



Megadeth - D9 215 Case Study

For nearly forty years, Megadeth has been at the forefront of US heavy metal. One of the original Big Four of the 1980s American thrash bands (alongside Anthrax, Slayer, and Metallica), the band's technically complex music and dystopian lyrics are as relevant today as they were when it was formed by Dave Mustaine in 1983. Its recent co-headline tour with Lamb of God played to audiences of 10,000+ across North America, and it's already announced appearances on a series of high-profile European festival dates for 2022.

The planning for the 2021 dates, dubbed The Metal Tour of the Year, stretched back to the pre-Covid period when lighting designer and programmer Jon Eddy was contacted to work up some idea for the upcoming shows. Designing rigs to slot into co-headline shows is never an easy experience and the band's Mustaine is a famously demanding taskmaster, so the design went through close to 20 iterations before it was finalised.

And then just before the go button was pressed, Covid pandemic happened

It's a familiar story by now, and the upshot is that by the time that rehearsals and pre-programming started up again in mid-July 2021, there was only a little over a month to go before the tour kicked off in Austin, Texas.

The number of bands heading out for tours as soon as they could — i.e. all at the same time — probably came close to setting an all time record for live shows across the US, and there was a mad scramble for the right gear across the industry.

Luckily, The Metal Tour of the Year already had a key component on board in the shape of an Avolites Diamond 9 215 console and its operator Ruben Laine. Eddy and Laine had been trying to work together for years and had even done NAMM speaking events together, but the Megadeth gigs were the first where they got to work alongside each other.

“He’s amazing with Ai and everything about it,” says Eddy of his accomplice on the shows. “I have a wealth of knowledge when it comes to the console and so does he, but he also has the vision to really know how to push Avolites’ gear to its fullest in ways that I always wanted to. So having him team up with me was a natural progression that helped me expand on what I do.”

One of those expansions was the use of Avolites’ new Timeline feature on the shows. Megadeth planned to run it to a click track, which meant that Timeline was the obvious choice for ease of operations. It also dovetailed with where Eddy wanted to be in his career.

“My goal was to design and programme and to be able to send out an operator; expanding on what I do become more of a designer than an operator. Timeline is the answer to all my problems with that in my mind because that’s how I do my shows. And there’s finally a way for me to lay it down and to be able to record it and play back that way. All of which meant that Timeline was amazing for me.”

Eddy refers to all his previous shows as 100% organic, 100% busked, so there was a bit of a learning curve. “If I had to give it an analogy, I would have been like the musician going into the studio with Ruben as the producer on it when we were going into pre-programming, with him lining everything up,” he says.

Improvisation is back

Eddy says that probably the biggest challenge on the tour was the truncated lead time post-Covid.

“It’s funny because we had all the time in the world in the break, but then whenever things started back up here, when it was time to actually go, there could have been more time to line things up with the whole rig.” He says. “We were in a situation where we pre-programmed on a full-sized D9 with a partial rig, and we didn’t get to see the full rig together until the tour started. That just meant tweaking the rig along the first part of the tour, which is not so much fun during the daytime.”

A lot of effort went into those 20 or so design iterations, with close to 200 Scraptron tubes tying in the design floor to ceiling and outlining the truss housings. One iteration using Clay Paky reflection mirrors on the air rig working off Xtylos shooting directly up off the ground had to be rapidly reworked after Mustaine decided to change his floor position. Others remained.

“I immediately grasped on to Megadeth’s Vic Rattlehead logo when going through all of their old video content they sent me from their last production. It was just highly underused, and such a cool rad aspect of them. So I lined up some blinders and some Clay Paky Xtylos behind some Roe LED vanish panels, and I had two Xtylos beams shooting out of those panels to shoot laser beams out of his eyes as if it was coming alive. Using the transparent video panel and incorporating lights from behind was a first for me but something that I’ve been wanting to try.”

Unfortunately there was no upstage videowall situation for the D9 215 to really stretch its legs on, just some video on set guards in the backline. But there was one aspect of the latest Avolites releases that was very crucial to the show, and that was Timeline as Laine was diagnosed with Covid and had to self-quarantine in a hotel in Long Island for several weeks.

“Luckily we were able to get a guy in called Dan Arnold, and he was able to run Timeline successfully within about a day,” says Eddy. “He did it for the rest of the tour with me heading out on the road and standing next to him like I was his Driving Ed teacher. That ended up working really well; I got time to programme more on the show every day, do editing, do adjusting, manually operate things during the show as it was happening, and then programme them in the next day to the Timeline. So my time out there ended up being very valuable and good.”

It is always good news when technology helps save the day. Even better for the band’s fans to hear that Megadeth have already announced appearances on a series of high-profile European festival dates for 2022.

