

Don McLean's Guitar and Stage Setup

Ron Buck submitted the following posting to the Guitarists forum at www.don-mclean.com. Beneath you will find the hoped for, but not expected, reply from Don McLean. Don also sent us his technical rider for concerts. This is therefore a unique and most interesting document for Don McLean fans.

Does any "Guitar Anorak" out there know what Don's "Stage Rig" consists of, i.e. what technical gear he uses to perform with?

Don used to use a real "purist" approach, with just a mic to amplify his Martin Guitar (What type of Mic, Shure, AKG?) But now he has followed the "unplugged(!)" route of some kind of pickup system, i.e. he has a cable from his Guitar!

When I was lucky enough to attend "the" soundcheck at the Hammersmith Apollo in June last year I noticed that Don brought his own vocal Mic and that his Guitar lead had an unusual module close to where it went into the Guitar itself. The lead then went to a "grey" box on the floor next to him with a few control knobs on it, which he fiddle with a fair bit during the set-up (but not the sound-check itself). I didn't recognise this Rig, and as an "unplugged" Guitarist myself I know most of them by heart.

I'm curious because the sound was magnificent, quite unlike any other pick-up I've ever heard before or since, especially at concert volume. It would be interesting to also know where he routes the Guitar signal too, i.e. delay or reverb units etc. On a more mundane note, does anyone know what type and grade of plectrum, finger-picks, thumb-pick and capo our man uses?

(I know he used to advertise and recommend Labella brand phosphor-bronze strings, but does he use them now?)

Perhaps Alan can ask Don for us? (I thought about doing that myself when in his company at the aforementioned sound-check, but I figured the last thing he needed at that stage of his jet-leg was some bloke he didn't know from Adam getting all "techy" with him about Guitar cables!.

Ron Buck

Here is Don McLean's reply:

February 11, 2001

Dear Alan:

Here are some answers about my guitar set up to questions posed by Ron Buck:

I do not use a microphone to acoustically mike my guitar as I once did, even though you now see a wire coming from my guitar, because I have decided to go "direct", I always used a radio system since 1986 which

had no wire but which electrified the guitar nonetheless. I found this system to be unreliable since we would pick up other frequencies on the radio sometimes. I dispensed with a guitar microphone when I went direct because it just caused feedback and I had all the signal I needed through the wire. There are a variety of reasons why the guitar sounds as good as it does and I have worked very hard over the years perfecting that sound.

- 1) My guitar is chosen, and in the case of the Don McLean Martin created, for maximum acoustic tone from bass to treble. There are very few guitars like this and I am expert in selecting the ones that have this sound. I insisted on the finest spruce top that Martin has for my Don McLean Martin because it will produce this kind of volume and clarity. In addition I have the slot that holds the bone saddle in the bridge made almost double width and the saddle is double width so that there is extra bone contact with the thin line pick up that is under it which I employ.
- 2) The wire I use is called Ripchord Guitar by Mit. It was suggested by Ralph Childs and is the best guitar chord I have ever used. The modules at either end which Ron noticed have some kind of chemical in them but in any case the wire produces much more sound and signal than any other wire. I carry eight-foot wire since I don't go far from the microphone.
- 3) I use Countryman direct box which is the best direct box I have ever found. I carry one of these as well.
- 4) I use for my voice an Electro Voice 957. This is their top-of-the-line vocal microphone and I have found that very few sound companies carry it and that when it is used it improves the sound of my voice enormously in almost all cases.
- 5) I have used since 1980 exclusively LaBella acoustic guitar phosphor Bronze guitar strings which are custom wound for me. They are made by LaBella of Newburgh, New

York and they are the finest string I have ever used. In addition they are a family owned business that made hand-made strings for over 120 musical instruments. I urge any fan to visit their facility. It is very interesting. Bob Archigian has kept me in strings for 21 years. Their address is 256 Broadway, Newburgh N.Y. 12550. Phone number 1 800 750 3034. Fax: 845-562-4491

- 6) I try to keep the guitar sound as natural as possible and do not require or ask for any delay or reverb. Occasionally I will ask for reverb on my voice if the hall sounds really "dead".
- 7) I use National finger picks which I understand are not in business anymore. I bought two boxes of these picks in the '70s and I still have plenty of them. They are the kind made with nickel silver with holes in them. I use medium 3-corner plectrum with my logo embossed on it custom-made for me through Northern Kingdom Music, Route 1, Rockport, Maine 04856. Phone number is 207 236-8721. They order these picks for me and also install the electronics in my guitars so if you have questions you can call there and ask for Elwood. I use Dobro thumb picks, large, in different colors and all my guitar work is done by Ron Pinkham at Woodsound Studios, Maine.

I hope this is helpful.

Sincerely
Don McLean

Don McLean: Technical Specification for concert venues

Don McLean

Technical Section

Purchaser agrees to furnish at his sole expense a professional sound system and all necessary operators/riggers to suit venue. Because the following are minimum requirements and because acceptable substitutions are listed, we request that the following technical requirements be firmly adhered to. In the event that a technical director is replaced prior to performance, it shall be the Purchaser's obligation to see to it that he is informed of all pertinent information:

1. **SOUND SYSTEM**
 - a. JBL, EAW, Apogee Sound, Inc., Ramma, Meyer or equivalent (3 or 4 way stereo) full range active system sufficient to provide clean, undistorted reinforcement to entire audience seating area (due to the dynamics of the show the system must be silent running).
 - b. Mixing console (minimum 12 channel with phantom power)
 - c. 2 - 1/3 octave graphic equalizers
 - d. 1 - Quality digital reverb - Rev7/AMS (or equivalent) - for vocal
 - e. Crossovers to suit system
2. **MONITOR SYSTEM**
 - a. Monitor run and console on stage
 - b. 8 - JBL, Meyer, EAW, Apogee Sound, Inc., Ramma or Meyer low profile wedges (15' & horn) plus 2 SIDE FILL CABINETS (not shown on stage plan - will advise at sound check)
 - c. 5 - Sends with 1/3 octave graphic on each send
 - d. Send 1 - Don front wedges, Send 2 - Don side wedges, Send 3 - electric bass wedge, Send 4 - keyboard wedge, Send 5 - drum wedge
3. **STAGING**
 - a. 4 - Tall mike stands with boom arms
 - b. 1 - Short mike stand with boom arms
 - c. 6 - Direct feed boxes (DI's)
 - d. 1 - Shure J7 microphone (for bass amp)
 - e. 1 - Audix DM3 or Shure Beta (for background vocal)
 - f. 2 - Condenser mics - Audix SCX or AKG (for piano)
 - g. 1 - BV857 (for lead vocal back-up mic)
4. **EQUIPMENT**
 - a. 1 - Takamine Acoustic/Electric guitar: model EP 340 or FP 340S or comparable guitar, as spare guitar, at buyer's rental expense
 - b. 1 - Grand piano tuned on play date at Purchaser's expense (NO UPRIGHT PIANOS - GRAND PIANO ONLY)
 - c. Keyboard controller consisting of: 88 weighted keys, midi capable. Order of preference is: 1) Alesis QS-8 2) Kurzweil PC88, 3) Roland (NO YAMAHA KX28)
 - d. 4 - Spectraflex or Monster 1/4" guitar cables
 - e. 1 - High quality bass amp. - EB: Ampeg SVT, Hartke with four (4) 10" speakers, I/WR, Truce Electric, etc... Countryman DI, 3' cable, and 15' cable
 - f. 1 - Complete Pearl drum kit (drummer is Pearl endorser) Bass Drum: 22" / Toms: 12", 13", 16"
 - g. Snare: 5x14 / Cymbals: 22" ride, 17" & 18" crash, 14" high hat (drummer prefers Paiste) Plexiglass baffling needed only if strings or symphony case
 - h. 1 - high quality guitar amp - Fender Twin, Music Man
5. **LIGHTING**
 - 1 - Follow spot operator and riggers, as required by the house lighting system. Artist's set list changes nightly. Lighting Director is to create effective lighting to suit the mood of the songs.

6. LABOR

Purchaser agrees to provide 2 stagehands/loaders for SETUP and BREAKDOWN of all equipment furnished by Don McLean or furnished by the Purchaser as per this rider.

7. STAGE PLAN

<u>CHANNEL</u>	<u>MICROPHONE</u>	<u>STAND</u>	<u>MONITOR MIX</u>
1. Don - vocal own	(EV857)	Tall Boom	1,3,4,5
2. Don - Guitar	DI #1	DI #1	1,2,3,4,5
3. Back up vocal	Beta 58	Tall Boom	3
4. Bass Amp	DI #2		2,4,5
5 & 6 Grand Piano	Condenser mic, Audix or AKG	2 Tall Booms	2,3,4,5
7 & 8 Keyboard controller	2 DI's (#3 & 4)		2,3,4,5
9 & 10 Synthesizer Module (own)	2 DI's (#5 & 6)		2,3,4,5
11 - 16	snare mic	Boom	1,2,4,5,6,7,8
	hi-hat	Boom	
	kick	Short	
	toms 1, 2, & 3	2 or 3 Booms	

The above channels are to be used for Don McLean only - support acts must be assigned alternative channels, no system EQ. Adjustments are to be made after sound check.

Please have a roll of white, masking tape for marking console and fader settings, and one roll of black gaffer's tape as needed.

8. PERSONNEL

Don McLean carries 4 Musicians in addition to himself: Elec. Guitar, Elec. Bass, Piano/Synth and Drums. In addition, Mr. McLean plays acoustic guitar which is amplified. Please have any and all necessary tools for the proper servicing of equipment, as well as back up equipment, should there be failures at sound check. As well, please have at the ready, replacement equipment, or contact phone numbers, in case of a failure with any equipment during performance or sound check.

THIS RIDER IS THE ONLY RIDER WHICH IS VALID AND SUPERSEDES ALL OTHERS WHILE, UPON BEING SIGNED BY BOTH PARTIES, BECOMES A CONTRACT IN AND OF ITSELF AND WHEN COUPLED WITH THE FACING PAGE, CONSTITUTES THE COMPLETE AGREEMENT.