

Flexible system design helps coliseum manage a varied event program.



Burton Coliseum, Lake Charles, LA, US

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Jason Barnes, General Manager,
Burton Coliseum Complex

Setting the scene

At just under 10,000, Burton Coliseum's capacity for concert events sits in that Goldilocks zone of being neither too big nor too small. "It's just right," says Jason Barnes, General Manager for the venue.

"We took over the management of Burton Coliseum three years ago; at the time we could see real potential for growth in the events market. This is an ideal mid-sized venue perfectly suited to having touring productions of all sorts come through."

However, since opening in 1976 Burton had struggled to achieve that ideal. "It's a large reverberant circular concrete building with a domed roof," explains Barnes. As an accomplished vocalist in his own right, Barnes knows all about challenging acoustics and the limitations they pose.

Establishing objectives

"Just as we took over management Lake Charles was lucky enough to have an American Idol finalist and we needed to stage a homecoming event. It was huge for us; we invited all the VIP officials and elected officials from the Southwest Louisiana region and trucked in a lot of production.

"Even so - and by pure coincidence because we weren't yet fully familiar with the venue - where we had placed the VIPs had the best view, but happened to be the worst seats in the house acoustically. They just couldn't hear anything clearly. To their credit they saw the problem for what it was and enlightened by the experience, wanted us, as a priority, to find a solution."

"Using a simple graphic of the arena they can just touch and mute the zones that are unseated."

Jacob Porche, Porche Advanced Systems

The solution

Barnes and his team assembled a brief that insisted upon 'a crisp clear sound throughout the venue'. "It also needed to be tonally sweet, rich and full spectrum. We didn't just want clarity, we wanted the solution to be musical."

Barnes contacted several different sound experts throughout the venue industry. "One in particular stood out, making a powerful and persuasive argument that we should consider a company called d&b. We'd never heard of them, 'dianbe who?' I asked."

Once Barnes had apprehended it was d&b audiotechnik, a German manufacturer, he talked to other venues that already had such a system. "We quickly realized just how wonderful a d&b system could be. They loved it. But we had other important considerations; if we hadn't heard of it what was its reputation in the touring world?"

"Further investigation provided a response so strong that it more or less made our minds up. Porche Advanced Systems, who ultimately provided and installed the system we now have, presented a demonstration of the d&b Y-Series - the solution they proposed - and it sounded excellent."

Jacob (Jake) Porche defines his design approach. "They wanted to have something good enough that they could stage their own concert level presentations, and something that would make their venue first choice for staging such shows in Lake Charles. The acoustic is not terrible; the domed roof had some baffles fitted a few years ago, but the walls and flat surfaces away from the seated areas are all pretty reflective. Bad, but better than it could have been."

"The system we installed is directive; the Y-Series line array is small and powerful, and performs very accurately to the published specification - a critical factor if we were to tame that reverb'. The design is segmented into five zones; although the building is circular the arena is slightly oval, so the zones are north, east, south and west, with the fifth zone on the floor for full seated events."

"The floor is covered by the d&b Yi7P point source cabinets. Two hangs of J-Series cardioid subs facing east and west put maximum direct L/F energy into the two largest seating areas. The whole system is powered by a mix of d&b 30D and D80 amplifiers; the D80 provides a little more oomph in the Ys - the 30Ds run the subs."

Touring concerts aside, there are already more than seventy regular scheduled events staged at the coliseum each year including festivals, sporting events, rodeos, and not least the annual graduation ceremony for McNeese State University.

"That's what sets Jake apart; his company approach is very collaborative. When we spoke to him about managing all these different event styles and ways of formatting the room he provided a range of alternatives with a good rationale beneath each suggestion."

Porche settled on a Symmetrix solution: "We set up a custom d&b R1 Remote network file for them so they can mute any section of the system depending on seat configuration, and then added a Symmetrix DSP interface. Using a simple graphic of the arena they can just touch and mute the zones that are unseated. With access to R1 they have complete control when they want it, but there is a 'nanny setting' limited to adjustment of level only."

Barnes is in no doubt the new system will prove a valuable asset for the coliseum. "The credo of our agency as a venue management company, is 'to exceed expectation'. We do not settle for 'that will do'. If it's affordable we always go for the highest quality and this system was entirely affordable. Downstream that approach always pays dividends, you don't then find yourself stealing other bits of budget in the future for making up the gaps in a cheap deal. Porche delivered an impeccable installation job and the Y system has already exceeded our expectations."

> System: Yi7P, Yi8, Yi12, J-SUB and 30D, D80