

TOOL

OK, LET'S GET THE SNIGGERING OUT OF THE WAY FIRST ... YES THE BAND IS CALLED TOOL AND THE FOH ENGINEER IS CALLED NOBBY. GOT THAT OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM?

Nobby - aka Alan Hopkinson - hails from the UK and has been in the audio business for a few decades. Cutting his teeth on artists such as Joan Armatrading, Nobby has somehow found himself working in the heavier side of music with his other regular client being System of a Down.

"It's completely unfair but it happens!" he laughed. Tool's Australia and New Zealand tour was not part of a

world tour, more a foray down under with a couple of dates in Japan. JPJ Audio supplied the gear and crew including Tristan Johnston as the system tech.

"I've known Tristan for years and he's a great system tech," said Nobby. "I always ask for him as he's great at time aligning and that sort of thing. That's the thing with line arrays, they have to be set up properly. In the old days you could stack boxes and as long as its front was together they



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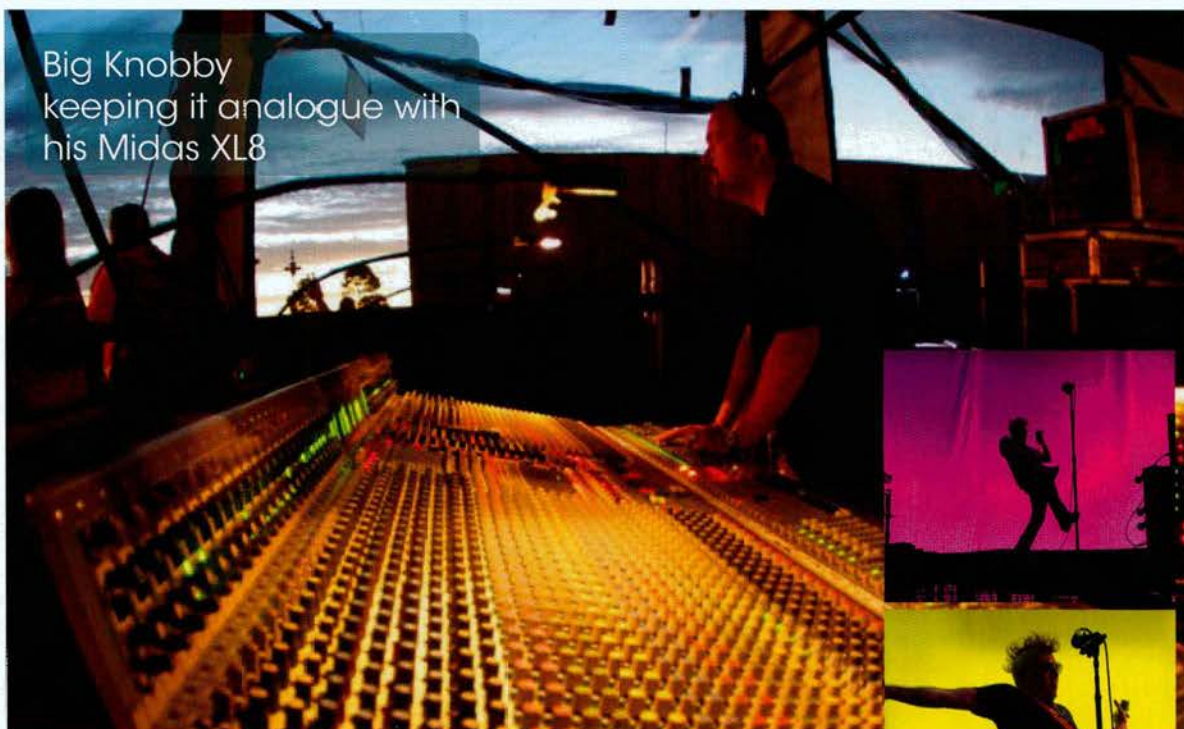
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Big Knobby
keeping it analogue with
his Midas XL8



they were in phase. Tristan is very experienced with all line arrays and is used to dealing with every situation and attitude!”

The line array for this tour was the d&b audiotechnik J-Series, Nobby’s favourite at the moment but as he points out this can easily change as new products come onto the market.

“My theory is that you can never stop looking,” he said. “I remember the first time I used a JBL VerTec system in 2001 with Tool in Australia. Jands supplied the cabinets but used their own sub bins that were amazing. However when I first walked into the entertainment centre and saw these eighteen little boxes in the air, I thought there was no way they were going to do what I needed. But I was absolutely stunned, it was the best sounding VerTec system I have ever heard. From there we have evolved and today I prefer the d&b audiotechnik J-Series although I used a L’Acoustics K1 recently and that was great too. Plus I hear Martin’s new system is insane so you never know what I’ll prefer next month!”

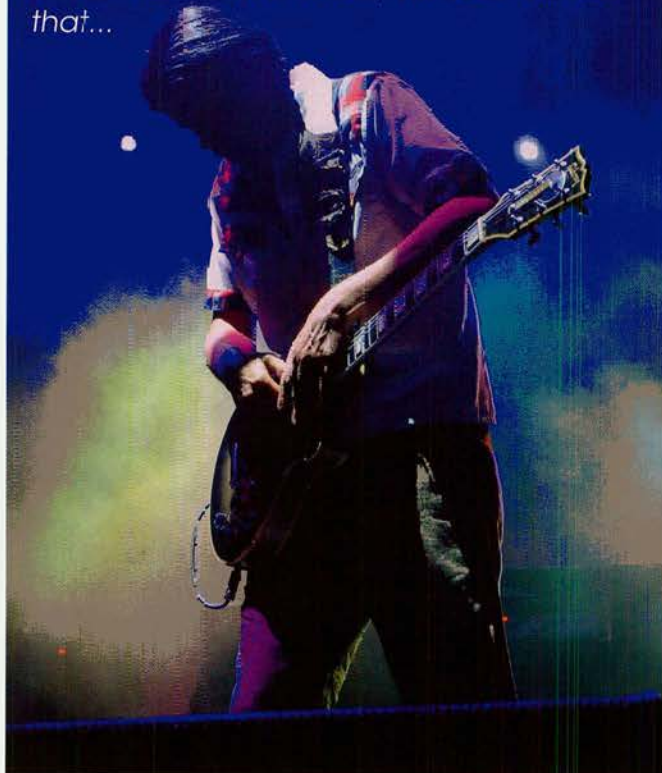
FOH, Nobby was using an analogue Midas XL4 console plus a large list of effects resulting in a FOH layout rarely seen in these digital days.

“We tried using a digital console last year but there were certain areas that just did not sit right,” commented Nobby. “They’re a very percussive band and there’s a lot going on for four people on stage. It’s really important to get the dynamics from the quietest bits to the loudest bits and for some reason, digital just wasn’t right. It was quite frustrating not to be able to succeed with digital.”

As a result Nobby’s FOH set up looks almost archaic with the XL4, Drawmer noise gates, dbx compressor/limiters, an Avalon valve compressor, TC Electronics digital delays, a Klark Teknik graphic equaliser, an Alan Smart compressor, Summit compressors well you get the picture. But it works for the band and that’s what matters. Fortunately the band carry the Midas XL4 console with them so Nobby doesn’t have to dial in his preferences at every gig.



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Does Nobby mix the band loud? He replies that you'd have to ask everyone else.

"The biggest compliment I have received whilst mixing Tool was from a punter who said they could feel their kidneys move but still talk to their mate," he said. "I loved that. It's pumping through you but you can still communicate with the person next to you even though you don't understand how that is possible. There are many different styles of mixing and there is no one correct way."

Tool's last album featured a song called Jambi which utilised a Talk Box created by Bob Heil in 1973, and has been frequently used by musicians such as Peter Frampton, Joe Walsh and Richie Sambora, and is still in use today.

"Bob makes his own microphones (Heil Sound) which work on a very large diaphragm theory and we actually use them on kicks, all the guitars and all the bass lines as well," added Nobby. "They're different - very warm and bigger - plus the large diaphragms also reduce distortion. Added to them are some pretty standard microphones - Shure, AKG, Audio Technica - with a lot of overheads."

Not surprisingly the band prefer to use wedges with only the lead singer using Sennheiser in-ears. Monitor engineer Pasi Hara used a Midas PRO9 digital console.



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