

INDUSTRY NEWS



Hello, Bette:

Audio Gear for Broadway's New *Hello, Dolly!*

The new Broadway revival of *Hello, Dolly!* puts Bette Midler center stage as Dolly Levi, the enterprising widow finding her way in 1890s New York City. Directed by Jerry Zaks, with sound design by Scott Lehrer, the production earned Midler a Tony Award.

Lehrer says the Shubert Theatre, where the show is playing, “is not especially reverberant. Its balcony and mezzanine are steep and close; the throw distances are relatively short. Using all d&b [audiotechnik] elements, we have developed three different left/right systems, one for each level: the orchestra is V7P, the mezzanine and balcony use Y8 arrays, plus a split orchestra/mezzanine center cluster of V8 delays and fills. It’s fairly intimate for each of the three areas; even the back of the balcony feels vibrant and fully in contact with the performance. After load-in, it was realized that those seated in the balcony couldn’t quite see some of the action on the front stage edge, so the balcony floor was raised, making it even steeper. Because we had taken the three-systems approach, it was relatively easy to lower in the balcony left/right system, re-adjust the angles on the box hangs, and, using d&b’s ArrayProcessing (AP), resolve any issues.

“I covered the orchestra with V7P point source loudspeakers. We were going to use Y-Series line arrays, but the set designer, Santo Loquasto, wanted the system hidden in the proscenium and it didn’t fit. Besides, we would not have been able to service it in there. The V7P solution works very well; the throw distance is not much, so it’s really no big deal. We have a center cluster of V-Series array, which provides coverage across the mezzanine and balcony. To

achieve an ideal balance throughout the room, I tend to favor the vocals in the center, maybe 3 or 4dB above the band; from the left/right sides, I favor the band 2 or 3 dB above the voices. Having the voices in the side hangs helps keep the vocals pulled down in the sound image. I set a vocal level that makes sense from the center cluster, and then balance to the sides.

“There are a fair number of fills, mainly E6, downstairs and as delays for the under-balcony; I also use three Y7Ps for delay on the balcony truss. There are E8 side fills to the extreme corners of the mezzanine and balcony. Front fills across the stage are E5s. There is no surround system, but we have E8s onstage for foldback; we also use them as a source for onstage effects.

“All the arrays were AP’ed and that made a huge difference. The whole ArrayProcessing thing is such a game-changer. After the opening, Carin Ford, who mixes the show for me, was able to hand over the mix to her assistant and listen around the room. She couldn’t believe how similar it sounded: same balance, same tonality, same level throughout.”

Lehrer’s design also makes extensive use of TiMax delay-matrix specialization. Eighteen TiMax’d vocal zones were mapped across the stage. Five time zones serve the passerelle area in front of the band, five zones cover downstage, with five for mid-stage, and a further three upstage. With that wide spread, Lehrer pulls as much vocal differentiation as possible from the big choral numbers: “When there’s a group of people singing, there can be four people on lead vocals, and we can time them across the stage from left to right. Also, when the voices are coming from a wider stereo field, time-wise rather than volume-wise, it makes it easier to hear those four people singing. We’re not piling them up in one position in the center of the stage.”

In some numbers, Midler moves downstage to the passerelle on several occasions, getting very close to the

audience. “When she’s way down front on it, we can get that timed so well using TiMax,” Lehrer says. “Singing to the audience from the center of the passerelle, it really sounds like she’s right there, and when she moves from left to right, the timings get more extreme, because she’s so close to the audience. She’s all the way right or all the way left, and we just cue the timings into TiMax and the audience hears her from where she’s singing.”

The band also has five time zones imaged separately across the stage. From the central conductor’s position, the left and right front zones map the front section of the orchestra. There are also up-left, up-center, and up-right orchestra zones. Lehrer uses this spread to distribute the orchestra across the sound system, so that all the musical parts can be heard clearly.

After laser measurement, Lehrer trims his TiMax zone parameters manually, which is detailed work requiring close attention to the action, but he also tries to rationalize the quantity of cues for Ford to handle, “because she still has to mix the show, too.” Keeping the specialization cues to a minimum also lends more impact to their discreet and strategic use—nevertheless, around 100 timing cues are utilized in a show with very few background sound effects.

Each cue morphs the actors’ mics seamlessly and transparently between the TiMax time zone level/delay imaging setups. As for what Lehrer calls “manual tracking:” “We don’t

do long sequenced cross-fades too often, as it’s hard to know how fast people will do things—but it’s a fun thing to try, and using the matrix to enter the timings is very straightforward—as simple as putting numbers in a spreadsheet.”

“The show has a wide dynamic range. Bette is accustomed to playing big arenas and concert venues, so I had to tell her it’s okay to be quiet, if appropriate. She doesn’t need to use her big voice, as it will be delivered by Carin and the system. If the intro to a song is ‘conversational,’ then make it conversation-level. That took her a while, but she likes it now. The performance of the sound system allows for great intelligibility, even if she just whispers. That is a liberating experience for her. With the audience right there in her face, there is that intimacy, so it’s really nice for her. As for her voice, she’s doing seven shows a week across five days. It’s tough, but she does a great job and she has a great cast around her, David Hyde Pierce in particular.

“Bette said, ‘I’m going to have the time of my life’ and that’s exactly what she has brought to her performance. With such abundant energy available on stage, it’s important to make sure every single audience member gets to enjoy that experience as if they were seated front row center. That’s not only about harnessing the latest technology; the sound designer’s role is as much about managing the performers’ energy. With Bette that’s a really exciting challenge.” 📡



The New Normal

Worldwide Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House, Royal Albert Hall, Carmen, Madam Butterfly, Tosca, Aida, La Boheme, Showboat, Disney Aladdin New York London Hamburg Tokyo, King & I Shuffle Along Fiddler On The Roof Hello Dolly Fun Home - Broadway, Milan Expo & Kew Gardens Hive, National Gallery Soundscapes, Atlantis Shuttle Experience NASA KSC, Fremont Street Experience Las Vegas, Fukui & Yokkaichi Planetariums, HMS Britannia, NCL Getaway, New National Theatre Tokyo, Turku Theatre, Stockholm Royal Dramatic Theatre, Oscars Theatre Stockholm, Gothenburg Folksteater, Gothenberg City Theatre, Helsinki City Theatre, Finnish National Opera, Deutsches National Theatre Weimar, Ronacher & Raimund Theatre Wien, Stanislavsky Theatre Moscow, Tangshan Grand Theatre PRC, Thunersee, Dance of The Vampires Austria Germany France Russia, Rocky Horror Show, Phantom of The Opera, Les Miserables, Jesus Christ Superstar, Titanic, Neumann&Muller, Feedback, Autograph, Orbital, Sound Associates, Masque Sound, PRG, Creative Technology, Edinburgh Military Tattoo, Basel Tattoo, Zurich Tattoo, Kremlin Zoria Tattoo, Sydney Melbourne & Auckland Tattoo, Tabaluga tour, Adele tour, Creamfields, Glastonbury, Wolkenturm Grafenegg, Amsterdam Zoo, DraakSteken

TiMax spatial audio