

Mobile Church Audio

Good Things in Small Packages

Mobile Audio has become increasingly popular in the church market. With new technology creating better and smaller packages, quality, state of the art studios can pull right up to the church door via mobile audio.

A company in the forefront of mobile audio is A.S.L. (Aura Sonic LTD.) of Flushing, N.Y. Steve Remote (yes, that's his real name!) is the owner, operator and creator of this amazing 30 foot truck, that has more equipment in it than most trucks twice its size.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Steve began his business 16 years ago when a friend asked him to engineer and produce a local band. Steve however, thought it would be wiser to buy some recording equipment and build a studio so they could produce as many bands as they wanted. Not content with operating a conventional recording studio, Steve decided to create a studio on wheels so they could go to the client instead of the client going to them. Steve's friend bought the idea and not too long after they purchased a used Con Edison truck for \$ 770.00 and began to build. The first year was one of growth both in business and experience. Much of what Steve learned about audio did not come through formal training but through hands on experience and reading a particular audio magazine - any clue as to which one that might have been? Steve said that

db Magazine helped him learn from the big guys. Reading articles about what they were doing, what equipment they used and what resources were available, helped Steve to directly apply their knowledge to his work. Well, it must have paid off because by the end of the first year of business, Steve had the money to redesign and update his truck. A prominent producer also made some suggestions as how to better utilize the truck's space and Steve implemented them. His motto was (and still is) "continue to update and improve so as to best serve the client's needs".

STAYING CURRENT

Through the years, with Steve's foresight, A.S.L. has been at the forefront of audio's latest technology. A.S.L.'s most recent purchases

are six Tascam DA-88 8 track digital hi-8 machines, providing 48 tracks of digital recording (Figure 1). Steve points out that the DA-88s have many advantages, the first being expandability. No longer do you have to sell one machine and buy another to update to a machine with more tracks. If the project grows, just add another machine. Up to 16 machines can be linked together without syncing problems, providing 128 tracks of recording. Another advantage is size. When you're dealing with limited space like a truck, you want to make every cubic inch count. The DA-88s are about one fourth the size of an analog 8 track machine enabling you to hop on a plane with two DA-88s, a mixer and a pair of his Genelec (powered) speakers

Figure 1. One of the six Tascam DA-88s that are located in the truck. Linked together these provide 48 tracks of digital audio.



Joe Ciccarello is the Music Director for a 500-member church, the Christen Victory Center in Hempstead NY. He has a Masters of Art in Communication from Regent University.

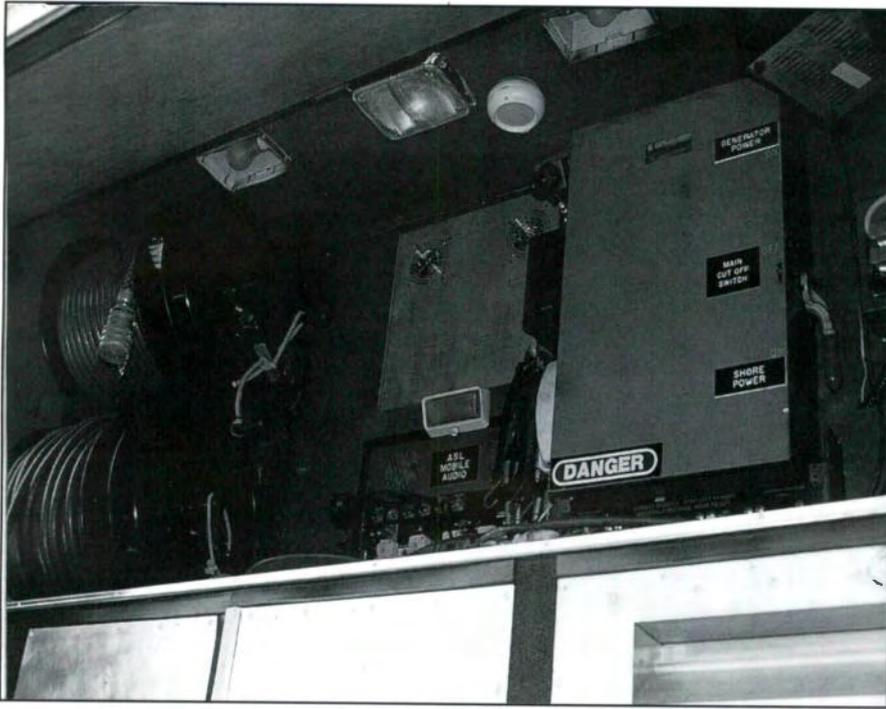


Figure 2. In the rear of the truck as the customized bi folding doors are opened, we find to our left, two 250 foot reels of cable nestled against the power supplies.

and do a session just about anywhere.

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE CHURCH

Churches, independent gospel producers and record companies supply A.S.L. with a healthy amount of business throughout the year. Unlike secular clients, churches have unique requirements when undertaking a recording project. It has been said, "You

Figure 3. Steve Remote sits along side of air ducts that are within reach for future hook up for the truck's rear extension



can take the studio to the church but you can't take the church to the studio". Steve's experience has shown him that there is a special vibe or feel in churches that would get lost in the recording studio environment. Many church musicians and singers are often uncomfortable and intimidated in the unfamiliar setting of a studio. Also certain instruments, especially organs, which are so important to gospel music are difficult and in some cases impossible to transport into a studio. Then there's the natural acoustics of some churches and cathedrals that cannot be duplicated in any studio. All of these disadvantages add up to the popularity of mobile audio in church recordings. Steve described a recent scenario that illustrates how the best of both worlds can be achieved through mobile recording in the church. A church was preparing to record a CD. Members of the congregation who were involved with audio asked Steve what they could do to make their church acoustically sound in order to attain studio results. Steve suggested (among other things) the use of baffles to produce isolation between the different sections of the band and choir. Upon his next visit he not only found sturdy customized baffles but ones that were aesthetically pleasing made from clear Lexan plastic in order to facilitate visual contact between the music director and the entire choir and band. The end result was a recording that was studio quality, yet recorded totally within the confines and comforts of the church.

OUTSIDE IN

To really appreciate what's inside of the A.S.L. 'Super truck' we'll take a look at it from the outside in. In the rear of the truck as the customized bi folding doors are opened, we find to our left, (Figure 2) two 250 foot reels of cable. Each cable equipped to carry 52 channels with a multi pin connector at each end. These cables are connected by two snakes within the venue making available 104 separate inputs into the truck. In the center of the rear of the truck are eight individual video lines, five phone lines, two of which are cellular, numerous studio stereo feeds



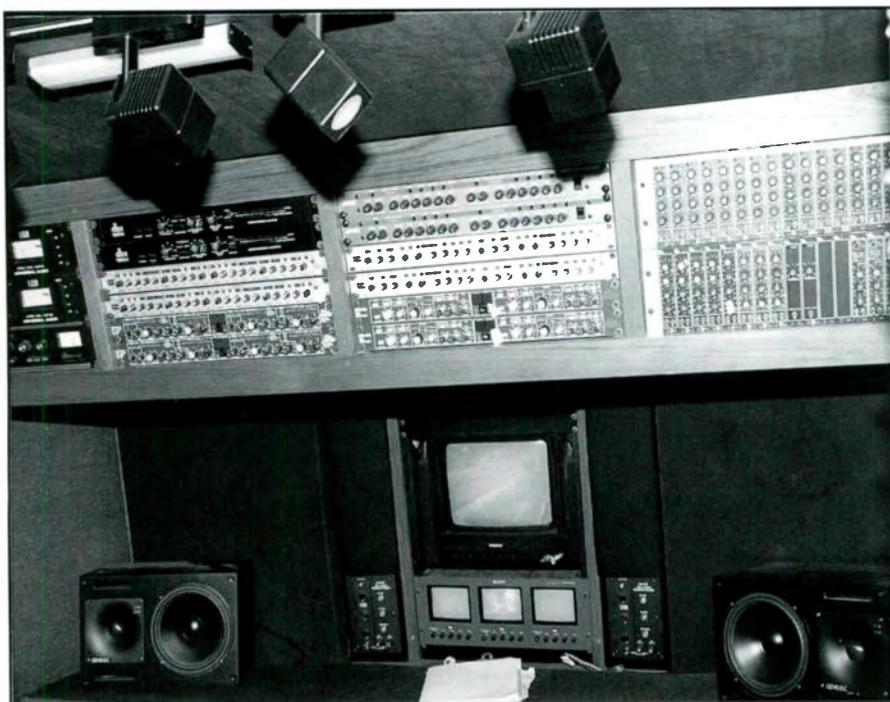
Figure 4. The dominant feature at the front of the room is the 36 channel Harrison MR-4 console.

and four different communication systems; ClearCom, which is used by most sound companies, RTS, which is used by most video companies, KS Audio which is A.S.L.'s own system and an auxiliary system. Finally to the right are the power hook ups; Shore power which is Navy terminology for land

power or power that's taken from the venue and Generator power.

Steve has plans to enclose this entire area with a canopy so work can be done out there in all kinds of weather. Even air ducts are within reach for future hook up for the truck's rear extension (Figure 3). A common problem for trucks of this

Figure 5. Above the monitors are a host of compressors and noise gates which are positioned above the console for easy access.



type occurs when repairs have to be made on equipment and accessibility is difficult. Steve however, had enough foresight to design his vehicle with rear entry doors that make all the equipment accessible so that repairs can be made quickly and without pulling apart the inside of the truck.

INSIDE

Upon entering the air conditioned control room of the A.S.L. truck, I was surprised how uncluttered the 17 x 7 1/2 room appeared. The dominant feature at the front of the room is the 36 channel Harrison MR-4 console (Figure 4). Above and slightly angled back are the reverb units which are fed into a Roland M-160 line mixer. Sitting atop the console are a pair of Genelec 1031A powered monitors and directly behind them are a pair of UREI 813s. In the center of the wall are seven video monitors. During an event these monitors can be connected to various video feeds and cameras including a camera that can turn 360 degrees, operated by a joy stick. Above the monitors are a host of compressors and noise gates which are positioned above the console for easy access (Figure 5) while other out-board gear such as EQs, space echos and other gadgets which don't require constant attention are positioned on the rear wall (Figure 6). Below are two Otari MTR 90 24 tracks. These machines are connected to the inputs of the board with Elco multi pins so all 24 track can be plugged and unplugged with one connection (see Figure 6 above Steve's left arm). Steve takes great care in making backups for much of what he works on. When making a digital audio tape master, he doesn't just make one master but two and therefore owns two Sony DTC 1000ES digital audio tape decks as well as two additional ones by Panasonic. In his own words, "backups to me are paramount even for the client who doesn't know better".

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

If there is one thing that impressed me about Steve is that he is a man with vision. He loves his

Figure 6. Steve Remote sits among the outboard gear such as EQs, space echoes and other gadgets which don't require constant attention and so are positioned on the rear wall.



work and appears to be challenged by his limitation of space. His future plans include the possible purchase of a digitally controlled analog console which would be able to take snapshots of numerous different mixes.

The big payoff however would be the increase in the amount of tracks. Where 36 tracks now exist in a 7 1/2 foot space, the new console would provide 96! Sixty more tracks in the same amount of space.

Where will Steve be ten years from now?

Who knows, he may pull up to your church to record your latest CD in a fully equipped, state of the art Geo Metro. db

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