

## CLOSE-UP: INSTALLATION

Copyright Lighting&Sound America

December 2024 complete issue: <https://link.lsamedia.com/dec2024>

# Making Music in Woodstock

By: David Barbour



The theatre opened in 1989, renovated from an 18th-century Dutch barn and designed by John Storyk, of Walters-Storyk Design Group. The event production company G4D Productions, led by Jon Dindas, was instrumental in the renovation, specifying the sound system. Lighting was specified by Christopher Ragan, of Movingbeam Productions.

## The Bearsville Theater gears up for a new era

In the music and countercultural mecca of Woodstock, New York, the Bearsville Theater is a key destination. It is part of the Bearsville Center, built by Albert Grossman, who, in the course of a storied career, managed an impossibly starry lineup of artists that included Bob Dylan; Janis Joplin; Peter, Paul, and Mary; The Band; Odetta; and Gordon Lightfoot. The Bearsville complex included cabins, a record label, and a recording studio that hosted The Rolling Stones, REM,

Muddy Waters, and The Pretenders. Today, it comprises two restaurants; a café and bar; residences; Utopia Studios, designed in 1979 for Todd Rundgren; and the Bearsville Theater. (Grossman, who died at the age of 59, is buried on the property.)

The theatre opened in 1989, renovated from an 18th-century Dutch barn and designed by John Storyk, of Walters-Storyk Design Group. It went dark in recent years until Lizzie Vann purchased and restored the property in 2019. It entered a new chapter in

June when it was taken over by Dayglo Presents concert promoter and multi-venue proprietor Peter Shapiro, well-known for New York City's Wetlands and The Capitol Theatre in Port Chester, New York.

"I have led the creation of new concepts and built great venues from scratch like Brooklyn Bowl, but I've also been fortunate to breathe new life into some historic venues, like Wetlands and The Capitol Theatre," Shapiro said when the purchase was announced. "The Bearsville Theater has a deep and amazing history that I am excited to preserve and lift as we put our touch on a new era for this

All photos: Courtesy of Meyer Sound

legendary Woodstock icon.”

“The performance space was built to be acoustically perfect,” Shapiro explains, speaking a few months later. “But it never had a perfect sound system. When I was fortunate enough to take it over, there was only one plan, really, which was to put in the best sound in the world; the theatre deserved it. So, we reached out to Meyer Sound.”

The event production company G4D Productions, led by Jon Dindas, was instrumental in the renovation. G4D has partnered with Dayglo to build or renovate numerous venues, including various editions of Brooklyn Bowl. Dindas’ connection to Woodstock dates back decades, to his work with Levon Helm at his legendary Woodstock studio complex, The Barn.

Dindas says that while acoustically pristine, the intimate 500-capacity venue presents some sound reinforcement challenges, with an asymmetrical space featuring a bar along one side



“When we were doing sound checking and I was up in the balcony, or sitting in the fourth row, I really got that living room sound, which I think, more often than not, is what’s going to be performed here,” Dindas says. “Whatever you loved about the room, about its vibe, is still going to be there. But now it’s just going to sound better.”

wall and a steep balcony. “The concert area is in front of the stage, and it’s

not very big,” he explains. “On the left side is this area not directly attacked



The lighting package includes Martin Allure Profiles, Elation ZW19 LEDs, and from Robe, LEDBeam 150 multisource moving units and ParFect 150 LEDs. An existing set of ADJ Ultra Hex Bar 12s is used to highlight the barn structure.



The new Meyer Sound system is centered around a pair of UPQ-D1 wide-coverage full-size loudspeakers soffit-mounted at stage left and right. The system is supported by 2100-LFC low-frequency control elements and ULTRA-X20 compact wide-coverage loudspeaker front fills and delays and is managed by a Galileo GALAXY 408 Network Platform.

by the mains. For me, it was about balance and making sure that immediacy, the in-your-face clarity, was going to be the same whether you're seated in the third row, whether you're standing for a rock show, whether you're back up in this severely raked balcony, or if you're over to the side; that there are no dead spots."

The new Meyer Sound system, installed by Masque Sound's Anthony Nittoli, Dave Francisco, Matt Garvey, and Leigh Pietz with support from Meyer Sound technical design and services specialist Brian Bolly, is centered around a pair of UPQ-D1 wide-coverage full-size loudspeakers soffit-mounted at stage left and right. The system is supported by 2100-LFC

low-frequency control elements and ULTRA-X20 compact wide-coverage loudspeaker front fills and delays and is managed by a Galileo GALAXY 408 Network Platform. The system also uses MJF high-power stage monitors. (A Dolby Atmos speaker system, used for film screenings, is available for immersive music performances.)

"We're not hanging a line array," Dindas explains. "They gave me array renderings and it just didn't feel like the Bearsville Theater. So, we went with cabinets set into the wood. I think it feels right in terms of the aesthetic. And it sounds great."

Dindas adds that the wide-coverage UPQ-D1 loudspeakers, with their 80°-by-50° pattern, provide uniform

coverage over a broad listening area. "You have the seated or the standing room right in front of you, but then you have the stage right area," he explains. "So having the wideness of those boxes was really great for the room. There were dead spots in the past, which the UPQs have addressed."

A pair of 2100-LFC low-frequency control elements, positioned under the lip of the deck, bring low-end clarity. "For the most part, we're not going to be shaking the room," Dindas says. "Not everyone has a subtle sub. Everybody has something that can push a lot of air, but something that can make you feel like you're sitting in your living room with a really good sound system, that's a treat. And

that's what these subs sound like.

"The coverage, pre-Meyer Sound to now, is really night and day in every point of the room," Dindas continues. "When we were doing sound checking and I was up in the balcony, or sitting in the fourth row, I really got that living room sound, which I think, more often than not, is what's going to be performed here. Whatever you loved about the room, about its vibe, is still going to be there. But now it's just going to sound better."

Overall, Dindas says, the project "was an upgrade in equipment a little bit of tuning of the room. It was always a good-sounding room. It's wood and not that big; it would be hard to make it sound terrible. But people I know who went to the last shows before we went in, and who went after, said that the difference is really night and day."

## Lighting

The lighting package was supplied by Christopher Ragan, founder of the firm Movingbeam Productions. "I've lived around this area for a long time," he says, adding that before checking out the venue with Shapiro he hadn't been in it for a quarter of a century. "It has gone through different changes," he says. Coming in late as the theatre was getting ready to re-open, he oversaw an overhaul of the lighting system, putting in a modestly

sized moving light component. "We put in eight Martin Allure Profiles," Ragan says, referring to a refurbished unit billed as having a novel RGBW light engine with seven-segmented beam control. It is also notably compact, making it a good choice for this intimate venue. Also in the rig is a set of Elation ZW19 LED beam/wash effect units featuring nineteen 10W RGBW four-in-one LEDs. Again, the units are relatively small, an important consideration here. Completing the lineup are, from Robe, LEDBeam 150 multisource moving units and ParFect 150 LED source ACL lights. In the rig's earlier iteration, Ragan found a set of ADJ Ultra Hex Bar 12s hung from the rafters for wash lighting. Repurposing these and purchasing additional units, he says, "They now light up the interior architecture, like the barn's rafters. People really dig looking at that." Lighting is controlled by an MA Lighting grandMA2 Command Wing. He adds, "Peter loves mirrorballs, so we have a nice big one in the main room and a couple more out in the bar."

On June 1, Don Was and The Pan-Detroit Ensemble performed the first show in the new theatre. "There is an incredible intimacy between the people on the stage and the people in the audience," says Was. "The sound system is incredible. I actually can't think

of a comparable room." Ragan, who, as part of his contract, agreed to run the first few shows, says, "It was unbelievable. He had some of the finest session musicians onstage, and they blew the roof off. Everybody I've talked to who has played there loves the sound of that stage. I was on a flight to Chicago for a gig. The keyboard player from Joe Russo's Almost Dead was on my flight; it's a Grateful Dead tribute band and they sell out amphitheatres. We were chatting and [talking about Bearsville], he said, 'That sound in that building! I've played all these places around the world, and I just yearn to go back there'."

Eclecticism is the key to the venue. As we go to press, the acts booked to play Bearsville Theater include the alternative country band Puss n Boots, the folk/rock/Americana duo Bob Schneider and Steve Poltz, the alt-rock/indie-pop band Rubblebucket, the Grammy Award-winning reggae group Black Uhuru, and Marky Ramone's *Holiday Blitzkrieg*.

"I believe that the Bearsville Theater now has the preeminent sound of any comparable venue of its size in America," says Shapiro. "It was built to be acoustically perfect, and now it has the acoustically perfect sound system. It's extraordinary." 📶