

A Brand-New Joint

By: Mel Lambert

Las Vegas gets a new concert venue



In the mid-'90s, The Hard Rock Hotel and Casino opened to major fanfare, establishing itself as a venue for a younger, upwardly mobile clientele Owned and operated by Morgans Hotel Group and equity partner DLJ Merchant Banking Partners, HRH is located on 16.7 acres and offers a unique entertainment and gaming experience with the services and amenities associated with a boutique luxury resort hotel; from the beginning, a major attraction was The Joint, a large performance venue with state-of-the-art sound and lighting systems. Having taken a long, hard look at the environment two years ago, the owners began to plan for a larger venue in an adjacent parking lot, absorbing the original space within the casino footprint.

"The original Joint was really just a simple rock club," recalls Paul Davis, VP of entertainment. "It was, in essence, a wooden box with a great vibe that could accommodate either a

GA [general admission] audience of 2,000 or a seated audience of 1,500. That formula was so successful that we planned to provide four times the volume and double the seating capacity, retaining the intimacy we enjoyed in the former venue." The \$60-million project is part of a \$750-million expansion initiated by the property in 2007 that features the addition of 860 guest rooms, including an all-suite 15-story south tower, a new 17-story north tower, plus additional meeting, convention, and casino space. The new Joint opened April 17 with concerts by The Killers, Avenged Sevenfold, Paul McCartney, Bon Jovi, and Kenny Chesney.

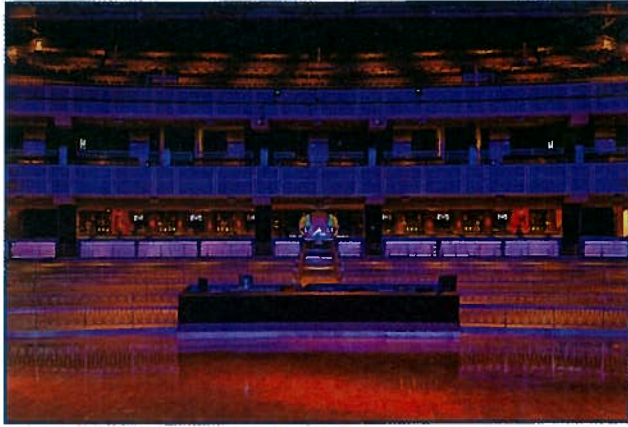
Located on the southeast corner of the property, adjacent to Paradise Road, a long city block east of Las Vegas Boulevard, the new venue occupies a total of 80,226 sq. ft. of space across the three seating levels. Laid out for general admission, the main floor holds 2,920 guests, with

VIP level tables and stools accommodating 80 patrons, VIP suites for 84 guests, and fixed balcony and balcony general admission accommodating 727 and 200, respectively. "Our total GA is 4,004," Davis confirms.

"Reserved-seating shows hold 1,769 on the orchestra level, for a total of 3,040 with VIP and balcony levels. We also have a plenty of ADA seating throughout the entire venue." Seating capacity for a boxing or mixed martial arts event, for example, is 1,855 on the orchestra level; VIP/balcony levels remain unchanged, for a total of 3,027.

"Our aim was to provide a larger venue that would attract touring acts as well as short-term residences," says Charles Smith, director of entertainment operations. "The Joint was Las Vegas' first legitimate and relevant rock venue, hosting such live acts as The Rolling Stones, Coldplay, The Foo Fighters, David Bowie, Linkin Park, Nine Inch Nails, and The Killers." The latter, originally a local band, opened the venue in early 1995.

The environment was designed by the Montreal-based architectural firm Scéno Plus. "AEG [the venue's exclusive promoter and booking agent] had selected Scéno Plus because of its familiarity with their work at other Las Vegas properties, including The Coliseum at Caesars Palace and The Bellagio Theatre [for Cirque du Soleil's production of O]," says Davis. "They also had the unique skills we needed for a design that had to look and sound like a concert hall while retaining the intimacy of a club venue that includes seven premier VIP hospitality suites. To maximize our guests' enjoyment with a genuine experience, we wanted the new Joint to carry on the up-close and authentic feel, with the furthest seat in the house no more than 155' from the stage. The old Joint had a decent ambience, but lacked the luxury elements that certain guests are willing to pay for, and the sightlines and acoustics that all guests deserve. It also lacked fly space, loading docks, and production offices—the back-of-house improvements were considered very important."



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“Our brief to Scéno Plus was to remain true to the heritage of the original venue, but make it bigger, with a more prominent VIP element. We started the process two years ago, in meetings with Benoit Panaccio [Scéno Plus’ theatre designer and project manager], together with AEG Live. We also secured feedback from tour operators to make sure that we incorporated all of the amenities they needed, including equipment load-in and adequate power distribution.”

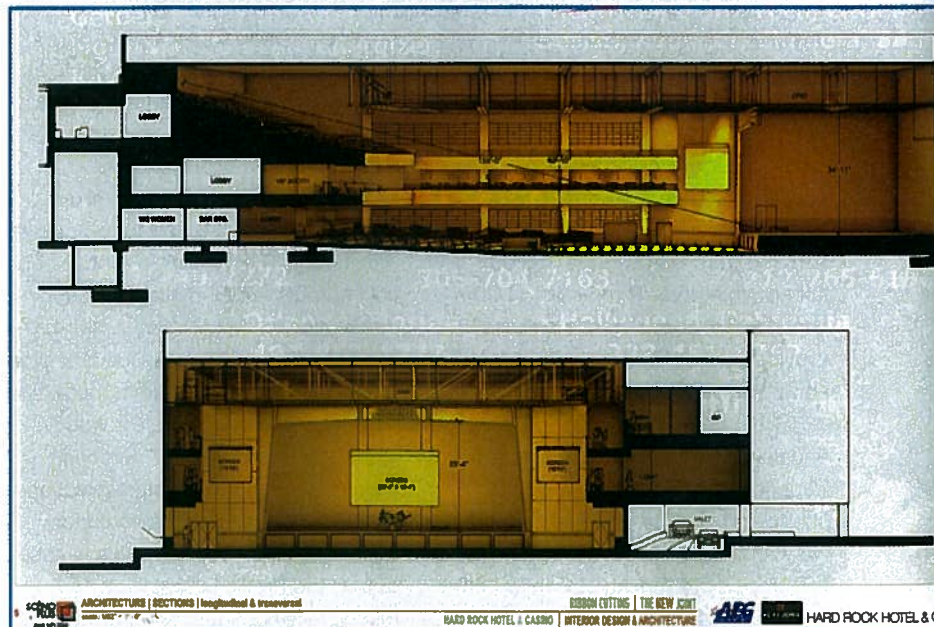
“When we first visited the [former] Joint,” recalls Panaccio, “we discussed what was wrong with the venue: poor sight lines, poor acoustic properties, a less-than-optimal sound system, and an environment that was not designed to handle a large flow of touring acts. The brief was to take the ‘essence’ of The Joint but make it larger, with improved acoustics and a more powerful sound system. Also, with such a wide selection of events to be staged at the venue, we needed to offer enhanced flexibility and transformability, a combination in which we excel.”

Founded in 1985, Scéno Plus specializes in the architectural design of cultural and recreational venues, as well as project and construction management. In addition to designing many notable theatres in Québec, the firm was responsible for the Wynn Casino Theatre in Las Vegas, Cirque du Soleil’s La Nouba Theatre in Orlando, and The Dream Factory in Warwick, U.K. Systems installation at The Joint was handled by Las Vegas-based Solotech, under the direction of

project manager Jacques Larue.

“In today’s highly competitive environment,” continues Norman Pierre, Scéno Plus’ director of specialized equipment, “a successful theatre needs to be able to accommodate a number of different events. Our definition of flexibility means that The Joint had to accommodate not only rock-‘n’-roll concerts, but also boxing matches, for example, and theatrical productions. Transformability includes the ability to make very quick turn-arounds; a venue cannot take three days to turn the room—four to five hours is the target.” The Joint will host boxing, wrestling, mixed martial arts events, corporate functions, and trade shows, as well as red-carpet movie premieres and advanced screenings.

Overall, The Joint measures 121’ wide by 155’, with a 60’ by 40’ by 4.5’ (W x D x H) stage platform and 12’ by 48’ wings at stage left and right. The stage depth is 48’, with a proscenium height of 30’ and a width between 65’ and 69’. “The height from the stage to high steel is 45,’” Smith explains, “and 34’ to low steel. Beneath the stage, Scéno Plus developed a pull-out 40’-by-8’ [motorized] drawer system on castors that houses the tables and seats we need to remove for GA events.” Load-in is via three 10’-by-15’ rollup loading dock doors equipped with two hydraulic lifts. The front-of-house audio and lighting positions are located 61’ into the audience area, with Clear-Com stations located throughout the entire back of house,



including dressing rooms, production offices, green room, meet-and-greet room, front-of-house control booth, video control room, and stage and spotlight booths.

"In terms of interior design," Panaccio recalls, "we followed the property's rock-'n'-roll theme, with guitar frets on the side walls, and vivid colors—we didn't want the space to be a dark black box. To ensure a well-controlled acoustic, we placed 2" sound-absorption material on all of the walls and ceilings; the result is an RT60 between 700 and 800mS." Approximately \$2 million, Panaccio estimates, was spent on the acoustic treatment.

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"For visiting artists, we specified four dressing rooms and a fully-equipped production office," adds Smith, "together with a green room and meet-and-greet area. We also have Wi-Fi access throughout the venue, with full blogging stations for the press covering events and shows." The new venue also features a pair of 12' x 16' motorized screens on each side of the stage, plus an 18' x 24' center screen for rear and front projection, fed from Barco HD18 18,000-lumen projectors. Three-dozen LCD and plasma video screens are also provided throughout the venue for enhanced viewing.

"Selecting a new sound system for The Joint was a complex process," Panaccio says. "According to the shape and volume of the new venue, we wanted the best audio system to fit the property." Working closely with the property's senior management and

consultants, Scéno Plus selected a d&b audiotechnik system that comprises two flown left/right line arrays, stage fills, and delay loudspeakers through the back of the venue, bar areas and lobbies.

The main arrays comprise 10 d&b audiotechnik J8 and four J12 cabinets per side, plus a dozen d&b J-SUB cardioid subwoofers. Six d&b E3 and two Q10 cabinets provide front-fills, with seven d&b E3s as under-balcony fills, six d&b E3s as under-mezzanine delay fills, and four d&b Q10s as under-balcony fills. Seven d&b E3s serve as VIP box fills, with six d&b E8s as balcony standing-area fills. EAW Sound Analysis Smart V6

software handles system equalization. Stage monitor cabinets include 14 d&b M2 and six M4 floor wedges, plus four C4 side fills per side, driven by D12 power amplifiers.

A pair of Avid Digidesign D-Show Profile digital consoles was selected for sound-mixing duties. "We have a 96-channel Profile with 16 outputs for front-of-house," explains Nick Simonds, the front-of-house mixer, "and a 32-output version for on-stage monitoring. The 16 front-of-house console outputs are all-digital ports, for connection to downstream signal-processing hardware and the loudspeaker systems, while the monitor console's outputs are analog ports, for wedges and in-ear monitors, etc." Simonds was involved in the console-selection process, and lists three favorite features/functions: "Top of my list is ease of use; the Profile is simple and fun to mix on," he confides. "The ability to

run a variety of plug-ins is very useful, since we can recall complete mix setups, including all of the processing—EQ, dynamics, ambiences, and cue balances, for example—at the touch of a button. And, to date, the system has been totally reliable—an important criteria for any live situation." Justin Willmon serves as the property's resident monitor engineer.

Four CAT-6 networks run between the various audio, video, and lighting systems. Network 1 handles the house infrastructure and office communications; Network 2 is a BSS Blue Soundweb London-based infrastructure for passing digitized audio and control data between the front-of-house console and the main PA system elements; Network 3 handles the lighting rig; and Network 4 oversees a number of Creston controllers and panels for house lighting and AV source selection, in addition to raising and lowering the main video-projection screens, and changing formats for 4:3 or 16:9. "All racks have been linked together with audio and video fibers to accommodate any future addition," says Solotech's Larue, "or to quickly interconnect with third-party systems." Two Panasonic HC1500C native-HD cameras, with pan-and-tilt remote control, can feed any video display, including projectors or LCD screens.

Joint lighting

"For lighting, we decided to retain the basic rig from the older venue, and add new fixtures to accommodate the range of events to be held at The Joint," says the venue's lighting designer, Alex Ares. An MA Lighting grandMA lighting console connects to an ETC nodes network that includes four Sensor SR48 dimmer racks—three for theatrical lighting and one for architectural lighting—plus a number of DMX plates distributed throughout the venue. The over-stage rig comprises an inner ring, augmented by front and rear trusses and stage-left-and-right arrays. Moving-light fixtures include 18 Martin MAC 2000 spots, 12 Vari*Lite VL3000 washes, 12 VL500 washes, 12 Barco/High End SHOW-



Alex Ares, the venue's lighting designer.

GUNS, and three Barco/High End DL.3 digital lights; conventional fixtures include 10 wide-lens ETC Source Four PARs, 10 medium-lens Source Four PARs, 10 narrow-lens Source Four PARs, twelve 50° Source Four Lekos, twelve 26° Source Four Lekos, twelve 19° Source Four Lekos, and 24 Philips Color Kinetics ColorBlast 12 LED units. Spots include two 1.2K Lycian II Starklites and two 2K Robert Juliat Victors. A pair of MDG Atmosphere hazers also is available.

Working with Solotech, the truss installation was overseen by Ares. New and existing equipment from High End includes the dozen Showguns, four DL.3 digital lights with a D-Tek D-Mix Pro video switcher, and two SHOWPIX pixilation luminaires, plus a Road Hog Full Boar console. "I chose the Showguns to add an edge over every house rig in Vegas," Ares confides. "They're tons of fun and their 'punch' is just awesome. After using them in the [old] Joint for a year, I can't be without them; they are a part of every design I'm doing. I also went with the DL.3s to add another dimension to my rig, and added the D-Tek switcher to give my video guy more cameras to enhance the overall customer experience. And for stability and user-friendliness, I really like the Road Hog Full Boar console."

"We added 260 rigging points in the high steel," Larue recalls. "Beam clamps with eyebolts offer a high degree of flexibility for the house systems and visiting acts." Las Vegas-based Conti Electrics served as elec-

trical contractor, handling both low-voltage and power systems.

"The stage has a full grid capable of hanging anywhere," Ares concludes. "If a tour wants to hang its own [lights], I just raise up our in-house rig. So far, every tour lighting designer is using my house rig plus their floor package."

This month, acts playing The Joint include Crue Fest 2, No Doubt, Los Lonely Boys, Kings of Leon, and Dream Theatre. There are also dates for Top Rank Boxing and World

Extreme Cagefighting. In September, Santana returns for another dozen or so dates. ■

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