

# A Performing Arts Gem

Modesto has a symphony? Who knew?

Exterior shot of the Gallo Center for the Performing Arts

By Breanne George

Madison Square Garden, NY



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The Gallo Center for the Arts is a shiny gem in the Central Valley of California, satisfying a need for performing arts in the Modesto community. The center, which opened in September 2007, is home to four resident companies including the Central West Ballet, Modesto Community Concerts Association, Modesto Symphony Orchestra and Townsend Opera Players. With two performance spaces — the 1,250-seat Mary Stuart Rogers theater and the intimate 444-seat Foster Family theater — the center is also designed to accommodate a variety of performances, from touring Broadway productions to rock 'n' roll concerts. "We've seen everything from symphonic and acoustic performances all the way up to Broadway shows and pretty much everything in between. We've seen ballet, contemporary dance, even break dancing," says Brian Svoboda, sound engineer at the Gallo Center for the Arts. "It really is an answer to a call for performing arts in Modesto."

With the array of acts to perform at the center, the sound system needed to be flexible and user-friendly. "(Staff) wanted to make this theater adaptable to accommodate our resident companies, but also accommodate these big Broadway tours," Svoboda says. "We needed a system in place that could cover all the audio requirements."

### A Smooth — and Clean — Install

PCD of Santa Rosa, Calif., was contracted to install the audio system at the Gallo Center via a competitive bidding process. President of PCD Henry Beaumont says he was aware of the Gallo Center prior to its construction, and introduced himself to the county project manager in charge of the project. "The county had built the center with a general contractor and had decided to outfit the theater through direct contracts with the various vendors," Beaumont reports. "That way all the curtains, lighting and sound would be installed after the center was completed."

When PCD started the four-month installation process, the center was already built and final aesthetic touches were being made to the two theaters. This greatly simplified the install for the sound crew. "Usually, you're trying to get the sound system in at the same time that general construction is still going on," Beaumont says. "In this case, I think the county wisely chose to complete the building and then bring in the specialty trades, which created a lot less confusion."

From the sound crew's perspective, they didn't have to worry about installing expensive gear amid sheet rock dust in a



Yamaha PM5D at front of house in the Mary Rogers Theater

physically dirty environment or face time constraints and conflicting schedules with the general contractors. One drawback with not being present during the center's construction, however, was the lack of input in the design process.

"I think the biggest challenge was working through the installation with an existing conduit system over which we had no input. In a normal construction process, there are coordination meetings that allow us as the audio-visual contractor to have

input and oversight over the conduit arrangement, and that was not the case on this job," Beaumont says.

PCD installed a JBL VerTec system into the Mary Rogers theater, including 16 JBL VT 4888s and four VT4882s in a left/right line array configuration on each side of the proscenium and center cluster. In addition, the system includes three Renkus-Heinz TRAP40M/6K MH, three TRAP40K/7K FR and five Tannoy IW6TDC stage lip fill monitors. The system is driven by Crown amplifica-

tion. Two Yamaha PM5D digital, which can be used for a wide variety of acts, reside at front of house and monitorland.

The Foster Family theater's narrow dimensions offer an intimate venue for un-amplified performances. The sound system is similar to the Rogers with 12 JBL VRX932LA line arrays, four JBL VRX918S subs, three Reinkus-Heinz TRAP40M/6K MH, three Tannoy IW6TDC stage lip monitors and a Yamaha M7CL digital console at front of house.

#### An Acoustical Gem

Nestor & Gaffney Architecture LLP of Santa Ana, Calif., designed both theaters with acoustical purposes in mind. The Mary Stuart Rogers theater is a traditional shoe-box shape to accommodate its primary use as a classical music venue. It has a maximum width of 97 feet that tapers to approximately 72 feet between the sidewalls in front of the proscenium to direct sound reflections toward the center orchestra seating. "I think the Rogers is clearly the acoustical gem,"



Yamaha PM5D at FOH in the Mary Rogers Theater



JBL VerTec line arrays in the Mary Rogers Theater



Crown i-tech amp racks in the Mary Rogers Theater

**"We've seen everything from symphonic and acoustic performances all the way up to Broadway shows and pretty much everything in between. We've seen ballet, contemporary dance, even break dancing." — Brian Svoboda**

Beaumont says. "That's where the Modesto Symphony plays — that's their flagship room. The theater also fashions beautiful wood veneer walls that increase reverberance as part of the acoustical design.

The theater also has a certain amount of adjustable acoustics with retractable drapes and other elements that can be brought in or taken out depending on the type of performance. "One of the great things is you can put an un-amplified orchestra in here and it will sound great, but you can also do a rock 'n' roll show or musical and it will still sound great," comments Svoboda. He admits that it can be a challenge bringing an amplified sound to theaters designed for symphonic or acoustical music. Because the Yamaha PM5D has

compressors and equalizers built right into the board, it minimizes the need for out-board gear, making it easy to tweak sound on the fly.

A particular challenge for Svoboda is mixing sound for performances by smaller groups and soloists who will sing along with the Modesto symphony. "The most challenging thing for me is to get a really good hybrid sound when some component of the performance is acoustic and the other component is amplified." He says he uses almost every tool available on the mixing console to achieve this desired balance.

#### Bringing Broadway to Modesto

Svoboda mixes for the resident company performances and smaller shows,

while Broadway touring productions bring their own sound engineers. Three Broadway shows have graced the Gallo in the past year, including *Gypsy*, *Evita* and *Cats*. Svoboda notes that sound engineers for each production used a PM5D at front of house. "Not only is it a popular roadhouse console, but also a popular touring console," Svoboda says. "If I have a PM5D, and I go somewhere else that has a PM5D, then I can transfer information very easily via a flash-based memory card."

For the opening week, the Gallo hosted a multitude of performances for both the younger and more traditional crowd. The first show featured Broadway legend Patti LuPone singing along with

the Modesto Symphony. "It was a major event and a lot of fun," recalls Svoboda. "We did a live broadcast outside on the plaza and it turned out to be a sold-out show." Shortly thereafter, Tony Bennett performed in the Mary Rogers theater and was so impressed by the acoustics that he made an interesting request. "Tony asked his FOH mixer Tom Young to cut all the microphones right then and there — three quarters of the way through the show! He cut the mics and Tony sang a piece by himself accompanied by a piano and light rhythm section," Svoboda says. "You could hear every word he sang. It's definitely a testament to how good this theater can sound even without reinforcement." **FOH**