



Korea's Clubland

Seoul's nightclub scene continues to thrive with DJs opening super-clubs and smaller venues alike. **Barney Jameson** visits the boldest of them all, Octagon

FEW TERRITORIES IN ASIA CAN compete with the passion that is currently fuelling the rise of South Korea's nightclub industry. Not so long ago, after-hours entertainment in Seoul was much the same as it had been for years – bars and small clubs could be found throughout the city alongside places to sing karaoke and rooms to drink whisky. Now, everything is changing.

DJs with a devotion to dance music in all of its forms are asserting themselves, new world-standard venues, large and small, are opening, and the youths of the city are eager to spend their nights and their money in the company of some of the best visiting artists the world has to offer. Not for nothing are club owners beginning to talk in terms of leading all of Asia – the era of the Korean super-club is arriving, and one name is leading its charge: Octagon.

Indeed, Octagon – named for the octagonal theme that runs throughout the venue – is perhaps the most symbolic example yet of the old guard changing for the new. The nightclub is located beneath the Hilltop Hotel, in the Nonhyeon-dong ward of Gangnam-gu, occupying a vast space that was once filled with a maze of traditional karaoke rooms. But now the old rooms have been

ripped out and replaced with a huge central dance-floor ringed by multiple bars and VIP areas, private rooms and even a swimming pool. All of this is served by a state-of-the-art audio, video and lighting installation. It combines to make a venue that could distinguish itself in any city in the world.

Yet perhaps the most remarkable thing about the November 2011 opening of Octagon was that it followed so close behind the launch of another Seoul super-club, Ellui. Last year, *Pro Audio Asia* described that venue as 'Korea's King of Clubs', and for months that it is precisely what it was. The result of one man's vision and commitment, Ellui was unlike any venue before seen in the city, and its mighty Funktion One audio install set a precedent that many have since sought to follow.

Octagon has now arguably taken its crown, but the two venues share much in common, not least the passion of the people who created them. In the case of Octagon, that honour belongs to vice president Byoung-Jun Yoo (better known as DJ BeeJay) and executive director Minho Lee (DJ Mindbender). When on stage and producing music, the two are collectively known as Shut Da Mouth, and they are both famous

'Sound is like life to me and it was maybe 90 per cent of the design process'



As visitors enter Octagon, they are told that 'anything can happen here'



The entrance to the private rooms

faces in Seoul and beyond.

More importantly, they are utterly devoted to bringing the music they play to as wide an audience as possible, with the best audio system available. Perhaps not surprisingly, the system the pair has chosen is coloured purple.

'From the beginning I wanted to use a Funktion One system,' enthuses Minho Lee. 'There were several clubs in Seoul before Octagon that used Funktion One, such as Club Volume and Club Ellui, and the sound was fantastic compared to the other clubs. I kept suggesting Funktion One to the club owners that I worked for in the past but they always said no, it was too expensive. They thought that different loudspeakers sounded the same, they couldn't tell the difference. But you can feel it in your

body and in your ears. Now, everyone is talking about the sound system at Octagon.'

Byoung-Jun Yoo agrees: 'About seven or eight years ago I heard Funktion One for the first time and I was very impressed by it,' he explains. 'Even though the sound is very powerful, it's very clean.'

In recent years, perhaps no other loudspeaker brand has captured the loyalty and imagination of the dance music fraternity to the extent of Funktion One. The small British company founded by Tony Andrews has become famous, not just in the way that other brands are respected and admired within the industry, but in the same manner that Marshall Amplification inspired a generation of rock bands, and the Fender Stratocaster became more than just another electric guitar.

As a result, purple loudspeakers are beginning to dominate nightclubs throughout the world, and Seoul is no exception. But while DJs are devoted to the brand, club owners can sometimes take a little more persuasion. For DJ BeeJay and DJ Mindbender, the road to creating the nightclub they had always dreamed of was long and challenging.

'We've been doing this business for a long time,' explains Mr Lee. 'My partner has been DJing for 17 years. For me it's almost 10 years. We used to work for other clubs but we were just DJs. We came out with the idea that if we presented quality sound and a quality lighting system then we could bring clubbing in Korea to the next level.'

'I have worked in small clubs and big clubs but I have always had an aspiration to use really good equipment in a really good place, a really good venue,' insists Mr Yoo.

'Then I found this place. While I was looking for a location for a really good club, I found this hotel.'

Along with it the partners found Octagon CEO Hun Choi, the man who ultimately gave the DJs the opportunity to create their perfect venue. On the night that *Pro Audio Asia* visits Octagon, Mr Choi is present, watching DJ BeeJay deliver a set. The CEO is evidently proud of what has been achieved, and rightly



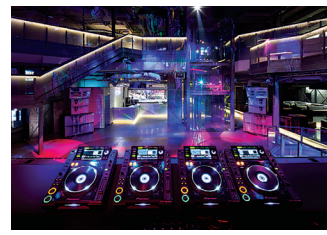
Funktion One dance stacks are positioned at each four corners of the main dance floor



A DiGiCo SD8 is positioned to the side of the main stage

so. The two DJs speak of him with deep respect, talking of his belief in their commitment to sound. 'We decided to invest a lot more on the sound system compared to our competitors,' enthuses Mr Lee. 'Now people have started to realise what a good sound system really is.'

Crucially, the first step in creating that sound system was for the Octagon team to contact Seoul-based Funktion One distributor Soundus, not just to find the ideal loudspeaker solution but to ensure that the acoustics within the new club were



The view from the main DJ position



A mixture of audio, video and lighting creates a special atmosphere within the nightclub



The famous Octagon swimming pool

ready for it.

'After we decided to create the club, the first people we contacted were Soundus,' remembers Mr Yoo. 'Because I am a DJ, sound is like life to me and it was maybe 90 per cent of the design process. One of the important things was that the noise and vibration from the club had to be at an acceptable level to the hotel above, so we poured a lot of budget into ensuring that it was correct. Also with the acoustics, there were some spots where there were a lot of reflections, so Soundus suggested that we should put in some absorbent materials.'

Working on the Octagon project for Soundus was sales manager Horang Baek, and he invested so much of himself in the creation of the club that he now beams with pride when speaking of how closely he worked with the DJs to perfect it. 'Even though Soundus always has the ambition to make a very good club with a Funktion One system, it's not easy if the owner of the club thinks differently,' he reasons. 'But for Octagon, Mr Yoo, Mr Lee, Mr Choi and Soundus were all of the same mind. We all agreed with each other and that made this club possible. They accepted our advice and assistance.'

Nor was Mr Baek the only individual who applied his expertise to the project's realisation. The completed Octagon experience incorporates the talents of the main system designer and Soundus general manager Kyoungmo Kang; assistant designer Ansung Jung; Soundus technical support deputy manager Eunjung Sim, who tuned the system; Masaki Azuma of Funktion One Japan, who provided the electrical wiring design; Jikyoung Kim of Tunework,

SOUNDSPHERE®

Omnidirectional Loudspeakers

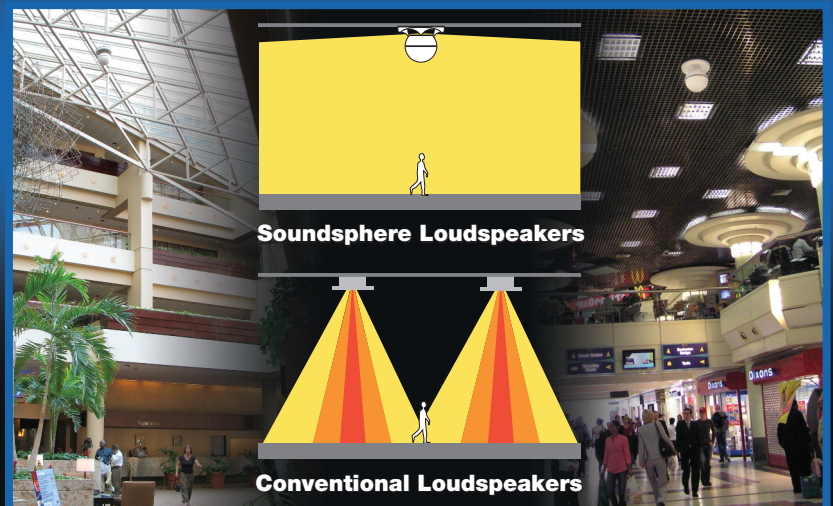
for large, open spaces

- Powerful, full-frequency sound
- Clear, intelligible voice
- More even coverage from fewer speakers vs. conventional speakers

www.soundsphere.com



**Exhibition Halls • Hotels • Airports • Public Buildings
Shopping Malls • Retail Stores • Schools • Train Stations
Sports Halls • Warehouses • Factories • Firehouses**

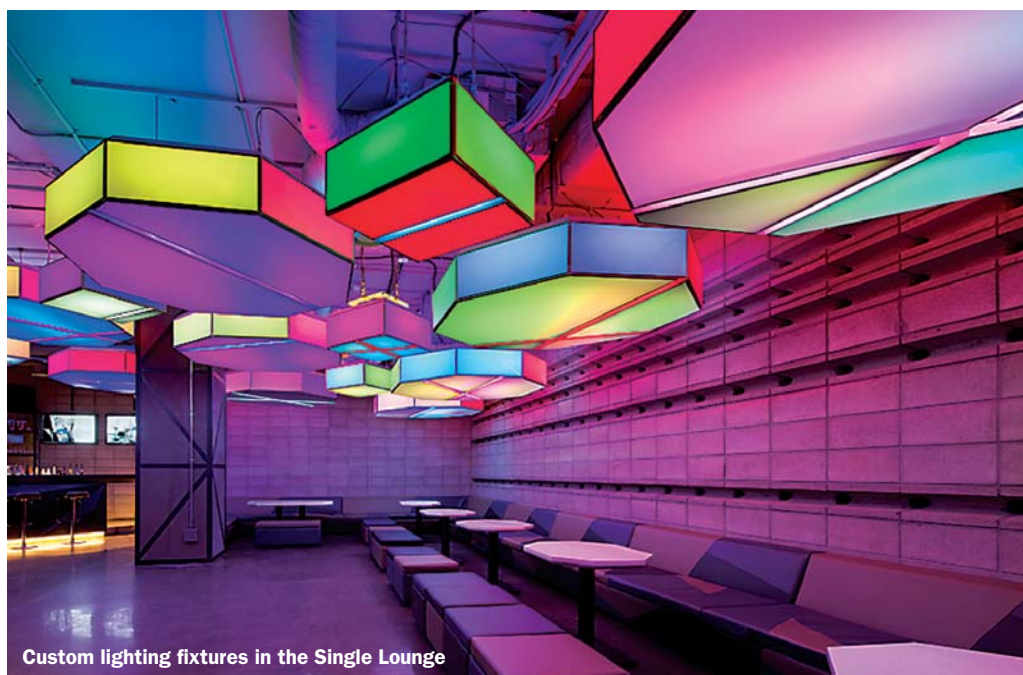


SOUNDSPHERE®
LOUDSPEAKERS



The best sound around™

FEATURES: INSTALLATION



Custom lighting fixtures in the Single Lounge

who worked on room acoustics; and lighting designer James Powderly.

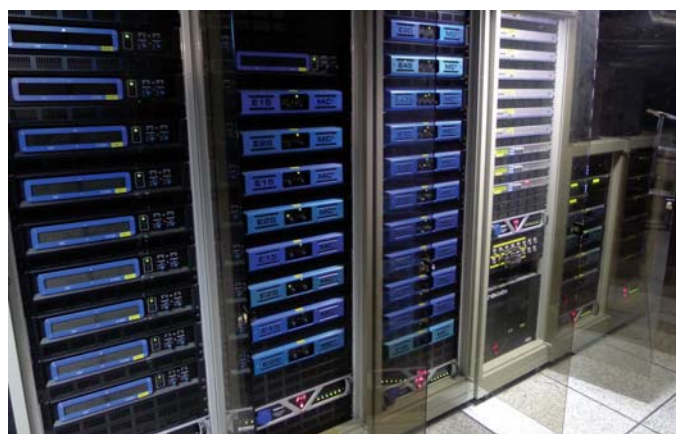
'There was a close partnership between the interior designer, Urbantainer, and Masaki Azuma and Jikyung Kim,' explains Soundus' Chanwoo Kang. 'This level of team work was possible because Octagon had a lot of trust in our work, which made for a smooth relationship.' Mr Baek adds that because of this 'it will be very difficult to create another club like Octagon.'

That much is clear as soon as a visitor enters the venue. The entrance is located to the side of the Hilltop Hotel's foyer, beyond which a short corridor leads to a reception area where a wall has been spray-painted with the declaration 'anything can happen here'. Beyond is a choice of a large staircase leading down to the main dance floor area, a right turn into the upper balcony VIP space, or a left turn into a separate bar and food area named the Single Lounge, which serves as a secondary, restrained dance floor. The décor inside has been designed with multicoloured octagonal lighting fixtures, created by James Powderly, which complement the futurist white furniture.

Looming over the space is a large DJ position flanked by two Funktion One Resolution 1.5 enclosures per side, mounted on a stack of three F121 subwoofers per side. Monitoring within the DJ booth is taken care of with two RM18 speakers. Providing power is a wealth of MC² amplification, comprising three E15 amps, three E45s and two E90s. Two XO-4A processors provide loudspeaker management, whilst a DiGiCo SD11 console is carefully hidden behind the booth, perched atop the rack.

Turning right into the VIP area, meanwhile, reveals a large balcony served by its own bar and overlooking the main dance floor. The area runs around the left side of the club with seating areas, all served by a delayed

distributed system mixing Funktion One RM18 full-range loudspeakers with K-Array enclosures for additional fill. A total of eight RM18 cabinets are ceiling mounted throughout the space, each covering its own zone, while the bar area is pushed harder with the combination of an RM18 and an F118 Mk2 subwoofer. Following the area around to the far right hand side of the club reveals an additional K-Array KR400S.



Inside the rack room

The augmentation of the RM18 system is, explains Mr Kang, a result of the sheer power being delivered onto the dance floor below. 'On the main floor they have a big system and the low-end is very loud,' he reasons. 'When we originally installed the system we only had the RM18s up on the balcony and people believed that the bass was lacking in comparison to below. Actually the RM18 cabinets are more than enough but we added more subwoofers to create more energy up here.'

While the VIP balcony offers stunning views over the club, an extra degree of privacy is available to those who can afford it with the offer of six private rooms, arrayed along the venue's right hand side. Each is equipped with a pair of F101 enclosures powered by MC² T1000 amplifiers, and patrons can choose to either listen to the performing DJs or



VIP seating on the balcony



Each private room boasts its own iPod dock with Symetrix DSP

their own choice of music via a Teac iPod dock and Symetrix 8x8 DSP controlled by ARC-K1 wall panels. A seventh VIP lounge has also been constructed in the Single Lounge – the most expensive room in the club.

VIP guests wanting to visit the main dance floor area can do so via an especially fitted elevator that carries customers into the midst of the downstairs bar. Awaiting them are eight distributed Funktion One Resolution 1.5TT delays plus four F101s firing across the bar, all merely acting in support of the system that all of Seoul's clubbers are talking about – four Funktion One DS4 Dance Stacks positioned at each corner of the square dance floor. Each stack is as powerful as it is imposing, comprising two stacked F221 subs, mounted with two DS15 bass horns and topped with a single DS210 mid-high enclosure. The design is, says Minhoo Lee, 'everything I wanted it to be. I love the sound and how easy it is to maintain the system – everything.'

To the side of the dance floor is the notorious swimming pool, where bikini-clad dancers provide something of a distraction. But it is hard to imagine how the attention of clubbers could be torn away from the huge stage where DJs perform

beneath an enormous, spectacular video wall. Even this can be folded back to the sides, revealing a second, upper-stage upon which dancers sometimes perform, with five K-Array KF12s providing monitoring.

The DJs themselves, meanwhile, are hardly lacking for power as they perform, with the combination of Resolution 3 enclosures and F121 subwoofers positioned to their left and right for monitoring. Finally, a DiGiCo SD8 digital console has been installed to the side of the DJ platform, while power for the loudspeaker system is delivered from an imposing rack room in which 53 MC² amplifiers have been installed, comprising a mixture of E15, E45 and E90 units.

'We have set a new standard – this has never happened before in Korea,' enthuses Mr Lee as he reflects on the completed venue. Beyond the artist's room in which he is speaking to *Pro Audio Asia*, the nightclub is steadily beginning to fill as the Funktion One Dance Stacks lure Seoul's clubbers onto the dance floor for another busy night.

'We just wanted to contribute to the next level of electronic dance music in Korea,' he adds, before Mr Yoo concludes: 'Opening a club is just the start – we have to maintain what we have created and we still have a lot to do. We are busy with our dream.'

www.funktion-one.com

www.mc2-audio.co.uk

www.soundus.co.kr



Two Resolution 3 enclosures are positioned to the left and right of the DJ for monitoring



A packed Friday night dance floor