

Church Production

JULY/AUG 2006

Magazine

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Sound Reinforcement for Operators Seminar

*World-renowned audio education
specialists bring training to the end user*

By Jim Kumorek

In 2001 I was led to pursue a church technical director position, and one of the things that I realized going into a technically sophisticated facility was my woeful lack of expertise. I knew what to do in the smaller room in which I learned to mix. But I didn't necessarily know *why* I was doing what I did.

I believe this is the case in a lot of churches. New sound system operators are often told "what to do", but rarely are they told the reasons for doing it. We connect the keyboards into the snake through a DI box. Why? Because, that's what the person who trained told us to do. But many of us don't really know the technical reason.

During my first few months as technical director at a large Midwestern church, I requested advice about technical training on Curt and Jeanna Taipale's Church Sound Check technical ministries forum (www.churchsoundcheck.com). The overwhelming response was "go to a Synergetic Audio Concepts (Syn-Aud-Con) seminar." Shortly there after I attended a Syn-Aud-Con class for sound system installers about audio design practices. While some of what I learned wasn't directly applicable to a TD role, it helped me immensely in being able to communicate with the audio designers my church was using for their new auditorium.

Syn-Aud-Con conducts several different types of audio-related seminars through out the year, but they have introduced a Sound Reinforcement for Operators two-day seminar geared towards the end-user of the system. This class is directed at

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Photo (above): With a world-class reputation in audio systems training, Synergetic Audio Concepts (Syn-Aud-Con) brings its expertise to the sound system end-user with their Sound Reinforcement for Operators seminar.

Photo (below): Syn-Aud-Con's Pat Brown and attendee Russ Berger of the Russ Berger Design Group chat during one of the breaks.



precisely the type of person that many churches often have as both technical staff and volunteer system operators. On January 29th of this year, I flew to Dallas, Texas to check it out.

One of the first things to know about the Syn-Aud-Con seminar is it is not a seminar on mixing. Instead, it focuses on the "whats", and more importantly, the "whys" behind how we set up and operate a sound system. Only knowing the "whats" will let you operate the system when everything is working normally. However, if you're going to be of any use dealing with the system when it's misbehaving, you have to be grounded in the "whys".

Pat Brown, the owner and instructor of Syn-Aud-Con, is a gifted teacher, and he starts off the seminar with the language of audio. For example, if you're going to communicate effectively as an audio tech, you have to understand the decibel (dB). Pat takes this non-intuitive measurement and explains it in terms even a novice can grasp. He also crafts excellent demonstrations of the concepts under discussion—in this case, examples of music played through the sound system at 1 dB of difference, 3 dB of difference, 10 dB of difference and so on.

He ventures into each component of an audio system, describing the role of each and the aspects of its function that are non-intuitive. One of the things you quickly learn about audio is just how non-intuitive most things are – another excellent reason for getting formal training.

This class also explores microphone pickup patterns, not only with words

and graphs, but through video examples – rotating a microphone in front of a pink noise source and recording the output of the microphone with the video, so you hear the change in pickup as you watch the sound source move off-axis. Watching and hearing the theory come to life was an astounding experience.

There are far too many topics covered in this particular Syn-Aud-Con seminar to go in to any detail, but here's a brief, incomplete list: phantom power; compressors, limiters and gates; gain structure; equalization; loudspeaker delay rings; gain before feedback. Basically, this course is exactly what most church sound techs need—a firm grounding in the basic theory of audio.

In addition to the education you receive, there are some fringe benefits that can come along with the class. You'll be in a room filled with other people who are passionate about audio, and "networking" opportunities abound at breaks and over lunch. You'll likely find numerous church staff members and volunteers at each seminar. There's nothing like a network of fellow servants that you can call or email to help solve a problem. Attendees also receive a travel coffee mug with the common answer to all audio questions printed on it—"it depends".

Syn-Aud-Con also tries to arrange a tour of a nearby facility for each seminar. At the seminar I attended, Prestonwood Baptist Church a 7,000-seat church in nearby Plano, Texas was the venue. The tour was guided by the designers of the A/V system: Acoustic Dimensions also

of Dallas, Texas. Getting to see "behind the scenes" at one of the nation's top venues can be an education in itself.

So, would a Syn-Aud-Con seminar be right for you? Here's a top five list of indicators that you should attend:

- 5) You think a direct-injection box is something used by drug addicts.
- 4) You think phantom power is some new youth-group phrase describing the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
- 3) You hear "feedback loop", and you think it's the new all-you-can-eat buffet down the street.
- 2) When you hear the phrase "unbalanced signal", you think they're talking about the sound generated by your worship team's somewhat psychotic drummer.

And the number one reason for attending a Syn-Aud-Con seminar is:

- 1) You feel that serving God by providing the best audio in your church is something that really matters, and you want to be the most effective you can be at making that happen.

Really – it's *that* good. Refer to Syn-Aud-Con's web site for locations and dates nation-wide.

Jim Kumorek is the managing editor for Church Production and Worship Facilities magazines.



Dial the QUICK-LINK # and reference: CHURCH PRODUCTION MAGAZINE

COMPANY: Synergetic Audio Concepts
QUICK-LINK: (800) 796-2831 or (812) 923-0174
URL: www.synaudcon.com

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