

Tour de Germany

The Master teams up with Acoustic Sciences Corporation

Five time Grammy winner Bruce Swedien is the only producer/engineer whose clients range from the Big Band era of Count Basie to the King of Pop, Michael Jackson. Swedien, the master of mixing, just finished a two week tour through Germany where he shared a plethora of knowledge with German audio professionals. At three world-class studios "Do Nothing Till You Hear From Me" a song from Quincy Jones latest album, was re-mixed featuring Phil Collins on vocals.



The Team

Bruce Swedien has become accustomed to working alone when mixing songs. However, this May he was surrounded by German audio professionals and his recruited equipment team. Swedien asked Marcel Schaal Studio Designer for Acoustic Sciences Corporation to assist him in taking acoustic control in the studios and the lecture halls. Marcel Schaal, who worked with Swedien and Art Noxon (president of ASC) in a Los Angeles video production, joined Swedien on the tour. Andy Mikutta from Digital Audio in Germany was responsible for all of the organizational aspects of the tour and Oliver Guenter of Frankfurt, Germany was in charge of the PA setup during the lectures that followed the mix sessions.

The Equipment

When it comes to producing and engineering, Swedien has very high standards. He carefully surrounds himself with equipment that guarantees the best possible results. That is why he insists on ASC's ATTACK Wall. In all three studios the ATTACK Wall was set-up for a reliable, linear and powerful mix environment. Swedien also used a pair of Westlakes BBSM8's - his reference speakers, and four Electrocompaniet AW 180 MB class "A" mono blocks, the amps that he prefers to work with. Neve 1084's were used for the EQ on Phil Collins voice. The Neve 2254 and the Urei 1176 LN were used for slight compression on a few of the tracks. For reverb Swedien used an EMT 252 with the 250 software, a reverb unit that he absolutely loves. The consoles used in all three studios were SSL 4000 series and the tape machine was a Sony 3348 in two studios and the Studer 48 track in the last studio.

Tour Schedule

The tour lasted about two weeks and ventured from the north of Germany to the south. On the 19th of May the tour made its first stop at the Chateau du Pape studio in Hamburg. On the 20th a lecture was held at the Hamburg Holiday Inn. The following day, the tour group traveled to Cologne for the May 22nd mix session at Dierks Studios. The convention center at the Cologne airport served as the location for the lecture on the 23rd. The last mix session took place on the 26th at the Pilot studio in the city with heart -

Munich. On the 27th there was another lecture at the Holiday Inn. In all, the tour schedule was perfectly planned.

The Mix Session

Since all of the studios had at least a 56 or 72 input SSL 4000 series, ASC's ATTACK Wall covered an 80 input console, with 30 Studio Traps and 6 Monitor Stands.

Each studio had at least 15-20 participants who crowded in the small, hot quarters, freezing the air condition system more than once. Chateau du Pape studios had just sold their Sony 3348 show equipment and a new unit was picked up on short notice at a rental company in

Paris, France. The SSL extended from one wall to the next, making a full ATTACK Wall set-up impossible. Marcel placed the two 16" Monitor Stands on top of each other as the middle column, following with Studio Traps on either side. Then he positioned the two 39' Monitor Stands side by side to support the BBSM 8's. From there, Schaal set up Studio Traps until they reached the wall. The BBSM 8's were placed in an equilateral triangle and towed slightly in towards the main mix position. The improvement was stunning. Even without traps placed the sides of the SSL, the whole sound tightened. Swedien had better bass, better imaging and focus.



The Dierks Studio in Cologne, was very similar except that there was space on either side of the SSL to place Studio Traps and complete the ATTACK Wall. Swedien has one of the best mic techniques in the industry and as an engineer, Swedien does not just record a signal - he works with spaces, resulting in a more emotional recording. With the ATTACK Wall he was able to hear and see the spaces. His masterful work was an eye opener for all the participants.



The last studio the tour went to was the Pilot Studios in Munich, the most intimate studio of the three. There was no producers desk so the participants had to crowd around Swedien. Marcel setup the largest ATTACK Wall of the tour, rivaled only by Sting's Attack Wall in his London studio. He used almost all of the available Tube Traps to form a gigantic ATTACK Wall. The sound was phenomenal. It allowed the speakers to operate the way they were designed to. It also resulted in pinpoint imaging, powerful bass an environment Swedien could trust, no matter what kind of music he produced. Swedien is an innovative producer, which is why he has developed an affinity for the Traps. He owns 15 Studio Traps that go with him to every recording session. He uses them to create a completely independent space or to alter an existing space to his liking. For all three Mix sessions, Marcel had to set up a Quick Sound Field with Studio Traps, in the same way Swedien uses them when he works with Michael Jackson. The only difference was that there was no dance platform, like he built for Michael Jackson's recordings.

The Lectures

Each of the lecture halls could accommodate up to 80 participants. The first lecture was held at the Hamburg Holiday Inn in a fairly dead hall. The PA speakers were elevated with the help of the Monitor Stands to reach every participant and to minimize the vertical energy from the speakers. Studio Traps were rotated to the reflective and diffusive side to liven up the hall for an increased natural sound. The tour team intended to recreate a studio monitor environment as best as possible.



Swedien had a tremendous collection of recordings that were played as examples for the audience. Some were even original masters that had never been released. High quality sound in the lecture halls was essential.

The next place Swedien lectured at was the airport in Cologne. A large, live hall with a lot of glass on one side. Here Schaal set up a false wall of Studio Traps on one side to create a more intimate space. The goal was not only to improve the sound, but to make the participants feel comfortable and to encourage questions.

The last lecture took place at the Holiday Inn in Munich, by far the worst place, sound-wise, that we had to deal with. With a slap back echo and reverb that would rival the Taj Mahal. Here the Studio Traps were setup along three sides with reflectors towards the wall and speakers on the Monitor stands similar to the previous set-ups, but slightly towed inward. It did the trick The audience could understand Swedien without a microphone and they could experience the music he played the way it was meant to be heard.

Last Thoughts

Overall the tour went incredibly well, German audio Professionals were exposed to a new and innovative process that they will be able to use for future projects. The trip was a huge success for Bruce Swedien and everyone involved. In fact, talks with Swedien, Digital Audio and Acoustic Sciences Corporation have already started in anticipation of an exclusive US Tour. The US Tour will be an enlightening week long project, with tracking, over- dubbing, mixing and mastering. A must for everyone who wants to know how the master really does it. Keep your eyes and ears open.

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