

Marty McCann from Peavey, talks about Side Fills

"Side Fills? or True Cross Stage Monitors? Do you know the difference?"

Here is my take on so called Side Fills. Now this is a qualified opinion, and is shared by many of us. First of all, when I hear the phrase "Side Fills," my first inclination is this guy, may not be doing it right. It is commonly thought that Side Fills are there to duplicate the FOH mix. This is not what I would have, as this just contributes to more bleed into open mics, and will only result in the band playing even louder. Oh, so you want to ruin the FOH mix, just crank EVERYTHING UP in the "Side Fills."

On the other hand (you have five fingers) when I hear Cross Stage Monitor Mix, then I think that someone may indeed have more than a clue. Here is a little more of a Clue: Spell it X-Stage, or better yet it should be REV X-Stage Mix for Reverse Stereo Cross Stage Mix.

Usually, the very large stages that we find in large concert halls are where you will find Cross-Stage Monitor systems, sometimes called Side Fills. Personally I don't like to call them side-fills, because there are a lot of people out there that do not understand the real purpose of a reverse X-Stage mix. When Side-Fills are used, too many times it is just a mix of everything into two, two or three-way speaker systems that happen to be on both sides of the stage. What this does is then increase the overall stage volume without solving the real problem, which is not being able to hear people on the opposite side of the stage.

True X-Stage mixes separate the stage in half, everything from the center of the stage to the right is mixed into the left X-Stage system, and everything from center stage to the left is mixed into the right X-Stage system. When done as above, it results in a more intimate sound field on the stage, kind of like when the musicians played on much smaller stages. If a guitar player and bass player are standing next to each other, they can hear each others back line amplifier and don't need more of these instruments blaring at them from some Side-Fill. However they may not hear that piano player on the opposite side of the stage. The piano player can hear his/her amp, but may need to hear that bass player and a little guitar. Usually some drums and lead vocals are mixed equally into both X-Stage mixers.

Is it because ordinary floor monitors lacks low frequency performance?

One reason yes, but not the only one if you follow the X-Stage approach.

Will a smaller band benefit from side fill monitors?

Only if they play on a large stage, and again only if it is a true X-Stage mix.

While on this subject, I have witnessed hundreds of times where a small local band performs on a large stage for the first time. They don't have an elaborate monitor system, but they spread out anyway. This can be a BIG mistake! Now, they don't have the intimacy of the small stage and lose their tightness. I have seen many arguments, mainly between the bass player and drummer, about rushing and dragging the beat.

If you are a small band and do not have a large monitor system, take heed and DO NOT spread out all over the stage. I remember seeing Eric Gale, Steve Gadd, and (I can't remember the bass player), but they were playing somewhere like Carnegie Hall, yet they set up so close to each other, they could almost reach out and touch one another. Of course they were extremely tight. Think about it.

Is placing ordinary smaller PA speakers behind the main speakers facing the band a better solution than floor monitors?

No, because properly placed floor monitors (at the base of the Mic stand) are playing into the null of the directional vocal Mic, which increases the gain before feedback. If you forego the monitor wedges, and tried to depend strictly on Side-Fills, you would probably have too much feedback in trying to get it loud enough to please everyone.