

# Get Behind Me, Kettle

by Mary Bakija

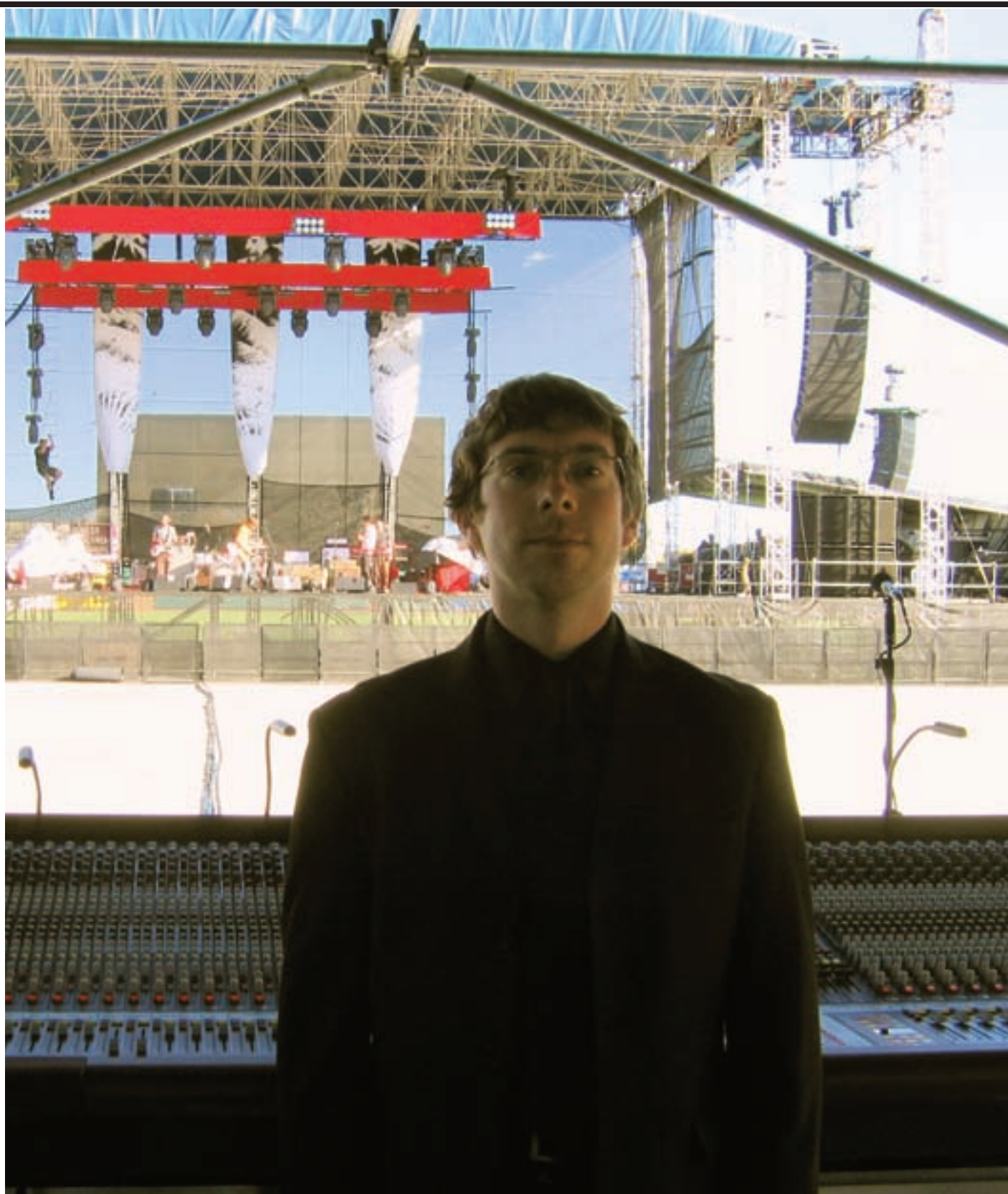
CONEY ISLAND, NY—Nearing the end of the North American leg of their 2005 tour, the White Stripes brought their stripped-down blues-rock to Keyspan Park at Brooklyn, NY's famed Coney Island. The park, which is used primarily for the Brooklyn Cyclones' minor league baseball games, has been opening its diamond increasingly to bands looking to play in a unique venue that is still located within a subway ride of Manhattan. While they could easily play larger venues, on this tour the White Stripes decided not to do arenas. They specifically picked more interesting venues and had done several nights at each place, making it more enjoyable for both the band and the fans.

As the first trip to this park for both the White Stripes and their FOH engineer Matthew Kettle, load-in began earlier than usual. "It's a very wide venue," said Kettle. "Its shape gave us very specific challenges. There are parts that are really far away, and you have to throw sound a long distance."

Even with these obstacles, preparations went smoothly and quicker than expected, he said, due in part to the Meyer Sound Milo line array employed for most of the tour—part of the touring sound package supplied by Taylor, MI-based Thunder Audio Production Group. Kettle reported that the 24 curvilinear loudspeakers provided flat, even distribution and had consistently stood up to the variety of challenging spaces they'd been, from Colorado's Red Rocks Amphitheater to the Gorge Amphitheater just outside Seattle. The system was added to the touring production after Thunder suggested they check it out.

"We got to try them out in different spots in our tour, and it made the decision really easy," said Kettle. "It's an incredible system, has the highest level of engineering for a line-array system, and gives you the most amount of control."

Kettle explained that being able to monitor each component individually with the Milo LD 3 system processor saved time when they had to set up, as the engineer could monitor how each section or component was working, how



White Stripes' FOH engineer Matthew Kettle gets behind his Midas Heritage 3000 console.

in Keyspan Park that day. "If you're in a venue and it's cool in the afternoon and then five minutes before the band goes on stage, it's much cooler or more humid," Kettle said, "you just press a button and it corrects itself."

To get the kind of sound that the White Stripes were looking to come out of those speak-

ers, Kettle mixed each show on a Midas Heritage 3000 analog console. One of the unique aspects of their shows is the improvised nature of the performance: there is no set list, and Jack and Meg White take the stage ready to play to the audience's energy. If they begin a song and it works particularly well, they may flesh it out into something bigger. According to Kettle, this is why a digital console would not work as well for the White Stripes' set. "It's nice in analog be-

cause it's quick to get to the places that the band take things on stage," explained Kettle about the various instruments the pair had laid out on 41 of the 48 channels in case the music required them. Kettle, as a result, becomes as much a part of the performance as the musicians. "I'm free to move around all of them. It's nice to have it laid out in analog because I know where things are and I can get to them quickly."

Kettle worked to capture the spontaneity of these performances by compiling a comprehensive recorded library of every show they played on the tour. He made a multitrack recording of each show with two iZ Technology digital recorders, the Radar 24 Adrenaline Plus and the Radar V. Shows were recorded natively in broadcast .wav files so they could be exported into a mixing program afterwards. "We gather about 50 gigabytes a day," Kettle said. "There are over 150 shows recorded. I spend a lot of time backing up shows, but it's worth it because we have a huge pile of recordings." In the past, resulting tracks have been used for the band's live DVD released in 2004 and for numerous B-sides.

After four years working with the White Stripes on tour, and having engineered the

band's most recent release, *Get Behind Me Satan*, Kettle and the entire crew have become a close-knit group. "Jack and Meg come from a grassroots, independent background, and they believe in building and maintaining relationships; it's not just about making money," said Kettle. "A lot of tours that you come across, it's about the bottom line and getting the cheapest provider. With the White Stripes, the bottom line matters, of course, but what's of even greater importance are the relationships you maintain." And the resulting performance was a reflection of that relationship, giving the audience the kind of stripped-down, raw and completely engrossing experience only the White Stripes could offer.

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**Matthew Kettle, FOH engineer, White Stripes**

hard, whether there was any limiting, and what was the unit's temperature. Rather than checking every day, the system told the engineer instantaneously if a problem existed in the system. The Milo LD 3 allowed for corrections of line-array effects and finishing, and attenuates for atmospheric conditions, which the production found useful when the system was set up outdoors in the morning, only to find that the temperature had dropped later on, as it did

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