

# United Sound for Unite in Worship

By: David Barbour

Careful selection of audio elements leads to high praise at a church event



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TERRY NEUDORF

Unite in Worship is a three-day event held each year in Vancouver and Toronto; this year's Vancouver show was held in the Broadway Church.

Unite in Worship is an annual event, staged each year in both Toronto and Vancouver. It's a three-day get-together that provides instruction and inspiration for people involved in the production of worship services. The program's brief covers a broad range of topics. Workshops at the 2006 conference included "Electronic Percussion in Contemporary Worship," "Creative Programming: Expanding Elements of Worship," "Fresh Ideas for Monitoring and Personal Mixing," and "Worship for 21st-century Kids."

Because one of its goals is to help people produce more technically competent services, Unite in Worship must be a technologically advanced event to begin with. Terry Neudorf, an integrated systems specialist from Western Canada's Genesis Communications Inc., says: "The daytime sessions are held with world-renowned Christian artists and music groups; they're not staged at a full concert level, but they're not far off. There's a showcase concert each night, and that's when we pull out all the stops."

As production manager and front-of-house mixer for Unite in Worship (for which Genesis is a major corporate sponsor), Neudorf knows better than anyone what's involved in creating the sound system. Furthermore, in his other career as sound engineer for many Christian artists, including Brian Doerksen, he has a good understanding of the Christian market. "The point of Unite

in Worship," he says, "is it's an opportunity for people from different churches to get out of the rut they may be stuck in, to see how it can be done differently, to inspire them."

The 2006 West Coast conference was held October 19-21 at the Broadway Church in Vancouver, a 1,800-seat facility; Neudorf brought in an entirely new sound rig for the event. The one exception was the church's console, a Digidesign Venue. As it happens, he says, "At last year's conference, I brought in a Venue to mix on, and, when the church saw what it could do, they bought one for themselves."

Pulling together a conference like this and trying to meet the needs of many musicians is hardly a simple process. Neudorf says planning begins about three months in advance, "and I try to get all my contract riders in six weeks in advance. We have about ten acts at each conference, and they're all of a very high caliber. We had the internationally known and loved Doerksen, currently Canada's number-two selling Christian artist; Starfield, currently Canada's number-one selling band; and Parachute Band, from New Zealand, just to name a few."

Neudorf adds that last year's experience, in the same venue, proved instructive. "Last year was the first year I mixed full-on concerts in there. The back wall around the balcony hits back really hard, even through they've tried to baffle it. My rig was directional, but not quite enough for the space. This year, I wanted to go with a line array; I also wanted, as accurately as possible, to pre-predict its performance. To do this, I used the LASS [prediction software] from SLS Loudspeakers; it was dead accurate. Let me put it to you this way: we put the rig up once, and did not move it at all during the weekend; it did exactly what it was supposed to do."

The loudspeaker system consisted of 16 boxes of SLS RLA2s (LS8800), eight per side, with two Community TLF-218 double 18" subwoofers per side as well. "The balcony is large; it's probably 50 to 55% of the seating," Neudorf says. "Also, it's a wraparound balcony, with the front seats of the auditorium coming down from the slope towards the sides of the stage. The main floor seats around 900. With this arrangement, we did just the left-right hang and it worked great."

Interestingly, Neudorf says he specified no loudspeakers for the under-balcony. That's because he "flew the rig so the top of the trim height was 26', to stay off the back wall of the balcony. According to the LASS software, the sound started to fall off drastically from 6' up. Because I only flew it at 26', the sound image went right under the balcony. Paul Kelly, the event's promoter, sits up front and off to the side; he says he'd never heard one of his concerts sound like that. We didn't use any front



The lighting package for Unite in Worship was supplied by Christie Lites.

fill or anything like that. It was just too easy."

Neudorf says he hadn't used SLS products before this year's conference. "They're not that big yet in Western Canada," he says, adding, "since then, I've specified them into a number of new projects and I'll be looking for them when we go to Europe in May for another Brian Doerksen tour." He adds that the loudspeakers have enjoyed very good word of mouth in the Christian market: Brian Doerksen "was at an Inspiration for Worship concert in Colorado that used SLS gear; his recording engineer/keyboard player said his mouth just hit the floor when he heard them for the first time."

Neudorf is also a big fan of the Digidesign Venue. "It's a wonderful console—easy to get around on, fast, and it sounds great," he says. Best of all, he adds, "I've never had it lock up on me in any event. The plug-ins are also great." He adds, "As this event is a little bit like a festival, you wouldn't think a digital console would be the way to go, but it's a testament to what the Venue can do. It used to be a few years ago that if you were running digital in a festival situation, you were that day's victim. While they're still not as fast as analog, they're certainly getting there."

In working with the Venue, external processing equipment wasn't necessary, although he did make use of a T.C. Electronic M2000 processor, "just because the Venue didn't have a tap delay plug-in. It provided a tap delay,

which was a crucial function when working with so many new and different artists."

"To ensure consistent sound quality from the stage," Neudorf says, "we supplied all the mics. Audio-Technica provided the mainstage package and they were great to work with; they simply said, 'Tell us what you want.' I had an amazing lineup of mics. Audio-Technica has come up with some stunning products. The AE2500 dual element kick drum mic, for example, should come with a warning; it is just completely addicting."

Another crucial element was the Aviom Pro16 personal monitor mixer system, along with one AN16CS control surface hooked up to an A16R 16-channel rack-mount mixer. With this system, the musicians benefited from a quiet stage, allowing each them to hear what he or she was each playing in great detail as they adjusted their personal mixes with their own fingertips.

The use of Aviom is "pretty much standard fare for me nowadays," says Neudorf. "They're just excellent. When you're dealing with bands you don't know intimately, when you don't know all the artists' personal monitor mix preferences, and you just don't have time to learn what they like, Aviom saves your day. With the Aviom system," he says, "you preamp a signal, EQ it to the artist's liking, and then they build their own mixes. It's so terribly quick—I can go in with Brian and his band, working on a system we've never been on before and, once we're all patched in, I can do five stereo in-ear

monitor mixes, two wedge-based mixes, and full FOH soundcheck in less than half an hour! People look at me like, how did you do that? Before Aviom, it took me half an hour just to build a stereo in-ear mix for one of the, shall we say, very detail-driven band members. That's not at all an issue any more."

The advantages of this approach are many, he adds. "With Brian, we travel with our own Aviom system. It makes a difference for the concert promoter, as we don't need a big monitor console with tons of monitor busses and a big rental price tag; we can do it with a Midas Venice, or something of that size. Give me a console with a decent preamp and EQ section, and we're good to go."

In addition, he notes, at Unite in Worship, "probably 50% of this year's artists had never used Aviom before. We were able to get them comfortable with the system minutes before show time. Starfield wanted their in-ears mixed by an engineer, but I know them personally and said, 'You've got to try it.' On their website, they rate this event as one of their top-ten concerts ever."

For Unite in Worship, Neudorf chose a Crest HP-8 32-channel monitor console. "Clean and simple is all we needed. We also had a killer wedge-based monitor system on hand in case any of the bands wanted conventional monitoring," he adds. It consisted of 12 Clair Bros. AM12s on KT DN360 EQs and Clair custom QSC amplifiers. "However, only two bands used them all weekend, and even then they created their mixes via the Aviom personal mixers. Another perfect combination!"

Audio was supplied through Genesis Communications Inc., as part of its corporate sponsorship of the event. Unite in Worship provides clear evidence, if any is needed at this point, that the church market is embracing the latest in audio technologies. It might not be long before this increasingly important constituency drives the development of new products. Stay tuned for what's next. In the meantime, Neudorf will be heading out on tour with Brian Doerksen in May. 📶