



# Ravinia

## Good People, Good Times, Good Music



Pictured at Ravinia Festival FOH position are, (L to R): Will Huffman, Local 2 monitor engineer; Tom Carlson, A Sound Choice FOH system technician; Mike Gotshall - A Sound Choice president; Norm Krueger, Local 2 FOH engineer; Tim Christenson, A Sound Choice monitor system technician; and Sam Amodio, Local 2 master sound technician.



The BoDeans performing at Chicago's Ravinia festival

**With a history of more than 100 years, Chicago's Ravinia is unlike any festival out there.**

Photos and Text By Bill Evans

Most festivals are just shows with a few more acts and a somewhat longer run. But Chicago's Ravinia is not just another festival. Opening in May and ending in October with multiple acts almost every day, it is really more of an install — kind of semi-temporary, but an install all the same.

Ravinia's history is a long one. This huge park in the northern suburbs of the Windy City is privately owned, and the festival, run by a voluntary board of directors, has been ongoing for more than 100 years. Yes, you read that right. "Long-running" festivals like Summerfest have nothing on this event.

### In the Beginning (FOH)

It started when some folks bought the land with the intention of it becoming an amusement park for travelers on the soon-to-be-completed rail line in and out of Chicago. As an amusement park it failed, but sometime after that the park began to host musical and theatrical performances, and the festival was born.

Today, it is the summer home for the Chicago Symphony and hosts tons of opera and classical performances as well as the usual folks on tour doing summer festivals. The night FOH was at the park, there were 10,000-plus people camped out on a beautiful summer evening listening to the BoDeans. The next night, Sheryl Crow was on the bill, and Tony Bennett was coming the following week.

Note we said listening to, not "seeing." That is because less than a third of the audience is seated in the covered amphitheater in front of the stage. The majority of the audience is found on blankets and camp chairs with picnic baskets and catered dinners on a large grass area near the stage. None of them can see the stage at all. Sound is provided via a large distributed system of speakers mounted in the trees throughout the park. In a time when rising ticket prices are making it harder and harder to sell out a show, a ticket into the park for Sheryl Crow was just \$20 and a seat in the "pavilion" \$60. When she played in Vegas a week later the prices were more than double that amount.

Those things alone would be enough to make Ravinia stand out, but the relationship between the union, a local sound company and a large soundco known mostly for its work on Broadway makes for an interesting look at where the industry is heading.

### A Sound Choice (FOH)

Mike Gotshall is a former band guy who went to work for the old dB Sound (now a part of CLAIR) when it was time to get off the road. A few years ago, he went out on his own and started A Sound Choice. "We mainly provide wireless services," he says. "Mics, in-ears, a lot of theater work, which is how I got to know the guys at Masque Sound."

For those of you who don't know, Masque is a New York City-based soundco known chiefly for its Broadway theater work, but one that is increasing its presence in touring as well. Remember, the business is about people and relationships, which is how a smaller company scored what is arguably the biggest gig in town.

"For private parties and smaller events around town, I use my smaller audio systems," says Gotshall. "I use Masque Sound to provide the audio equipment for my concert tours, theaters, plays and some of my corporate events. That's the great thing about my relationship with Masque. It enables me to look for the bigger events and have the confidence that Masque Sound can provide and design the type of systems to satisfy my clients' needs."

"As for equipment at Ravinia," he continues, "Masque Sound is my audio provider. A Sound Choice provides wireless microphones and in-ear systems if and when needed. Also, we provide all sub-rented audio equipment for last-minute artists needs."

Bottom line is bigger gigs without the overhead of owning and maintaining a big system. And this is a big system. (See gear list sidebar.)

Remarking on his working relationship with Mike Gotshall and IATSE Local 2, FOH engineer Norm Krueger, Masque Sound Audio Specialist Paul Klimson said, "Ravinia is a genuinely unique venue. A portion of

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### MICROPHONES

AKG C451EB pre-amp w/3pos rolloff black/silver 6  
AKG C414B xls multi pattern mic 2  
AKG CK1B cardioid capsule-black 6  
AKG C414B/ULS four-pattern mic w/3position roll off 4  
Audio-Technica AT4050/cm5 multipattern studio mic 4  
Beyer M88TG n(c) hypercardioid mic 2  
Earthworks M30 omni-precision mic 1  
EV RE20 variable d super cardioid 1  
Shure Beta 91 cardioid condenser drum mic 3  
Shure Beta 57 super cardioid mic 6  
Shure Beta 58 super cardioid mic 8  
Shure Beta 87a supercardioid mic 14  
Shure Beta 98 mini supercardioid (rpm 108) mic 20  
Shure Beta 52a dynamic kick drum mic 3  
Shure Beta 56 swivel mount instrument mic 4  
Shure C98D cable for Beta 98/91 w/ ta4f-ta3f 23  
Shure ILP1 inline preamp for SM98/SM91 2  
Shure ILP3 inline preamp for Beta 98/91 21  
Shure KSM32/CG cardioid studio condenser mic 4  
Shure SM58 dynamic cardioid mic 7

Shure SM57 dynamic cardioid mic 12  
Shure SM81 cardioid instrument mic w/10db attenuation 8  
Shure VP88 stereo condenser microphone 1  
Sennheiser E609/MD409 dynamic super-cardioid drum mic 4  
Sennheiser MD421U cardioid mic w/ 5 pos. bass rolloff switch 8  
Sennheiser MKH40/cardioid studio mic 10

### PROCESSING

Alan Smart compressor 2  
dbx 1046 quad compressor/limiter 1  
Drawmer DS404 quad noise gate 1  
Eventide H8000 multichannel multi-effects processor 1  
Klark Teknik dn-360/30-30 dual 1/3 oct eq  
Lexicon PCM80 digital fx processor 2  
Lexicon PCM91 digital reverberator 2  
Meyer Galileo 616 loudspeaker management system 1  
Summit DCI200 tube compressor-2 ch. 1  
XTA DP224 2~in/4~out speaker management system 2  
XTA DP428/448 audio management system 1

Yamaha SPX1000 digital multi-fx prosc 1

### CONSOLES

Midas Verona monitor console 1  
Yamaha PM5D-RH digital mixing console 2  
Yamaha M7CL 48-channel digital mixing console w/bridge 1  
Yamaha DSP5D 10u rackmount expansion for pm5d 1

### SPEAKERS & SPEAKER PROCESSORS

L-ACOUSTICS 115xt two-way monitor wedge 6  
Meyer 650-P self-powered subwoofer 2x18 8  
Meyer CQ1 self-powered loudspeaker 1  
Meyer MICA System 24  
Meyer MSL-4 self-powered speaker 6  
Meyer UPA-1P self-powered speaker 4  
Meyer UM-1P self-powered monitor speaker 9  
Meyer USW-1P self-powered 2x15 subwoofer 3  
Meyer UPM-1P self-powered speaker 6  
Meyer UPM-1P ma self-powered speaker w/manual attenuation 2  
Meyer M'elodie compact line array weather protected





**"Ravinia is a genuinely unique venue.  
A portion of the audience is in an expansive  
lawn area creating a dynamic with a  
more relaxed environment."**

**— Masque Sound  
Audio Specialist Paul Klimson**

The BoDeans in concert at Chicago's Ravinia festival



A crowd shot inside the Pavilion at Ravinia



Inside the Pavilion



Norm Kruger at FOH position



The BoDeans performing

the audience is in an expansive lawn area creating a dynamic with a more relaxed environment — picnicking and listening to music. Mike and Norm were committed to improving the sound quality while still maintaining that atmosphere. We helped them accomplish those goals by scrupulously considering each hanging placement and splay angle. The Meyer Sound MICA compact line array speakers were an excellent choice. They made a big difference in keeping excess energy from spilling onto the lawn."

The choice of the Meyer rig also made a crucial difference in getting ready to go on time. The bidding process was longer than anyone expected, and by the time A Sound Choice got the gig and gear, there were only a couple of weeks before performances began. Meyer Sound speakers — being self-powered — meant less gear and fewer cable runs and a system that was designed to work as a unit. The choice of the Yamaha boards was similarly pragmatic. The PM5D is ubiquitous and the visiting engineer who has never used one is rare.

Knowing that many of the artists who play the festival are touring and carrying their own PA, the Meyer rig at Ravinia is designed to retract into the grid if a visiting act wants to hang their own gear. But that option is almost never exercised. "They may not know A Sound Choice, but when an act comes in and sees Yamaha and Meyer Sound and Masque, the confidence in the system seems to just come naturally."

## Good People, Good Times (FOH)

Back to the people and relationships thing. Norm Kruger is IATSE's audio guy at Ravinia, and has been for 20 years. He knew Mike and A Sound Choice through their theater work (which in a union town like Chicago is going to be all IATSE all the time). When it came time to bid the gig, A Sound Choice's theatre rep and their relationship with Masque (and via Masque, Meyer Sound) made for an attractive package. One that won out over much larger operations with roots in the touring industry.

In the end, it seems right. Ravinia is family-run with a definite family vibe that extends from the audience to the artists who return to the festival year after year, to the close relationship Gotshall has with both the venue's audio crew and Masque crew. Good people, good times, good music. It doesn't get much better than that. **FOH**