

FAC251

HAVING LEARNED HOW NOT TO RUN A CLUB, PETER HOOK HAS REVIVED THE OLD FACTORY RECORDS BUILDING WITH PARTNER AARON MELLOR TO BREED NEW TALENT AT A NEW LIVE VENUE...



When New Order and Joy Division bassist Peter Hook and nightclub entrepreneur Aaron Mellor, MD of Tokyo Industries, announced they were planning to launch a new live music venue in the old Factory Records building, the rumours whipped up a media storm that reached as far as *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone* magazine in the US.

Nearly 30 years on, the Hacienda, the club that spawned the acid house and rave culture in Manchester, is a legend that lives on. The associations with the iconic club are blatant — the new venue has even been designed by original Hacienda architect Ben Kelly (pictured above with Mellor and Hook) — but FAC251 The Factory, as it has been so named, is no rehash of the Hacienda.

There are no whistle-blowing dance heads in sight, nor dodgy door staff, but instead FAC251 is a 21st century live music and rock'n'roll venue that aims to champion new talent and recreate

the music community which surrounded the original Factory project. Live bands, indie and dance influences will feature across three floors, and the sound system they'll be played through is Funktion-One Resolution 5.

Aaron Mellor, who runs 15 venues across the UK including the award-winning Digital in Newcastle and Brighton, and the Tokyo branded venues, is a long-time Factory Records aficionado and friend of the family, having begun his club career on the Hacienda dancefloor and later DJ-ing at Stonelove at The Hacienda in the mid-'90s. When the venue became available, he knew that Hooky, previously a director of FAC 51 The Hacienda, would be the ideal partner.

The ground floor now forms the main live space of the club, housed in the old vinyl distribution area of Factory's offices, in a time when bands toured to sell records, nowadays tour income far outweighs that of record sales for bands. The first floor, the label's former accounts and promotions office space, has become a separate 'Neon' dancefloor, with the feel of a VIP section, and fittings to match. The DJ is cantilevered and plays from above the venue's reception area. The top floor, the third FAC251 environment, is 'The Boardroom', unchanged from its original minimal design, just lacking Wilson's famed £30K table.

The Audio Group, a rental and sales company that has offices in Glasgow and Cheshire, has worked with Mellor for around 12 years, spec'ing and installing clubs under the Tokyo Industries umbrella, including Digital in Brighton and Newcastle.

FUNKTION-ONE GOES LIVE

Company partners Nadar Shahzad and Paul Adamson sat down with Mellor to discuss which sound system should be employed. Shahzad explained: "Aaron has a long-standing preference for Funktion-One, which he has in Digital."

Commented Funktion-One's Tony Andrews: "We're always intent on getting the best result for the people who listen to our systems. You get promoters who will collaborate and co-operate with you, as well as those that really aren't bothered; Aaron is one of those who is committed to getting it right."

"In terms of the audio that has been installed, it's bang on the money, right down to the Midas Verona 480 console. Midas make proper audio kit and in my opinion it's a much better way to go than an all singing, all dancing digital set up."

The old Factory Records building has been home to other music projects in the past, namely The Paradise Factory in the mid-'90s and more recently The Warehouse Project's temporary club Paradise, but ultimately the venue was originally designed to be offices, and has historically been challenging, sound-wise.

Explained Shahzad: "It's a very difficult building for audio due to the shape of the rooms and there are noise breakout issues with the neighbours, so it was a major issue trying to keep the noise contained and we had to ensure we didn't get too much spill on the bass. The low ceilings don't help when you're trying to do live bands either."



Paradise Factory.

"I tuned the system, monitored the fitting, offered improvements and made sure it was done right for the opening nights. They had The Whip playing on the Saturday and I'm their FOH engineer so it all tied in really. The Whip thought it was great."

In the Live room, there are four Res 5s and two F-221 double 21" bass enclosures each side of the stage, and six Turbosound NuQ-15 stage monitors. Said Shahzat: "The FOH console is an analogue Midas Verona 480, which we recommended because a lot of the incoming touring engineers will be comfortable with it."

Audio Group also provided Sennheiser mics and Shure SM58s and SM57s, as well as a Res 1 monitor system for the DJ. Pioneer supplied CDJ-100s and a DJM-800 mixer for each floor.

The sound system in the second room consists of two Res 4s, two F88s and two F-121 bass bins, whilst The Boardroom has four Res 1s and two F-121 bass bins. "Each floor has the new Funktion-One XO4 controller powered by MC2 amps, with XTA crossovers," said Shahzat. "The EQs are a lot better on the XO4 and it has four inputs as opposed to the other one which has two, so you can plug in the DJ mixer and a live mixer and flick between the two."

An additional Allen & Heath MixWizard WZ3 14:4:2 mixer is on hand in The Boardroom for the occasional acoustic/live set.

As The Audio Group predominantly handles dance club installations, long-term Funktion-One ensorcee Audile was brought in on a consultancy basis to oversee the installation of the system in the Live room and assist the venue's in-house sound engineer Steve Jones (previously with Twisted Wheel and Mellor's club The Castle in Oldham; pictured above at the Midas Verona), with the opening nights.

Audile's project manager Stev said: "We worked at the venue when it was Paradise under Warehouse Project and Paradise Factory originally. It's the venue that Audile came from because Rob and Bob used to be the in-house techs there when it was

BESPOKE LIGHTING

Lighting in the venue is minimal, to maintain a clubby, warehouse vibe. Aaron Mellor knew exactly what he wanted in terms of fixtures, specifying six Martin MAC Krypton 250s above the dancefloor and 18 LED PAR cans either side of the stage, along with two 1500W strobes in the Live room, controlled by an Avolites Tiger consoles for live shows and Martin LightJockey for DJ control.

Said Shahzat: "There was no trussing involved because the ceilings were so low. We had to cut into the ceiling and attach them to the actual structure of the building, which was quite a challenge."

In-house LD Colin Campbell, who has freelanced for four years working for Castle, Sunshine Underground and Manchester Academy, commented: "Aaron has a good eye for design so he always knows what he wants. For bands we'll put together a live show package and do something different for each one, so, for example, we've got Twisted Wheel coming in and I've arranged a massive sub hire package with moving lights, which I'll put on the floor to uplight the show."

The Second floor features a custom neon lighting raft supplied by LDi under Mellor's specification, whilst the Boardroom has 20 of Chauvet's MiN Spot moving LED fixtures, from Audio Group, controlled by a Martin Professional replay unit.

FAC251 launched on February 5 with a one-off performance from Peter Hook's Manchester supergroup The Light, featuring Mani (Stone Roses), Rowetta (Happy Mondays), Howard Marks and other special guests. Acts that have topped the bill so far have included White Lies, Kid British, Hudson Mohawke and Twisted Wheel.

www.theaudiogroup.co.uk
www.factorymanchester.com