than most alternative options. Says Danny Greenspoon of Toronto's The Audio Truck: "We still offer a higher-quality signal path, better microphone selection, and, more importantly still, better microphone placement," alluding to Hawthorne's point on how experience comes into play with capturing sources.

And while increasingly accessible technology (in terms of both diminished complexity and cost) has lured many potential clients away from the remote option, some advances have aided their cause by simplifying, improving, or reducing the cost of any part of the recording process.

For Greenspoon, the availability of fibre optic transmission has been "incredible" for his business, allowing The Audio Truck to send as many as 256 channels of audio, video, or other data over long distances using a single cable with no signal degradation. "This has been a real game changer," he attests. "You can listen to someone speak into a microphone kilometers away, and have it sound as if they're speaking right into your ear."

Bengle adds that the advent of digital consoles has greatly benefitted his operations, recalling the first time Le Studio Mobile did the JUNO Awards with a digital desk: "Engineers could at last record each performance pre-EQ and compression, and tweak the mix after the performers' rehearsal. What a difference!"

On that note, McClement adds: "Total recall of all parameters has been a significant improvement, especially on multi-performer shows like the MMVAs and the JUNOs." Where he used to have to physically write out hundreds of EQ, volume, and effects settings and make changes manually during commercial breaks, now, "the entire console resets in 90 seconds at the touch of a button."

Agreeing wholeheartedly with Greenspoon's praise of fibre, Hawthorne adds that MADI has "nicely matured" over the years, and that Dante is another platform worth "keeping an eye on." He continues: "Both (MADI and Dante) may allow more flexibility in my infrastructure as I move forward." He also mentions Avid's recent upgrades to ProTools as being attractive to his operations as he adds "even more redundancy and increased channel counts" to his current path.

Considering the inherent costs of

infrastructure upgrades, which extend well beyond financial expenditures, Hawthorne says that any equipment changes need to provide some form of return on investment, be it "financial, an increase of audio quality, or an increase in the truck's onsite efficiency." For him, fringe equipment is swapped out as needed, with the core equipment generally existing on a four to five-year cycle. Says Bengle: "It's a never-ending process and we keep improving."



Handing Over The Keys

The mobile recording business, like its ground-rooted counterpart, has undergone significant shifts over the last 10-15 years – both those outside of the industry and, subsequently, those made within it to adapt. Traditionally, mobile recording solutions were sought after to both capture multitrack audio for later mixes and to mix a live-to-air broadcast feed in real-time; however, of late, the latter has become the primary source of business in Canada and elsewhere.

"The most frequent use of the mobile is now for bigger broadcast situations where a quality live mix is required," shares Greenspoon. And though some longstanding income sources for remote recorders have been on the decline, new ones have appeared in their wake, including live webcasts and cinecasts. This past summer, for example, LiveWire recorded Spanish tenor Plácido Domingo with a 70-piece orchestra that was broadcast worldwide via HDMI in 5.1 surround on Facebook. "The next day, I saw feedback from viewers in Austria and Italy commenting on how good it sounded," says McClement proudly. "I see concerts broadcast on social media platforms, and performances beamed live into cinemas and IMAX theatres being an area of growth for mobile recording over the next few years."

Hawthorne adds that, with the public so used to hearing cell phone audio and bad board feeds, many clients are realizing that using a mobile for web-based content gives them a leg-up in having their production "cut through the noise."

"The recession has caused budgets to shrink, meaning annual shows we've been doing for years are trying to provide the same level of quality on 15 per cent less money," reveals McClement. "Everyone has had to sharpen their pencils a bit to provide professional service when the margins are shrinking." And like some of his peers, McClement has adapted to the paradigm shift by employing a portable dual 48-track system to do jobs when the budget is too small to justify bringing the fully-loaded, treated, and mix-ready truck.

In light of decreasing budgets and the increase of low-cost technology, many potential truck clients have been settling for less-costly solutions and, subsequently, less-desirable results. One of the most

common misconceptions with which Bengle is usually faced is "that many people believe that putting gear in a Winnebago or dressing room is the same as using a remote recording studio." Even worse, he notes, is that some are plugging a PC into the FOH console to record for a TV show or DVD. "What we offer is a service," he adds, "not just gear in a truck."

The question of "Why do I need a mobile?" is one with which every truck in the industry is more than familiar. "Unfortunately, I've seen budget-constrained broadcasters use this kind of thinking on events that definitely should have used a mobile," shares Hawthorne, though on the positive side, he notes: "When potential clients see that a mobile and its crew can deliver a superior end product with significantly less effort on their part, they are more apt to consider the mobile option."

Hawthorne adds the belief that "the cost of a mobile is prohibitive" and that he and his peers "only provide recording services" to the list of misconceptions he faces. Addressing the former, he shares: "One must realize the value that a mobile service adds. I've had productions claim the mobile cost is prohibitive, only to then go and rent trailers, snakes, consoles, etc. to 'build' an on-location production space. By the time cost, labour, and stress is tallied, it has exceeded the cost of the mobile," and usually doesn't come with any redundancy, meaning one failure could render all of that work useless. As for the latter concern, he lists services like live web mixing, live-to-air mixing, post-production, conference recording, music production, and even some video capture as services available from his outfit and others.

Providing such a niche service, education is paramount to the success of remote recorders. Says Hawthorne: "There is a continuing education of the client that I engage in to hopefully show them the value addition that a mobile and its staff can bring to an event." But it can be a trying venture.

"It's tough to convince people that it's worth it to spend more money for reliability and quality," offers McClement. "I tell my clients that LiveWire won't be the cheapest quote they'll get for a particular job, but I guarantee they'll end up with a show that can be broadcast on national television, comparable to anything they'd see on network TV anywhere in the world."



Down The Road

With Toronto's Humber College recently adding a mobile broadcast truck to the assets of its Technical Broadcasting department, some of Canada's finest offer candid advice to their prospective future employees and peers. "Well-trained is better than not," offers Greenspoon as encouragement to those in the program or others like it. "There are tons of talented people who have yet to make their mark in the industry. It's important to give them the tools with which to learn. That

Guillaume Bengle Le Studio Mobile



Le Studio Mobile's Guillaume Bengle

Based Out Of: Montreal
In Business Since: 1979
(new truck built in 2008)

Contains:

- Yamaha DM2000 digital console (x2)
- 192 channels
- 144 microphone inputs
- 5 48-track recorders (TASCAM X-48s, Nuendo system)
- Klein + Hummel/Neumann 5.1 system
- TC 6000 reverb

Recent Projects:

- 2011 JUNO Awards
- Paul McCartney PPVs from Quebec City & Halifax
- 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games



said, it's a tough industry, and there are many people vying for fewer and fewer jobs. Given equal talent, a good attitude will always win."

Bengle explains that he gets many job inquiries, some from very interesting candidates, but Le Studio Mobile is after experienced engineers and stage assistants, so some practical on-the-job experience either in the studio or onstage would be wise to accumulate before attempting to break into the mobile market. McClement adds that while there are only a select few making a living by operating a truck full-time, "it could be an additional source of income for a studio – especially one outside the larger cities already serviced by established remote trucks."

Hawthorne offers several other helpful tidbits – to prepare not only for what you expect to occur, but to prepare for what you don't; to take care of yourself and your body; and to work hard on developing your ear through as much critical listening as possible. "My goal is to not only put each person listening right there in my seat, but to feel the emotion of a moment the way I feel it right then," he shares. "If those students can bring a genuine love to their broadcasts, whether it be sports, music, or entertainment in general, it will show, and they'll do well."

For now, these four engineers plan to keep truckin', trying to keep a mile ahead of the industry's constant shifts. To do that,

Doug McClement LiveWire Remote Recorders



Doug McClement of LiveWire Remote Recorders.

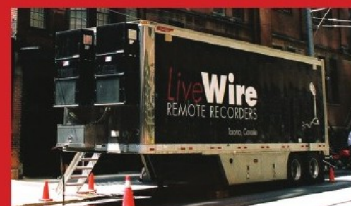
Based Out Of: Toronto
In Business Since: 1994
(1974 as Comfort Sound)

Contains:

- SSL C200 96-input digital console
- Pro Tools HD 96-track system
- TASCAM X-48 (x2)
- Genelec 1031A 5.1 monitors

Recent Projects:

- 2011 JUNO Awards (Gemini Award for Best Sound)
- 2011 MuchMusic Video Awards
- 2011 Grey Cup Halftime Show



Danny Greenspoon The Audio Truck Inc.



Danny Greenspoon in The Audio Truck control room.

Based Out Of: Toronto
In Business Since: 1996

Contains:

- Yamaha DM2000 digital console (x2)
- Pro Tools HD3 Accel recording system (main)
- TASCAM X-48 Hard Disk recording system (redundant backup)
- Optocore fibre optic snake & matrix
- Genelec 1030A nearfields
- SOTA (State Of The Art) 250 soffit mounted main monitors

Recent Projects:

- Live recordings for JAZZ FM 91 (Al Jarreau, Randy Brecker, Dick Hymen)
- 2011 Heavy TO festival (Megadeth, Anthrax, Slayer)
- 2011 Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards



they'll call not only on their own personal experiences, but also their collective ones. "We often work together on large shows that require more than one mobile, and we're always referring gigs to each other when booked," offers McClement, "so although we are competitors, there is a healthy respect among the remote audio truck crews – sort of a brothers-in-arms attitude. Guillaume, Wayne, Danny, and I are often on the phone with each other, solving problems, tracking down gear, comparing notes on venues..."

It's all in an effort to secure and strengthen their arm of the industry, and any other could benefit from that kind of professional camaraderie. It's especially important to this one, though, for as

Greenspoon says in summary: "The thing about live recording is... stuff happens. We develop a huge bag of tricks through previous challenges so that, when stuff happens, we can fix it."

After all, in this business, there is no second take.



Andrew King
is the Editor of
Professional Sound.



Wayne Hawthorne Click Track Audio Inc.



Wayne Hawthorne in the Click Track Audio truck.

Based Out Of: Ottawa
In Business Since: 2005
(informally since 2001)

Contains:

- Yamaha DM2000 digital console (x2)
- TASCAM X-48 recorders (x2)
- Network Sound Mamba digital snakes (x2)
- Yamaha AD8HR 8-channel preamps (x10)
- Mackie HR824 nearfields (x2)/HR626 centre monitor
- Genelec 6010 surround monitors (x2)

Recent Projects:

- 2011 Canada Day National Broadcast (CBC)
- CANO – Le Dernier Gros Show (TFO)
- Sirius Satellite Radio broadcasts (Billy Talent, Bedouin Soundclash)

