

# Bumpin bass for a loving race

Jazzy B and FOH Engineer Brandon Knights specified a mammoth Funktion-One system and an analog mixing setup for Soul II Soul's recent comeback performance at London's Camden Roundhouse. Andrew Low bumped and grinded to bring you this report...

Soul II Soul took London's funky dread movement of the late '80s to another level. Producer, artist and frontman Jazzy B was hugely successful with the *Keep on Moving* album, which sold over two million copies in the US, went triple platinum in the UK and won the group two Grammy Awards.

Over twenty years on, the band got back together this March for a gig at the Camden Roundhouse that featured many of the original members, including renowned crooner Caron Wheeler. And if there is one London musician who is passionate about sound systems, it's Jazzy B. His musical career began in the depths of the reggae and rock steady scene in the late '80s. His group gained mass appeal as a sound system, playing records at house and street parties. As such, Jazzy B and his FOH engineer Brandon Knights know exactly what they want in a PA, and specified a Funktion-One system for the Camden gig, which was supplied by Essex-based rental firm Audio Plus.

Based on an analog-centric FOH setup, the system used at the Roundhouse featured dozens of Funktion-One's Resolution-5 and 4D point-source loudspeakers, and 12 F221A bass bins, complemented by a Midas XL4 and racks of outboard from the likes of Lexicon, TC Electronic, Avalon, DBX and XTA. Monitor engineer, Ben Emisah provided wedge mixes for the band through a combination of Funktion-One's RM18 wedges, Res-2 and 4s.

Brandon Knights has been knocking around the reggae and dub scene for the past 20 years. Starting his career as the owner of a small PA company that provided gear for Glastonbury, WOMAD and the early UK '90's house scene, Knights got his big break when he met up with Albert Griffiths of The Gladiators, who highjacked him for months of stadium shows throughout Europe. Although his original role was the dub man, triggering delays, gunshots and other noises, he soon found that he liked it better behind the desk than on stage. Since then, he has engineered for the likes of Lee 'Scratch' Perry and Groove Armada. It was while working for the latter that he met Jazzy B.

Knights reveals that mixing for Soul II Soul is all about space: "Jazzy's music has the same ambient space as reggae," he explains, "so when you are working with someone like Funktion-One, it's a dream come true because you can hear the transients. With this kind of music, the system really shines because it is not constrained by the compression-driven mid range typical in line array systems."

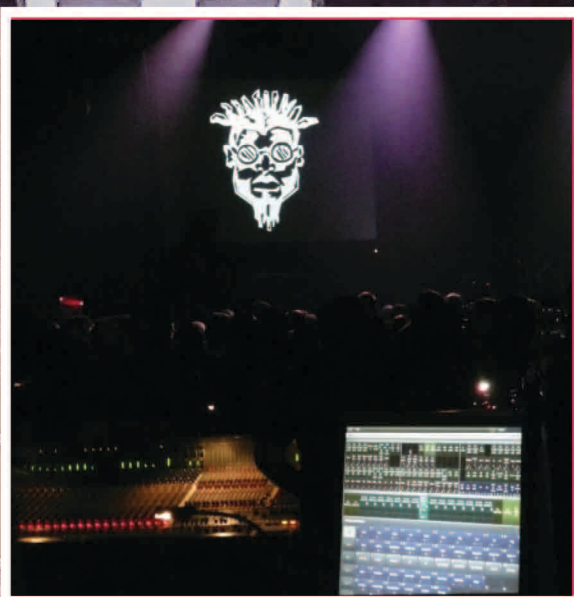


## APPROACHING THE MIX

Soul II Soul's basic roots are in big sound systems, and Knights mixes with that in mind. "I take it from the bass up and always push the system from the kick and LFs. I will always push a system around from the kick and bass to create a foundation," he explains. "Once you understand the system you can put things where you want without having to hard pan anything. The speakers allow the music to breathe and the listener can pick up the transients that are squashed by line arrays; what you put into it is what comes out."

#### LOAD ON THE BINS

After reading the spec for the Roundhouse show, Knights ordered six extra bass bins. "I wanted three more per side and Stefan Imhof from Audio Plus told me there was more room on the truck. I used the extra F221A bass bins to reinforce the idea of making the sound bigger, rather than just louder, because louder just introduces more distortion. After the gig people told me that their ears weren't ringing at all. Loudness is damaging and I try to take care of my ears. I wouldn't want to hurt the crowd either."



#### EFFECTS

Yamaha's E1010 delay unit has been a mainstay in Knights' bag of tricks since his early days as a dub man. Now on his fourth box, he used the analog delay to manipulate various instruments during the gig. "The E1010 lets you catch a signal and play with the sound while its still in the box," he says. "The signal doesn't lose its decay and you can tweak it further and further, unlike digital units that do not sustain as long."

"I also used TC Electronics' M2000 effects processor, Lexicons for reverbs, a Yamaha SPX2000 processor for gunshot effects, and on the congos. I was always changing the patches for reverbs that I flew onto the delays and used TC's D2 tap delay for the longer delays."



#### ANALOG ONLY PLEASE

Knights has used digital boards in the past when working with American indie band Mice Parade, but requests analog boards wherever possible. "I have always insisted on analog desks because I need eight aux sends on every channel to coincide with my rack of effects. I use them to spontaneously fire off effects when I am locked in a groove. You can't do that with a digital board and you can't feed back effects on its own channel, so in my opinion, it takes away all the musicality."

## A HAPPY FACE FROM ALL THE BUMPIN BASS



JAZZY B insisted on a Funktion-One system for Soul II Soul's return to the stage because of the audio character it delivers. "Having a big sound system myself, I know how interesting it can be for both the punters and the artists," he explains. "I have a mix of analog and digital equipment on stage and we are trying to hit a level of sonic purity."

"I always want to get the most natural sound possible during a gig. In the studio you have total control, which is a major issue as a producer because, on stage, you are in other people's hands. That is what makes the real difference in my interest with what is happening at FOH. We spend a lot of time working on the songs in the studio, and the worst thing you can do is go to the cut and fuck it up."

"Knights plays a big role in the live show. It is all about interpreting my thing and having him get it right out front. We are triggering lots of sounds from the original two-inch tapes, and blending the strings in with the bass is an art in itself. The system needs to be able to give us the ability to work with all of those elements, and Funktion-One definitely delivers."

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