

FESTIVALS

SNOWBOMBING

FESTIVAL REVIEW

Snowbombing swarmed Mayrhofen at the end of March, and celebrated its 10th birthday with a brand of fun that regulars at the event have come to expect. With cosmic energy lines channelled in from the four adjacent valleys, an epic line-up confirmed and a very healthy splattering of snow on them there hills, the stage was set for the unique Snowbombing crowd to make their mark...



If behind every great man there is a great woman, then behind every great event there is an ambitious organiser, first class production team and a host of different parties merging together with almost frictionless ease. In this case, Gareth Cooper's youth travel operator, Outgoing are organisers, Ear to the Ground, headed up by Jon Drape and Steve Smith handle the production, continuing the Manchester connection are Audile, with significant contributions from Picture Works and Fish Seeks Bicycle.

At the heart of the event, which spreads throughout the resort and beyond, is the Hotel Strass, where 'bombers bond over wheat beer, artists catch up with one another and quite regularly production director, Jon Drape or organiser, Gareth Cooper whisk by in the direction of the production office.

The atmosphere is unique. Days are spent on the slopes and nights in one of the 15 venues dotted around the resort enjoying an international line-up of DJs and bands. There is a real sense of togetherness and you get the impression that while some are here on their maiden voyage, many are returning to old

friends.

In a quieter moment, we managed to catch up with Ear to the Ground's Jon Drape and production manager Jimmy Stone, both of whom have worked with the event since its second year. And whilst they admit things should get easier with the familiarity of setting and its demands, that's not always the case. Says Jon: "We did the first show in The Forest last year. So we got that under our belt, with Madness. And then obviously we were working towards the production kit for Norman [Cook aka Fatboy Slim], and that's what what was on the truck. Just as the truck doors were shutting..." Interrupts Jimmy: "Literally, I shut the truck doors and got a phone call from Jon saying, 'by the way, I've got something to tell you, Norman's had to cancel'. I said, 'I don't care what you do, it ain't coming off again!'"

That was Monday 23 March. Three trucks had been packed to the gunnels with Audile's sound, lighting and rigging, Picture Work's video kit and décor from Fish Seeks Bicycle.

Advertised as the headline act, Fatboy Slim was due to play The Forest Stage; a one-off party at the end of

the week that crowns the festival's crescendo. With the cancellation, not only did Gareth's company Outgoing have a task on their hands finding a high-profile act to satisfy paying customers, but there would be ripples felt throughout the production team.

Says Jimmy: "What we try and do is take the main artists' requirements, looking at the main acts for each venue, look at their production requirements, look at how we want to do it, and build a generic that will work for everybody, and put in specials as and when needed. What you don't want is it to look the same set every single night, so you build your generic and put your specials in as and when they're needed to try and keep everyone happy." Adds Jon: "It's a real juggling act of taking out what we need and how it'll fit on the truck space really. It's a very tight budget."

Fortunately, due to the adaptability of the sound and lighting gear, when 2manydjs were drafted in to fill the spot, Audile was able to re-adjust by using the kit on-site to support their performance.

Perhaps the greatest challenge was dealt to Picture Works, which had a visual show tailored to Fatboy Slim's performance, and nothing for 2manydjs. It

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ABOVE: Ear to the Ground's Jon Drape has worked as production director on Snowbombing for nine years OTHERS: Snowbombing revellers enjoy the slopes during the day, music at night, and fancy dress all the time

was the first time that Robin Wealleans and his team had been involved in the festival, and in the face of adversity, Robin was determined to make an impression.

"We got word of the headline change; by then our kit was already on the way there, and it meant we had to make the best production we could with the kit that was already out there, it wasn't like we could change it. It was a bit like when the A-Team used to have to cobble together something out of the bits they had; it was that kind of job. But the end result was fantastic," reflected Robin.

Taking only four days to do what would normally demand four weeks, whilst also doing all the video for the Racket Club, Picture Works wiped the canvas clean and produced an epic show. Whereas Fatboy Slim's show used one flat screen, Robin opted for a three panel, panoramic screen with a 10m x 2.3m centrepiece, with a 2m x 2.3m angled wing on either side for 2manydjs. Content had to be created, and particularly because the show was being filmed for TV, it all had to be copyright clear.

"We could have taken the easy option; put in

one simple screen, and some bog standard content, but I knew it was their 10th anniversary and it was important to them, and I suppose we wanted to prove what we could do. Because we made it awkward for ourselves with the extended screen, normal content wouldn't have worked anyway, so we had to make it all up from scratch," added Robin.

Another success story of this year's Snowbombing was the transition from the Europa House, which is like the town's civic hall and is currently being redeveloped, to the neighbouring tennis club. In previous years, the Europa House has been the default setting for the evening's shenanigans, providing the largest capacity of all the venues. With it out of action, attentions turned to the tennis club and the challenge of transforming one large room, which is used for tennis and conferences, into a two room party venue with live and clubbing capabilities called The Racket Club.

Explains Jon: "We had a look at this venue last year and came back in December, Jimmy did the production design, decided the look and the feel of the place. We plumped for this, mainly because it's near the Europa House and everybody knew where it was. The

challenge was putting in two rooms and our brief was to have one large live room and a more intimate club space. Gareth brought in a décor company and found a company called Igloo Vision. They're like a little self-contained unit."

Igloo Vision is a relatively new company that, following several years of development and testing, broke onto the major festival circuit last year at Glastonbury. It provides large-scale, immersive media environments in the form of an igloo, complete with a 360 degree panoramic screen and Super HD 1080 projectors. The result is a mesmerising environment, which at Snowbombing was added to in the form of Audile's Funktion One sound system. Speaking to Igloo Vision's Colin Yellowley after the event, it was clear that he found the festival extremely useful: "Snowbombing was a great event for us with loads of firsts. It was the first time we had shipped the system to another country, the first time we have run the system indoors professionally, the first time we have had to share a room with another sound system and had to deal with the resulting sound clash. Saying all of that the system functioned flawlessly and the event went exactly to

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GARETH COOPER - OUTGOING



This year Snowbombing was bigger than previous years and we were worried beforehand of losing the intimacy and the atmosphere that's become the signature of the event. We were wrong to be worried, 'bombers came and went crazy for six days in the nicest and the best possible way. What an atmosphere, what fancy dress outfits and what amazing people.

Hats off to all Snowbombers past and present that have helped us get to 10 years old. Thanks to Mayrhofen for hosting it and understanding it – it's their favourite week of the year. Also to the crew that put it all together – it really is a complicated event, we're proud of our level of service from the holiday side to the production side so thanks from me and Mandy Beattie to all the crew, and over 140 people that worked flat out for over a week.

What for Snowbombing now after 10 years? We're gonna take a well earned holiday and we are going to make some announcements over the course of the next month or two. Thanks once more for making Snowbombing into a world class event.

► plan. It has given us a lot of confidence in what we are doing and in our ability to deliver what we think is a unique audience experience."

As well as providing a visual spectacle, the enclosed space went some way in answering the practical issue of creating two rooms and managing the resulting sound implications. Acoustic curtains split the room and provided the 'back wall' to the larger 'live' room, creating a smaller room behind, where Igloo Vision were positioned. The chill out area outside the igloo was treated to some escapist décor by Fish Seeks Bicycle.

In the main room, Jimmy faced a challenge establishing a workable backdrop due to the tennis club's wall's inadequacies for rigging a live show; a false wall was needed. With no plans of the building in sight, weight loadings from the roof were impossible and so separate ground supports were used to secure the video wall and the truss arch housing the Snowbombing 'bomb' logo.

Since the event's inception, Funktion One sound systems have been at the core the entertainment technology. As Rob Ashworth from Audile will explain,



CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW: James Zabiela and Nic Fanciulli packed out the Arena venue; A snap shot from the Picture Works' triumph at the last minute 2manydjs show; Mr Hudson poses with a Funktion One Dance Stack



part of the reason they were drafted in for the second Snowbombing was the then recent purchase of a Funktion One system. In The Racket Club, the spectacle of six Funktion One Resolution 5 mid/high speakers stacked atop F-221A powered sub, on either side of the stage was almost as important visually, as it was aurally.

Coordinating the entire resort including the different venues, equipment and security, whilst at the same time keeping locals and 'bombers happy, requires various systems and tricks along the way. Says Jon: "It's keeping everyone happy in the resort. I must say, the Snowbombing audience are extremely well behaved but having said that, there are 3,500 people out here, and they're out here to party. With that come some elements of disorder."

Explains Jimmy: "We have our security. The town hires a security company for a season, we then bring in our own security head, which we have two of this year and they're German speaking and then we hire local event security companies to come run our part of it.

"Most of the arenas have their own security as well, so it's a big logistical exercise making all the different

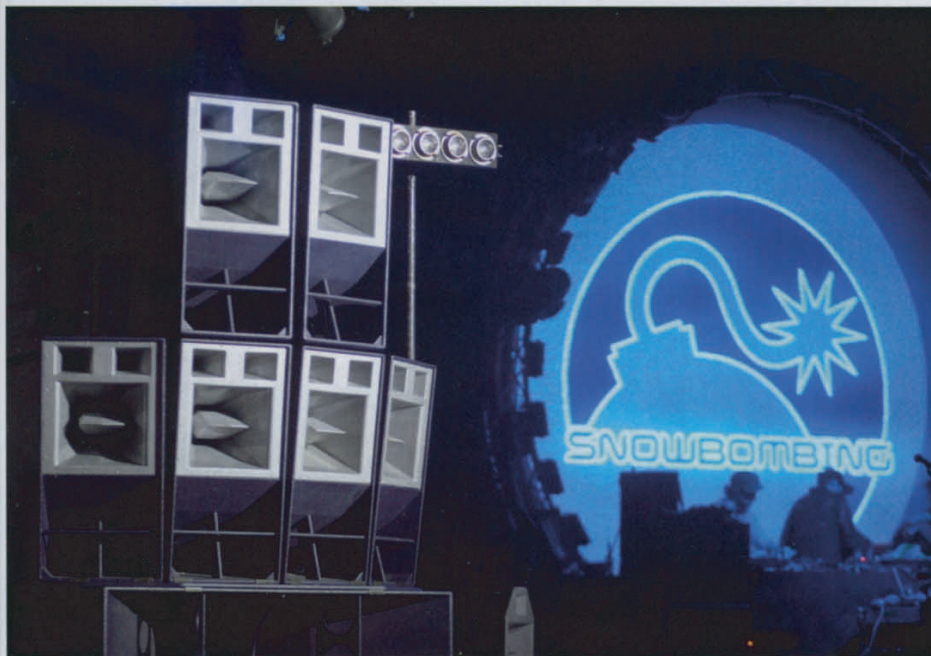
elements of the security work together. And then we have the local police force, and generally they sit back and let us deal with stuff. They are on call and are very supportive but they let us run our show, and they make it very easy for us, I have to say."

Each year 16 volunteers bus it out to Austria and in return for some time on the slopes during the day, work as stewards at night. The part they play is a valuable one, as Jon reveals: "They do the doors so we've got an English speaking 'meeter and greeter'; so if anyone has any problems they can speak to them. They are a great way to smooth things along and to convey information."

It obviously takes a certain kind of person to not only handle the challenges thrown up by an event like Snowbombing, but to turn them into successes. Jon and Jimmy are two collected individuals who are as lighthearted as they are professional, and who seem to get the best out of people. In Audile, Picture Works and Fish Seeks Bicycle, they worked with some of the best around, and from the ground up, the entire production crew, united by a love for snow, turned the 10th anniversary into the biggest and best Snowbombing yet. ■

ROB ASHWORTH AUDILE

Audile's Rob Ashworth (pictured right) has worked with Jon Drape since the heady days of the Hacienda, when Jon was running the infamous Manchester club, and Rob along with business partner, Rob Leach managed the production on some of the club nights there. Following Snowbombing's debut year, the potential of the event was realised along with the necessity for a professional production set up. Steve Smith, co-director of the since formed Ear to the Ground had attended the first event, and knew just the man for the job. Jon Drape was brought on board, and soon after so were Audile. This is Rob Ashworth's Snowbombing tale...



How did you first get involved in Snowbombing?

I knew people who'd been out as guests on the very first Snowbombing, and it sounded like it would be a fun job to work on. Jon Drape at Ear to the Ground, who we'd known since his days at The Hacienda, had been brought in to production manage the second Snowbombing, and we asked him to put us forward for the job. As it happened we'd just bought our first small Funktion One sound system, becoming the second member of the world rental network. Gareth Cooper liked the idea of having a state-of-the-art system out at Snowbombing, and the deal was done.

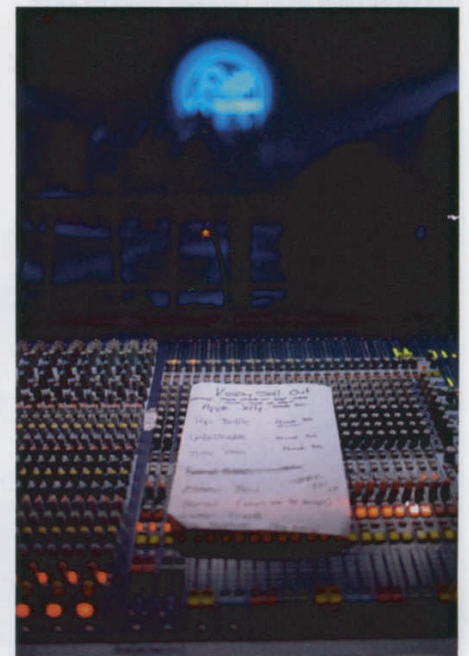
As it happened, we arrived in Risoul to find that the first member of the network had also brought their system out independently for the company who organised the 'Bombcomp' competition that was a part of Snowbombing back then, so Funktion One sound was firmly established as an integral part of the event! We continued to provide sound and lighting for the third and fourth events in Villars, and after a hiatus of a couple of years have done the last four in Mayrhofen.

I have to say I have a soft spot for Snowbombing, because our success as a company began with our

decision to invest in the Funktion One system, and Snowbombing was the first show it ever went on. Since then the growth of Audile has been reflected in the growth of Snowbombing - just as the event has grown from a couple of hundred punters and DJs enjoying a few parties in small clubs to a major festival attended by thousands with a massive line up of major bands and DJs, so we've grown from a being couple of guys doing sound and lights for local club nights to a nationally-known company servicing major festivals, concerts and dance events.

How did this year compare?

Snowbombing has certainly come a long way in the nine years that we've been working on it! Technically speaking, we took a record amount of gear and crew out this year - two 44ft trailers packed to the roof with gear, and seven engineers. Contrast this with the quarter of a trailer of gear and one engineer for our first Snowbombing! We had some really great shows this year - The Racket Club, particularly, was a massive production with some big artists, and looked and sounded amazing - the lighting was a big step forward



over previous years.

Equally the 2manydjs show in the forest was spectacular, though Madness at the same venue last year remains my all-time favourite Snowbombing show. Organisationally, Snowbombing's come a long way too - through necessity, much more planning goes into the show and it now runs like a well-oiled machine.

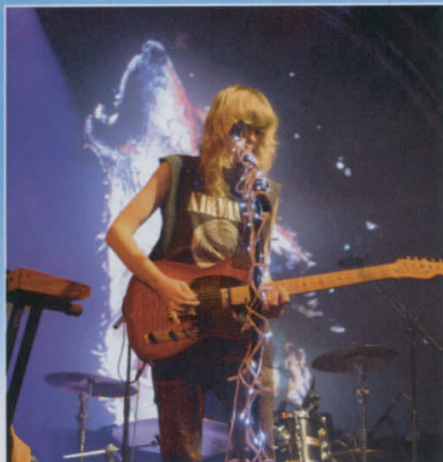
Again, this is in stark contrast to our first Snowbombing which was superbly disorganised and threw up some interesting challenges! Not that this year was without its challenges - a sound system being stranded in a remote valley by an enormous avalanche was a particular highlight, necessitating some rapid juggling of kit to cater for activity in the mountain Boardpark.

Can you talk me through some of the manufacturers you use, and what they offer to an event like Snowbombing?

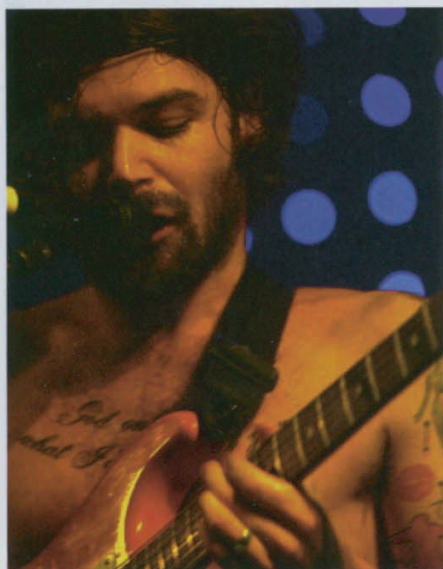
Funktion One plays a huge part in the Snowbombing production. It's obviously world-renowned as a club sound system and suits the DJ shows better than anything, but it's also an extremely capable system ▶

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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Ladyhawke playing the Racket Club; A shot from the Forest Stage during 2manydjs' headline set; A crowd and stage view during Biffy Clyro's performance at the Racket Club; Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil



► for live performance, whether it's urban artists like Dizzee Rascal, electro acts like Kissy Sell Out, crossover bands like Reverend and the Makers, or straight balls-out rockers like Biffy Clyro. MC2 amplification and XTA processing are integral to our systems too, and Midas mixing consoles and Turbosound monitor speakers ensure the live acts sound world-class. I would particularly single out Pioneer on the sound side also - the CDJ-1000 and the DJM-800 have become the industry-standard DJ tools, and we took dozens of these out with us. I should also make a special mention of dB Technologies, as our good friend Dave Kelland was kind enough to provide some demo gear, which was put into use on the Mountain Terrace, and as DJ monitors in some venues. We had some glowing reports of the sound in both cases - the performance of the dB boxes is remarkable for what they cost.

On the lighting side, Martin MAC-700 and High End Studiobeam PC moving lights are the staple of our rigs, with the massive brightness and range of effects they offer for their compact size and weight being critical on shows like Snowbombing where trucking requirements must be minimised. Avolites Pearl desks are an industry

standard and are familiar to every visiting LD, and this too is an important consideration. Two manufacturers who played a prominent part in lighting the show this year are Chroma-Q and Green Hippo - DB-4 ColorBlock LED modules and ColorWeb LED panels were a key feature of the Racket Club production, driven through a Hippotizer Express media server. The DB-4 modules give incredibly bright output for very little power, which was an important consideration as The Racket Club's mains supply was a little small for our needs, and the ColorWeb allowed us to transform the entire stage backdrop into a low-resolution video surface, yet was transported in a single, very light flightcase. And I can never say enough good things about Green Hippo, who did a massive amount to help us upgrade our Hippotizer to the new V3 standard and use its new features to implement a complicated show.

What were the biggest challenges this year?

With nine venues requiring production to some degree or other, and dozens of artists with their own particular requirements, probably the biggest challenge was in the planning - putting together the kit list and making sure

that everything could be transported in the two trailers that were available. Obviously with a show thousands of miles from base, it's not an option to overlook anything, and it's necessary to anticipate requirements that might only arise once we're out there. Once the ideal kit list was established, we had to virtually pack the trailers on paper to make sure the gear would all fit; measuring non-standard items and slotting-in boxes in an enormous three-dimensional game of Tetris. Some items of kit inevitably had to be dropped, making it necessary to analyse kit usage over the week to identify redundant gear, and come up with a daily plan of kit movement to ensure that the needs of each individual production element were met. Fortunately we nailed everything in pre-production, so everything ran smoothly once we were out there.

If there was a particular challenge out in Austria, it was running the stage in The Racket Club - with up to four bands and seven DJs on each night, and virtually zero time for changeovers in between, the stage was littered with guitar amps, keyboards, drum kits, DJ tables and monitors, all rolling on, off and around as necessary. The varied DJ requirements meant we

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VITAL STATISTICS

Snowbombing
 Mayrhofen
 Austria
 Organiser: Outgoing
 Website: www.snowbombing.com

Key Companies

Event Agency: Ear to the Ground // Audio & Lighting:
 Audile // AV: Picture Works // Igloo: Igloo Vision // Décor:
 Fish Seeks Bicycle // PR: Get Involved

Technology - Racket Club

Sound system (FOH): 12 x Funktion One Resolution-5 mid/hi speaker, 8 x Funktion One F-221A powered sub, 2 x Funktion One Res-2SH infill speaker, 2 x MC2 E-series amp rack, 1 x XTA drive rack, 1 x Midas Heritage-3000 40+8 console, 1 x insert/fx rack: 1 x Lexicon PCM-80, 1 x TC M-2000, 1 x TC D-2, 1 x SPX-990, 2 x XTA G2 gate, 2 x Drawmer DS-201 gate, 2 x XTA C2 comp, 2 x BSS DPR-402 comp // **Sound system (monitors):** 12 x Turbosound TFM-450 monitor speaker, 1 x Audile CS-215 drum sub, 2 x OSC/XTA amp/drive rack (5 mixes + drum fill + listen), 2 x Sennheiser EW-300 IEM system, 1 x Yamaha M7-CL 48+4 console // **Line system, mics, etc:** 1 x Klark Teknik 48ch active stagebox c/w VDC sat boxes, 1 x 48+24 VDC multicore, 4 x Sennheiser EW-935 radio mic, 1 x mic/DI kit (Shure, Sennheiser, Beyer, Audio Technica, BSS, 1 x mic stand kit // **DJ:** 2 x Turbosound TFM-450 monitor speaker, 2 x Pioneer DJM-800 DJ mixer, 5 x Pioneer CDJ-1000 CD player, 4 x Technics SL-1210mk5G deck c/w Isonoe feet // **Lighting:** 50 x Chroma-Q DB-4 ColourBlock LED unit, 48 x Chroma-Q ColourWeb 250 LED panel, 8 x Martin MAC-700 Profile moving light, 8 x High End StudioBeam PC moving light, 6 x Martin Atomic-3000 strobe, 4 x bar-of-6 Thomas PAR-64 1kW, 4 x Thomas 4-lite Molephay blinder, 4 x Thomas 2-lite Molephay blinder, 2 x JEM ZR-12 smoke machine, 2 x JEM AF-1 fan, 2 x JEM 24-7 hazer, 1 x Avolites Pearl Expert control desk, 1 x Green Hippo Hippotizer Express media server, 1 x Anytronics dimmer rack, 1 x Light Processor Q-Buffer DMX buffer



ABOVE: The Street Party on the Wednesday added to the eclectic mix of parties, and production challenges during the week

► were flip-flopping between DJ booths most nights, using a total of two Pioneer DJM-800's, two Pioneer DJM-909's, one Rane TTM-57 and one Allen & Heath Xone-92 mixer with five Pioneer CDJ-1000s, four Technics SL-1210mk5Gs and one Serato SL-1 interface to cater for up to three DJs at once. We're well used to this sort of gig, though, doing similar shows twice a week for three months of the year at the Warehouse Project in Manchester, as well as countless festivals, and I'm pleased to say we ran to schedule throughout the week.

What were the greatest technological feats this year?

The integrated video and LED lighting in The Racket Club was quite a feat. The central design feature of the show was a vertical truss circle representing Snowbombing's bomb-shaped logo, with custom-bent scaff bars representing the bomb's fuse. This was outlined with 50 DB-4 LED modules, and framed on

either side with 6m x 4m ColorWeb panels. And in the centre of the circle was Picture Works' Lighthouse LED screen. Our Hippotizer powered all these elements, not only pixel-mapping two layers of video for the DB-4s and ColorWeb respectively, but also running the video feed to the Lighthouse screen and masking it to fit inside the circle. All of this was only possible with the new V3 software, and we're indebted to Green Hippo for helping us implement the set-up in the short length of time between V3 being installed on our machine and the show trucking! While much of the footage run on the screens was based on the stock Hippotizer media, we also came up with some custom Snowbombing media in pre-production, and used the Hippo's effects to manipulate this in real time to give an endless variety of footage. We were also taking graphics from bands' and DJs' laptops throughout the week, and again manipulating this in the Hippo to effectively create show-specific media. ■

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