

Martin Audio MLA Mini Helps Jalsa Salana Scale Back Without Compromise

RG Jones' audio redesign preserves integrity of the teachings



Jalsa Salana is the annual three-day international gathering of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community - which takes place on a 200-acre farm in Alton, Hants

Over the three days, up to 35,000 people from across the world have traditionally congregated at the location, where the Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association (AMC), Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, delivers a daily address.

Back in 2016 Simon Honywill helped Jalsa Salana celebrate its 50th anniversary by completely redesigning the audio infrastructure around a uniquely Martin Audio set-up. By turning to the award-winning MLA platform for the first time he could achieve supreme control and vocal projection in a challenging environment. Since the address itself is in the form of a very quiet and humble series of speeches, sermons and teachings powerful projection is required. There is no music, it is all about speech intelligibility, and Honywill's carefully considered redesign in his quest for

perfection was built predominantly around an MLA Mini central cluster.

Fast forward five years, and in a post-pandemic world (following the cancellation of the scheduled 2020 event), the challenge this time was to scale back down for a socially distanced event without compromising the audio, since instead of the usual 35,000 the Gathering would accommodate a mere 4,000. Once again RG Jones, who have been involved in the event for many years, were working under the direction of the Sami Basri (audio visual) team, headed by the National Secretary Audio Visuals UK Safdar Ali and Deputy National Secretary Imran Ali.

Looking at the task in hand, Simon Honywill said of the scaled-back marquees, “The problems were the fact that we couldn’t fly the system, along with the limited floor space and the low height at the sides of the structure, which made it hard to get sufficient elevation on the arrays without encroaching on the floor space.” So in conjunction with RG Jones project manager, Jack Bowcher, he initiated a redesign.

Bowcher explained that the audio set-up had remained uniquely Martin Audio. “This time the Men’s marquee was scaled back to 25m x 100m and the Women’s to 20m x 90m. We ground-stacked MLA Mini on MSX subs with DD12s running left and right as repeaters down the length of the room.” Stacked on 2ft high Steeldeck, the main arrays were programmed to cover around 30 metres. Front fills comprised DD12 and DD6 and 14 Martin Audio XD12 provided coverage outside the marquees.

In addition, four pole-mounted MLA Mini, left and right per side, were deployed in the first delay position set 30 metres back from the stage before the DD12’s took over.

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Further overflow marquees, one either side of the Men's Mosque, were equipped with DD6s and eight Blackline X8. The Women's Mosque was also supported by two overflow tents, each housing four further Blackline X8.

Everything worked to plan. "The DD12 and DD6 functioned superbly as infills, and by using MLA Mini we could achieve even coverage and ensure as much gain before feedback as necessary. We could also programme the system to prevent reflections from the roof and sides." Speech intelligibility was aided by carpeting throughout and the rear gable end being draped to prevent slapback from the plastic marquee materials.

Imran Ali, who production managed, agreed that the event had gone off without compromise despite the challenges due to COVID restrictions.

"Our initial reaction was one of apprehension - our thoughts were that the full, evenly distributed sound that we were used to would not be possible. We always have a challenge trying to project the voice of the Khalifa to the participants of the Jalsa, and knew this could be an even bigger challenge!"

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“However from the first day to the last, with each speech that went past, we realised that the PA was not compromised at all; it was highly intelligible, and the controllable nature of the PA allowed each of the participants to hear the message of peace and unity that was being delivered by the Khalifa of Islam Ahmadiyyat.”

To ensure the event’s success, RG Jones had a top crew on duty. Mark Edwards was system tech, Ian Threlfall mixed FOH and Steve Carr operated in the women’s marquee.

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