

live

Like a fine wine

DXD technology kept audio quality high for Italian veteran Paoli, writes **Mike Clark**



GINO PAOLI IS a seminal figure on the Italian singer-songwriter scene, and many of his songs are Italian pop classics, including *La Gatta*, recorded in 1960. Never one to rest on his laurels, even at the age of 80, Paoli recently released an album of his songs with a jazz slant, accompanied by Enrico Rava and Danilo Rea, among others. His latest live venture (accompanied by pianist Rea) features the application of a unique system based on Merging Technologies products that enables live sound mixing and processing using DXD (Direct Extreme Digital, with a 352.8kHz/24-bit PCM sample rate/bit depth).

Igor Fiorini, CEO with Rome-based Italian Merging Technologies distributor VDM, explains: "This brand-new modus operandi originated from a simple idea: in the recording world, in spite of endless work going into ensuring top sound, end products are often listened to in low-quality compressed formats, such as MP3.

"The live world is unaffected by this, as the audio 'chain' for an important concert is

always high quality. This led me to think that the noticeable difference in quality between 48 or 96kHz sound and DXD could be maintained and heard at live events. In fact, even if an analogue signal is fed to the sound reinforcement system's power amps, the profound difference in sound quality thanks to the system used to mix and process the sound upstream ensures noticeably superior sonic quality nevertheless."

One of the Paoli/Rea concerts was staged at San Miniato, a picturesque town in the Italian province of Pisa on a hilltop on the Via Francigena, a major medieval pilgrimage route linking northern Europe with Rome. One of the first in the world at which the set-up had been used at a live event with a paying audience, it featured Merging Technologies' Horus (or Hapi in this specific show) networked audio interfaces and Ovation Live virtual Mixer and VDM Design's Live Station System 24 – a computer designed by VDM's design division specifically for live work (both recording and concerts) based on the

(L-R): Luca Giannerini, Danilo Rea, Gino Paoli, Igor Fiorini



concept of impact resistance and reliability.

Fiorini continues: "After the extremely positive initial tests, we began presenting the idea, which immediately attracted the interest and support of sound engineer Luca Giannerini and

producer Aldo Mercurio, then artists like Paoli and Rea – and the idea became reality."

Also convinced that it was absurd to invest in huge amounts in quality PAs and then feed them 48kHz signals, Gino Paoli's sound engineer

Luca Giannerini add: "I'm collaborating with Igor on the project and was really amazed the first time I used it – it's very easy to mix with and I'd never heard such a clean, well-defined sound on live events. The 'breath' of Paoli's vocals and the

piano's harmonics can be clearly heard. Apart from the sound quality, the dynamic range is also superior."

From a practical point of view, all that's needed is a mini computer and a display for virtual mixing – engineers can prep the computer and go to gigs with a unit more or less the size of a briefcase containing an impressive mixing system that enables them to mix (and record) 32 tracks in DXD with no problems or delays, and process signals' EQ, compression and so on at a much higher quality than live digital consoles.

Ensuring front-end quality at San Miniato was Tuscan rental firm Bufalo Sound Service, which works mainly on Italian concerts, festivals and theatre productions, but also abroad on events like the 2014 Trondheim Metal Fest in Norway.

Entirely amplified by D12 power amps, the d&b audiotechnik rig comprised



four Q1 two-way enclosures stacked atop a pair of Q-SUB subwoofers either side onstage. BSS owner Alessandro Bufalini comments: "As far as monitors were concerned, as well as four d&b Max 12 two-way full range

wedges Paoli also used a Shure PSM personal monitor system."

With the singer's DPA d:facto II, Giannerini also carries a DPA 4099P stereo mic system and a pair of 4011C compact cardioids for the piano.

Bufalini opined: "In spite of being re-converted to analogue before being fed to the amps, the audio quality was in fact very good. The sound would have been even more appreciated if the local authorities had allowed

us to fly the system, but grids were out of the question as they would have obstructed the splendid view of the valley."

"Even 'lay' members of the audience noticed the difference in sonic quality," agrees Giannerini. "At San Miniato, an elderly lady told me she'd never heard such a beautiful concert – I appreciate this feedback more than any hair-splitting 'techie' at the shows. Moreover, I can now take my mixing set-up as cabin luggage when flying!"

"All the effort that has gone into this ongoing project to date has also been repaid by the response of audiences, who immediately perceive sonic presence, depth and listening pleasure," concludes Fiorini, "so we're convinced this project has a great future." ■

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