

Avolites Install: Aures London

3D sound from Pioneer Pro Audio, lighting and visuals from Avolites, Robe and Epson, and ground-breaking haptic technology combine to create a truly immersive event space in the heart of London.

Take a swift left out of London's Waterloo station and you'll stumble across multi-sensory, immersive venue, Aures London. Designed and built with emotion in mind and derived from the Latin word for 'ears', Aures aims to touch every single one of its guests' senses using a vast array of high-end technology. Through 3D sound from Pioneer Pro Audio, lighting and visuals from Avolites, Robe and Epson, and (literally) ground-breaking haptic technology from Subpac, the venue is catapulted into a unique league of its own.

Owner, Sam Davis encapsulates Aures' creativity through his infectious, enthusiastic personality and has brought his vision to life, with exhibitions exploring jazz and disco greats such as Billie Holiday, Sister Sledge and Donna Summer currently being shown. The space can also be hired out for external events and has been used by companies including Sky and Palmers.

With over 20 years' hospitality experience across the UK, Canada and Japan, Davis was determined to make Aures his most technologically advanced venue yet, stating "I am a hospitality guy,

but I am also an audiophile and I wanted to equip Aures with the best technology available".

'A GEEK'S PARADISE'

As Davis navigated his business through the difficulties thrown at him due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he found himself thinking of ways he could reinvent Aures and bring in visual technology that would go hand in hand with the one-of-a-kind Pioneer Pro Audio sound system. "COVID-19 was devastating for us as a business as we were closed for 16 months. Before the pandemic hit, we were on a great trajectory, doing events for YouTube and other big companies, then as soon as March 2020 came, everyone who had booked the space started cancelling their parties.

"During the months we were closed, I applied for the Government's art grant, which we subsequently got. We were able to use the money to revamp the space for when we reopened post COVID. I had lots of ideas, but I knew that I wanted to bring in big brands like Robe for our lighting, change our current projectors to Epson, and also collaborate with the team at Avolites so the venue would not only sound great, but it would look great, too."

The result is a stunning visual package dominated by an immersive 270° projection surface, 3.65m in height and 35m long, covered by Epson PU2010 projectors. This is complemented by a Robe lighting rig of 10 Tetra2 units and four ESPRITE moving heads.



“Aures is all about quality,” revealed Charlotte Gowers, Aures’ Technical Manager expanding on the choice of fixtures. “To achieve the best quality, we work only with the brands that we feel reflect the quality we strive to achieve in every event and show we are a part of.

Also in situ at Aures is an Avolites Q3 Server running Ai v12.1, as well as a Quartz lighting console. The seeds for the Aures and Avolites collaboration were sown back in Christmas 2019 when Davis met the Avolites team at a Pioneer Pro Audio event held at his venue. He knew straight away that what they were offering would be perfect for the venue, but as COVID took over, they had to wait until things had settled down before officially starting work on the project. “The concept of the venue ties in nicely with Avolites’ ethos as it is unifying lighting and video,” explained Stephen Baird-Smith, Sales Manager at Avolites.

“We also had something that we thought was going to be unique for Sam with our Synergy integration between lighting control and video control. He needed a very powerful media solution because even though Aures isn’t the biggest venue, it has a huge video canvas and, to be able to do the venue justice, you need to be able to play back video at really high quality in a high resolution.”

Avolites’ Synergy feature set brings lighting and video together, offering creative programmers a streamlined workflow for all the visual elements on their stage. It is a proprietary connection between a lighting console and any Ai media server offering better reliability, flexibility, and extended programming abilities, all within an intuitive interface.

Powering the video side of the Avolites Synergy system is a Q3 Server which offers one 4K and two HD outputs, yet is only 2 rack units in height, making it perfect for any pixel-dense installation. “The canvas size is 12k wide by 1k high, so it pretty much fills 6 HD outputs all stitched together”. The lighting and server control is handled by an Avolites Quartz console “it’s the smallest in our range, but still gives the venue plenty of room to grow offering 16 universes of DMX on top of all the server control” said Baird-Smith.

“As well as this, they can map the video content through the lighting fixtures at any point, so they can transition smoothly from traditional lighting cues to video driven lighting cues, without giving up any creative control of the lighting fixtures. That’s where you really see Synergy come into play and demonstrate how integral it is for the venue.”

Gowers added: “Before Synergy, changing content and updating the lighting console control was a long and laborious task, requiring several steps that could ultimately fail using the age-old CIP protocol. Synergy did away with all these issues. I can connect in seconds, with less than five button presses. I can take NDI signals from the media server and send them to the console; with this function, I can pixel map all or some of my fixtures to my screen output, which for some clients is incredibly useful as it means I can match their content energy and colouring with minimal effort.”



Of course, such a visual spectacle brings inherent challenges – not least the sheer amount of data required for every piece of content. “A large proportion of my time is spent moving the files and folders from one storage drive to another or into the media drive on the server itself,” Gowers commented.

“LexTempus, our in-house immersive experience, is 1.5TB of data with bespoke content created for each song in the show. At a little over one-and-a-half

hours, the experience is about the same length as a feature film; however, it is a mammoth, unlike your average DVD at 10GB.

The server is fitted with a super-fast NVME SSD, we are pushing a high bitrate when playing back files due to the quality of the AIM codec. This codec is specifically designed to take full advantage of the GPU's power."

"Due to the size of the screen, it can also be challenging to find any stock content that looks good enough for us to utilise on the screens," she added. "Often, we find ourselves hunting for clips in the 8k range to then adapt for the screens. It is also costly to make custom content financially and takes a significant amount of time. LexTempus, for example, takes six days for six high-end rendering computers to output the 1.5TB of footage."

However, despite the challenges, there's no getting away from the fact that Aures is, in Gowers' words, a "geek's paradise". She concluded: "From audiophiles to video lovers, we are all about pushing technology to its limits and always sitting right on the curve of the latest new immersive tech while still pushing our existing setup as far as we can."

