



From top:
 Autograph headquarters.
 The Royal Court Theatre, London.
 The Leas Cliff Theatre, Folkestone.

Autograph: Still Setting the Standards

The name 'Autograph' is one that needs no introduction in professional audio circles. To most it means 'theatre', but in fact the London and New York-based group embraces a diverse range of activities beyond the stage - including installation, sales, rental, sound design, studio facilities, new technology development and distribution. LSi reports . . .

UK - Throughout Autograph's growth and diversification over nearly four decades, the founding ethos has remained unchanged: 'To help enhance any experience that depends on audio, and to realise any artistic vision through the creative control of sound'.

Founded in 1973 by two young sound engineers then working at the Royal Opera House, Andrew Bruce and Phil Clifford, Autograph Sound Recording was one of the first companies anywhere to specialise in theatrical sound. Born out of a realisation of the growing need for a modern approach to live sound reinforcement and the increasing importance of audio in live stage shows, Autograph's unique approach has since set and continually redefined the standards for theatrical sound reinforcement globally.

The list of West End shows for which Autograph have provided sound design and equipment is far too long to list here, but 'household name' shows include *Evita*, *Cats*, *Starlight Express*, *Les Miserables*, *The Lion King*, *Mamma Mia!*, *We Will Rock You*, *Jersey Boys*, *Shrek The Musical*, *Wicked*, *Ghost*, *Rock of Ages* and *Matilda*. Over the years many West End hit shows have gone on to tour the UK and Europe, and maintaining their impact and theatricality has required Autograph to create touring versions of the 'permanently' installed audio systems in London. These shows currently include *Avenue Q*, *Spamalot*, *Oliver!*, *Les Miserables*, *Mamma Mia!*, *Mogadishu* and the latest production of *Phantom Of The Opera*.

The company has also been closely involved with numerous key manufacturers such as Meyer Sound, Sennheiser, Cadac and DiGiCo - relationships which have resulted in the development of products that have become industry standards. For example, the theatre-specific software developed for DiGiCo's D5T and SD7T is the result of eight years' close collaboration between Andrew Bruce and DiGiCo's software team. Such partnering has helped these products achieve universal acclaim and helped earn them work in other fields, with one particularly important project lined up for 2012, of which more details anon . . .

In 1982 the company realised that the design principles, expertise and equipment they had introduced to theatre and musical production could be just as applicable in other fields. Autograph Sales & Installations was founded specifically to address the wider marketplace whilst maintaining the standards of quality and innovation established by Autograph Sound Recording.



The Barbican.

Celebrating its 30th birthday in 2012, Autograph Sales & Installations' expertise has been sought by a dizzying range of applications, venues and users. Their lineage gives them a unique perspective on theatrical installations in particular, with The National Theatre, The Dominion and The Ambassadors Theatre among many to have benefited from their experience in this specialist discipline.

The company has applied many of the same principles and technologies in non-theatrical applications, such as education and Houses of Worship. Recent examples include Latymer Upper School, University of York and Kerith Community Church. Autograph's background in musical production has allowed them to assist a number of well known concert venues such as Cadogan Hall, The Barbican and St Georges Hall in Bradford, and their wider expertise in all aspects of audio has earned them a diverse client list including the Ministry of Defence, the BBC, Hilton Hotel Group, Canary Wharf's East Winter Garden, the London Metal Exchange and Deutsche Bank.

Debbie Lovelock, general manager of Autograph Sales & Installations said: "We try to offer the broadest possible range of products and services to our clients, to ensure they really get the right product for their requirements. Whilst the core technologies are generally consistent, our success comes largely from being able to relate to our clients in a variety of ways - as specifiers, as designers, as suppliers, as consultants, or in whatever combination of those skills they might require. It's also vital to understand a little about their business, the intended application of the technology, and the skills of the users. It's all about adding value at every stage, and we fully appreciate that is subtly different for each client".

Autograph Sales & Installations maintain UK dealership status for numerous leading brands including Meyer Sound, DiGiCo, Sennheiser, EM Acoustics, Milab, Countryman, K&M and Yamaha. Debbie continues: "Autograph personnel are all recognised experts in their field. With the

addition of a regular and loyal pool of the best freelance talent in the audio industry, we are always able to keep a project in-house rather than subcontracting to others. This, plus our personal ambition to produce the best possible results, guarantees an unparalleled level of service and support".

As previously mentioned, the connection between Autograph and DiGiCo is fairly well known. In addition to this, Andrew Bruce's worldwide sound design experience has ensured close relations with Broadway and its own designers and sound companies. These connections led to the establishment of Autograph A2D in New York, led by resident New Yorker Lew Mead. A2D is a dedicated distribution arm for DiGiCo theatre-oriented products which allows Autograph to take a little piece of the West End to Broadway.

Duncan Bell, long-serving director of the Autograph group, seems to sum up the philosophy of the company in that he manages to combine his duties as financial director with his Ofcom spectrum battles as part of BEIRG, as well as his vice-chairmanship of the PLASA EU Regional Board.

He commented: "Autograph today is largely unchanged from what it has always been, and what it set out to be. That is, essentially, a group of designers and engineers who try to combine their skills and experience with the appropriate technology to produce the best possible end results. That philosophy is the thread that joins together all the diverse elements of the business today, and it's served us well".

He continues: "It's particularly satisfying to see our sales and installations division thriving in a tough and competitive market, and knowing that they do so because of our continued focus on delivering client satisfaction. Nearly 40 years ago Andrew and Phil formed a company that would make a huge difference by listening and being heard: we are very proud of the fact that this ethos continues today".

> www.autograph.co.uk