

# Talking Pictures

The first Meyer Sound EXP cinema system has arrived in an Asian cinema. But what inspired the manufacturer to address the movie industry? **Barney Jameson** talks to John Meyer

**MEGABOX'S KINTEX** near Seoul in Korea has become the first cinema in Asia to fit a Meyer Sound EXP system, in the process joining an elite club of venues in Europe and North America to install the solution. EXP is Meyer's first product range created exclusively

for the cinema market, and with a concept of 'providing sound on par with high-quality digital projection systems' it has set itself some lofty goals. But for those who are familiar with the engineering mind of John Meyer, that's no surprise at all.

'I've been interested in cinema since I was a kid – my uncle did the sound for Walt Disney,' he explains. 'I always thought that what we were learning to do in our world of touring sound would be interesting in terms of cinema and pictures.'

'But cinema systems have evolved into their own flavour. The trick was to design a system, or a line of products, that film people would be happy with. It's their world – you can't come from another place and say that they are doing this all wrong.'

Herein lies the origin of Meyer Sound's cinema offering, a development process that has seen the manufacturer apply the same philosophy that John Meyer the engineer brings to every challenge he sets himself – just reproduce what's already there. 'What's our role? We want to bring something in, not to make their movies more successful, but to make them more flexible,' he explains.



Meyer Sound's Helen and John Meyer



Meyer Sound EXP Acheron cinema sound loudspeakers

Developing the Acheron enclosures was, therefore, a remarkably collaborative process in which Mr Meyer and his team sought out the best of Hollywood's audio fraternity in the search for the ideal cinema system. Fortunately, he didn't have to look far – Meyer Sound headquarters is based in Berkeley, California, a mere 40 minutes away from industry powerhouse Skywalker Sound.

'We took their screen down and we put our system up, which at that time was basically the first prototype Acheron,' recalls Mr Meyer. 'I explained that what I really wanted to know was if they played their movie on our system, would they be

okay with it? If they went to a movie theatre and that's what we put in, how would they feel about it? That's all I care about. We wanted to make sure that our idea was going to work for their movies.'

There is an admirable pragmatism in this approach that Meyer Sound aficionados will recognise, and at its heart is the fact the Mr Meyer takes no interest in what is being played through his loudspeakers, only that it is reproduced with precision.

To help make the point, he calls to mind an old anecdote relating to his seminal work with the Grateful Dead, so many years ago. 'I once got a tape from Jerry Garcia,' he explains, 'and

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**Clockwise: Views from inside the Kintex Megabox 'M' screen**



it sounded like he had an illness. He had this tremor in his voice. He said he took out the hiss from the recording, and I told him that he'd damaged the recording. It's all one structure, like film and grain – they're intertwined. You take out the grain, and you've got no picture.' Similarly, the concept of building a cinema sound system that attempts to make a film better is anathema to Mr Meyer. The EXP range is something very different – a tool to help show more of what's already there.

Of course, none of this means that Meyer Sound wasn't willing to bring a little of its experience from tour sound to that early development process with Skywalker Sound, particularly as regards coverage.

'They liked our coverage,' Mr Meyer confirms. 'We worked out these new horns so we covered every seat in the room. We're used to that, in the PA world, at looking at all the seats.'

It was only the beginning of the process, however. 'We went back and forth about what they liked about their system, and we started thinking about what we could do. Right away they wanted some variation. The first horn we built was 100-degree, and they wanted 80-degrees for smaller rooms. In the PA world, we don't change things that much, it's more of a permanent thing, but they wanted to be able to experiment.'

Experiment they did, a process that still clearly fascinates Mr Meyer. 'They use the word 'translation' a lot,' he enthuses. 'They ask 'how does it translate from one space to another?' and they'll mix in a small room, then the big room, and make sure it translates to a big space. So during the process we had two areas set-up – one in our own Pearson theatre in Berkeley, a smaller room with smaller power, and one at Skywalker. The idea was that the sound level measured in the middle of the room, or two-thirds back, would be exactly the same in both places.'

'But there were all these discussions about how rooms should have a different level, all these different ideas. I said let's just start at the same level, not bring baggage from the past. I like to keep things simple. It's one thing to work on one theatre, but to do 20,000 would not

work. It has to be really simple and very straightforward.'

Eventually, the development process for the Meyer Sound cinema project reached a natural conclusion not because Mr Meyer himself declared it finished, but because it received the endorsement of precisely the kind of Hollywood luminary the company was hoping to impress. His name was Richard King, the Academy Award-winning sound designer behind a string of blockbuster movies including *Inception* and the movie he sat down to watch in the Pearson theatre, the Russell Crowe seafaring epic *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*. The new cinema system was in for the ultimate test.

'He asked me what would happen if he didn't like it,' Mr Meyer recalls. His answer was, again, pragmatic. 'I said, 'If not then we'll find out why!' We'll do this over and over and over – we're engineers, life is very simple for us. And if you do like it, then we're done!' Suffice to say, Mr King liked the system so much that the screening earned the loudspeakers their name – Acheron is the name of the ship in the movie.

Since then the EXP range has steadily built momentum throughout North America and Europe, a trend that the manufacturer is seeking to recreate in Asia following the installation at Kintex's Megabox.

The system – located within the premium 'M' screen, complete with luxury seating, a 19m wide screen, and 4K projection – comprises Acheron 80 and Acheron 100 enclosures supplemented by Acheron LF low frequency loudspeakers and X-800C subwoofers. Eighteen HMS-10 surround loudspeakers are also included, while the system is optimised via a Galileo 616 processor. Meyer Sound consultant Dave Dennison designed the system, calibrating it with the SIM 3 audio analyser. In the fast-growing and super-competitive Korean cinema market, it is the kind of installation that rival theatre-operators and audiences alike can't help but notice.

Not that Mr Meyer is concerned, as long as the loudspeakers do their job. 'We're not here to make the film better, bigger or more impressive – that's not our job,' he declares. 'We don't want to be in the way, we don't want to be part of the creative process. All we want to do is reproduce it so we can build these rooms over and over and over again.'

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## British artists use Allen & Heath iLive consoles in Jakarta

**INDONESIA:** Allen & Heath iLive consoles were recently used in Jakarta for a concert starring renowned Britpop acts Ian Brown and Kula Shaker, who performed at the LAP ABC Senayan venue. The desks were employed on both front of house and monitors.

The monitor engineers for the concert, which was part of a 14 date tour of Asia, were offered the choice of an analogue ML5000 desk or an iLive system comprising an iDR-48 MixRack and iLive-T112 control surface.

According to Kula Shaker engineer and production manager Mike Taylor, the iLive was selected because he was 'able to build a show and lay out - including all the FX and dynamics - on the plane on the way there. Once



**The iLive consoles used for Ian Brown and Kula Shaker**

we were on site I was able to quickly ring out my wedges with the aid of the backline tech.'

Mr Taylor added: 'The effects are amazing and the compressors

are very musical. iLive has great operating software, high quality sound, and an easy to operate layout.'

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