

# A spotlight on Sonalyst

Kate Lyon meets the Welsh production company that has built a loyal clientele among prestigious productions and performers...



**UK** "I pulled up outside our warehouse just the other morning and, just for a moment, thought to myself: 'How did all this actually happen?'" This opening gambit reveals a good deal about Sonalyst founder, owner and managing director, Rory Madden. The engaging, genial and self-deprecating characteristics of this most welcoming of directors belie the presence of an astute and keen business intellect that has built Sonalyst into one of the premier production houses.

A resounding testament, if any is still needed, that a regional location is no barrier to commercial prosperity, Sonalyst has been based on the M4 in the South Wales steel centre of Port Talbot for well over a decade. Madden himself had already established himself as one of the most sought-after sound engineers in the business: Joe Cocker, Lionel Richie, Tina Turner, Michael Ball and the famously fickle Diana Ross are just a few of his credits. He fills in the details of the company's inception: "I suppose we began about 2004. I had been asked by a theatre producer to assess the audio system in a production they were involved in. To cut a long story down to manageable proportions, that had a very successful outcome and I was asked to do more."

He adds: "I suppose that was something of a light bulb moment. Like so many people who forge a career through touring, I was beginning to feel it was time to be able to sleep in my own bed most nights and reconnect with the real world. I began to invest in sound equipment and stored it in a small corner of the ML Executives warehouse, although it was rarely there. I am a Port Talbot lad through-and-through, so we soon relocated to an abandoned sweet factory in Bridgend as a stop-gap while searching for the better premises we now reside in.

"The business plan is, there is no business plan," he adds.

- 1 Happy staffers: (L-R) Dan Davies, (projects manager) George Pakenham (projects manager) David Holland (warehouse manager) Bob Rendall (AV department) Josh Townsend (lighting department)
- 2 Monty Pughton
- 3 Managing director Rory Madden (left), Leuan Fishburn, sound department (right)



"I really believe I've made it up as I've gone along and I believe it's all about providing the best service." For someone who purports to have "no plan", the results are about as far from shabby as you can get - the Sonalyst warehouse is a spotlessly tidy hangar-sized building that would now not be large enough to accommodate all the stock Sonalyst owns today. Madden has plans to double another unit that will double the current size behind the main property. This breaks ground this summer.

From that initial foray into audio rental, the company now boasts a full production service: the PA is predominantly Meyer Sound, recently bringing in 160 Leopard line array cabinets to join the already vast stocks of Meyer products. Madden

Hippo, Catalyst and QLabS. Truss and rigging are not forgotten - recently, over 100 sections of HUD have been added to stock along with over 200 EXE Rise motors and outboard control; standard trussing is from James Thomas but Madden uses Total Fabrication for bespoke work. The warehouse is also used for storage of set pieces from some of Sonalyst's repeating clients such as musicals *The Commitments* and *We Will Rock You*, and the *Strictly Come Dancing Live* show which has just completed its 11th year of touring (see *LSJ February 2018*), so mirror balls and sections of grand entrance staircases abound.

Since that first association with a small corner of the ML Executives warehouse, which retained in touring the *Little Britain* show, Sonalyst has become the foremost provider for comedic and one-man shows such as Ben Elton, Miranda Hart, John Bishop,

Professor Brian Cox, Bill Bailey, *Dynamo Live*, the Monty Python reunion extravaganza at the O2... the list goes on. This 'stand-up' and TV crossover type of tour has become so popular it can almost be seen as the new rock'n'roll: Sonalyst's associations within this industry have certainly been positive ones.

Madden comments: "I firmly believe you can still do business without being ruthless. I've had lots of help over the years from those whose word is their handshake: Roger Davis from Roger Davis Management, Barry and Jenny Marshall from Marshall Arts, Gary Marks from ML Executives and Phil McIntyre of Phil McIntyre. Entertainments are all people who prove that this industry still retains a genuine heart and attracts those who are passionate and enthusiastic about what they do."

To prove his point, Madden's Port Talbot workforce is a very tight-knit team, all of whom are

feature 18 life-size creatures and tour the UK, Ireland and Europe from July onward. "Shows of this nature require an altogether different set of skills than if you were delivering sound and lighting for a straightforward musical act. For something like the Monty Python show and single performers, the quality of the delivery of the spoken word and punchline is paramount. *Walking with Dinosaurs* will be a different challenge, where we are looking forward to supplying the latest and greatest lighting, sound, rigging and communications to bring the dinosaurs back to life. I can't wait!"

After so many years in the business, Madden retains a genuine enthusiasm and warmth for his craft, which is clearly shared by those around him, and one can't get away from the feeling that this may be the real reason why Sonalyst is the resounding success it's today. ●

www.sonalyst.co.uk

Send fewer emails, make more money.

With Second Warehouse, rental companies can sub-hire AV equipment in less than two minutes, keep inventory working without lifting a finger and pay nothing unless they make money. Register today for free.

It's time to open your Second Warehouse.

**second**  
warehouse

Pro AV cross-rental made easy

www.secondwarehouse.com

Terms and conditions apply, visit www.secondwarehouse.com for full details and to register.