

## News

LIVE SOUND: BESTIVAL

# The festival that's best of all



The Isle of Wight's Bestival was the highlight of this year's festival season. **Andrew Low** schlepps through the mud to bring you this report...

The UK has recently seen a plethora of new festivals held nearly every weekend throughout the summer. While the old hippy spirit of Glastonbury has been replaced with over-crowding and commercialisation, smaller boutique festivals seem the more responsible venue for a positive festival experience. The Isle of Wight's sold-out Bestival festival, hosted by Rob da Bank productions from September 5th to the 7th, willingly hosted 35,000 happy people throughout the weekend.

Although there was plenty of rain and even more mud, a 'marine freak' fancy dress theme, adequate accommodation and ample space for all gave the festival an upbeat feel. Comedians, burlesque acts and a variety of different genres of music graced the many tents and stages of the festival.

Positioned against the backdrop of Robin Hill, the main stage of the festival hosted an unlikely line-up of rain-soaked acts from mainstream singers like Jaime Lidell and Amy Winehouse, to more obscure artists like My Bloody Valentine and The Wedding Present. SSE Audio Group provided the PA for the stage, which consisted of two drops of 11 L-Acoustics V-DOSCs hanging above two ground stacks of 12 Nexo CD18 subs. Front fill was provided by 60 additional V-DOSCs, while side fills were combinations of ARCS and dV Subs. SSE used its own stage boxes and MB4 wedges for monitors.

The FOH position hosted a variety of analog and digital consoles throughout the weekend. The main boards were two Soundcraft Vi6s and two Yamaha PM5Ds on stage for monitor mixes.

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Some of the acts deviated from the main boards as SSE provided Underworld with a Midas Venice desk and Grace Jones used a PM5D.

Friday night headliners My Bloody Valentine (MBV) used their own set up of a 48 channel Midas XL4 and a 30 channel XL3 combined at FOH. MBV uses analog only; therefore, they used a host of outboard gear, including Manley compressors, an Alan Smart C2 compressor, an Empirical Labs EL8, a Manley stereo variable limiter/compressor, a TC Helicon VoicePro for vocals, an Eventide Harmonizer (H3000-D/SE), a XTA SiDD and a Drawmer1960 tube compressor along with XTA processors. On stage the band used a Midas Heritage 3000 with 48 inputs for monitor mixes.

Because the main stage is in a valley, the band's FOH engineer, Michael Brennan, had to deal with winds blowing the guitar sounds around. "The guitars were just swirling to the left and then to the right, and just generally blowing the sound all over the place. There was really nothing you can do about it. I also do sound for Super Furry Animals, and they have joked that they are going to create a wind simulator pedal to reproduce the effect the wind has on the sound at festivals," Brennan explains.

SSE's Miles Hillyard stated that Rob da Bank reported that this year's festival was the best sound they have ever had. He furthers: "We did not have to deal with many noise restrictions because the main stage space is more encapsulated than other festivals. Apart from the bad weather, Bestival was a pretty straightforward gig with no reported problems. We do quite a lot of outdoor festivals and this one



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and the Rockness festival are our favorites to work for. Bestival has decent quality food stands, it is less commercial than other festivals and it is more accommodating to the punters, especially those who bring their families."

The Big Top stage served as a second main venue for Bestival. With DJs and bands booked by Rob da Bank, this year the stage included a second set for the Human League along with Friday night headliners CSS and Aphex Twin's headline set on Saturday night. The tent's main PA included main hangs of ten Resolution 5 point-source loudspeakers on each side, all powered by Full Fat Audio amplifiers. Project Audio in partnership with Production Hire of Northants, UK, provided the gear for the stage. The company also used 24 F121 bass enclosures and ten Resolution 4 speakers for downfills. Martin Audio's Le700s wedges were also used on stage for monitors.

Production Hire chose an analog Midas XL3 because, in a festival situation, it feels that an analog board is easier to work with than digital consoles. With quick set changeovers, it finds the Midas is easier to mix on and keep set up. The company also has a Martin Audio system in stock, but the organisers of Bestival prefer the Funktion-One system.

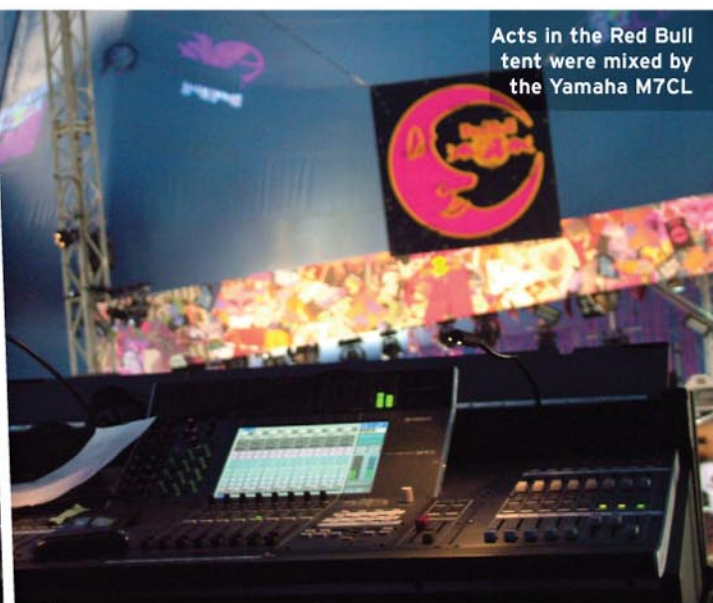
Full Fat Audio's David Millard not only provided 60 of his 10,000, 36,000, 2000 and 6000 model amplifiers between the Big Top and Bollywood stages, but he also worked as a sound engineer for Project Audio throughout the weekend. He comments: "The crowds were fantastic and it is a very professional event. Despite the bad weather we had no technical issues. Because we were using Resolution 5s, we could point them where we wanted the sound to go; they are very directional. At one point we actually turned some of the boxes off to bring the reflections down. The tent is very reflective and it is a very tricky environment to mix in, but when it was full we got a really great sound."

Another stage that used Funktion-One speakers was the adjacent Red Bull 54 Speakeasy tent.

Hosting everyone from hip hop originators The Sugar Hill Gang to the saturated pop tunes of Alphabeat, Manchester's



**L-Acoustics' line array was on the main stage**



Acts in the Red Bull tent were mixed by the Yamaha M7CL

Audile provided Resolution 4s and F218 MK2s, six per side. The acts on the stage were mixed on a Yamaha's M7CL digital console.

Further along the muddy path was the Bollywood tent. This DJ only tent is programmed by Rob da Bank and features all his favourite DJs. The Bollywood tent featured eight of Funktion-One's F121s, six Resolution 5 cabinets and Resolution 2 DJ monitors, again powered by Full Fat Audio's amplifiers.

Millard was also on hand at the Bollywood tent. He notes: "The tent is canvas, so it is not as reflective as the Big Top tent, and it had drapes so we got a very good sound in the tent. It is all down to the acoustics. No matter how good the PA is, if you have a bad acoustic environment it can be very hard to get good sound."

A plethora of varied bands, DJs and festivities held throughout the weekend, Bestival was three days of peace, love and good music, a theme that most festivals have seriously lost sight of through commercialisation, overcrowding and poor conditions.

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