



Tour Profile: Modest Mouse Can't Stop Moving

TOM KENNY · AUG 3, 2018

Modest Mouse performs. Photo by Jacob Feinberg

FOH Engineer Jacob Feinberg Keeps It All on Track

Modest Mouse has played it big and played it small, ridden the hits and slumped it in clubs, seen members come and go and held steady around their core. They've been around the world a few times. Yet this past spring tour of the United States was the first time the band carried production, hooking up with [Thunder Audio](#) for an L-Acoustics K2 package, Avid S6L at front of house and loads of Meyer and d&b monitors across the stage.

Following the spring tour, the band played a few one-offs and festivals in July. They pick up again with a [fall tour](#) starting September 17 in Wisconsin, barnstorming through the Midwest and Northeast for five weeks with rare days off. The nightly pace seems to provide an energy and drive to the band, and it certainly keeps veteran FOH engineer Jacob Feinberg on his toes, as he prefers it, dealing with the variances in arenas, sheds and theaters along the route.

"It's an extremely dynamic mix since they have 70-plus songs they draw from and they never repeat a setlist—and often don't even follow the one written," he laughs. "The band is now eight pieces and is very eclectic, from almost all acoustic songs—acoustic guitar, upright bass, pump organ, horns, fiddle, banjo—to stripped down garage punk, to atmospheric, dance-y, and indie-rock. The show isn't automated with snapshots, so all movements are done manually. I use the S6Ls extensive control options to make that as easy and quick as possible.

"It also helped to carry our own P.A. and lighting rig for the first time," he continues. "The Thunder people, especially my system tech, Peter Dottin, have been great, and the K2 system provides us consistency and confidence when we go into all these different rooms. Plus I'm getting to mix with my own gear in some of my favorite venues."

This is actually the second time around for Feinberg and Modest Mouse. After heading to the University of Rochester to pursue an electrical engineering degree, Feinberg switched to the associated Eastman School of Music and finished as a music major, his instrument the bass guitar. He took a few recording classes while there, mixed some performances for the AV department, and did small P.A. work with local bands. When finished, he headed for NYC and started doing whatever he could, mostly corporate work. Then, in 2000, a friend from his Rochester-band days called and offered him a spot mixing monitors for emerging local act Wheatus.

[Bruno Mars 24K Magic Tour](#), by Steve Jennings, Nov. 5, 2017

"My friend took me out to do in-ear monitors, and then halfway through a small tour of Europe he ended up quitting, and I was moved to front of house," he recalls. "Wheatus had a Number One hit in Europe at the time, and my first-ever FOH gig was in front of 30,000 people at a festival! I was thrown right into it, and it was great. In a way, it's easier to be tossed onto the big stage, where you're not fighting crappy gear and bad rooms. I did that for two to three weeks, then a full tour in the UK for six weeks with a Turbosound Flash rig."

After working with Wheatus it was back to New York and back to the indie club scene. Feinberg landed a gig at Irving Plaza off Union Square, where he served as stage manager and monitor mixer. The early 2000s were a hot time in the indie circuit, with a huge variety of bands coming in, all different genres and all different styles of mixing. Some were produced and prepared; many weren't. He watched, he learned, and he met lots of up-and-coming artists, including Modest Mouse. A few months later, he was on tour with them, tour managing.

"The biggest difference between when Modest Mouse started and now is the size of the band," Feinberg says. "Back then it was just the three guys, and now it's up to eight, sometimes nine, on the stage. I mix all my bands with a vocal-centric mindset to ensure fans can sing along and intelligibly hear the lyrics. So I'm concentrating on getting back to the core of the band's sound, while providing a space for all the musicians and arrangements around that sound."

Between his first time out with Modest Mouse in 2003, Feinberg worked for 15 years with Conor Oberst and all the variations and ensembles he put together, including Bright Eyes, Monsters of Folk and Desaparecidos. He also has enjoyed a long working relationship with Gillian Welch and her musical partner David Rawlings.

[Tour Profile: Bright Eyes](#), by Sarah Benzuly, July 1, 2007

This time out with Modest Mouse, he's served as production manager and FOH mixer, though he popped in and out late in the tour to mix dates with Father John Misty in Europe and back in the States. He knows a thing or two about mixing vocals.

"On this last tour we switched Isaac [Brock], our lead singer, from downstage left to the center, the first time it's changed in 15-plus years," he says. That was a drastic change for both our band and the fans. The band was re-energized by the stage plot change, and the shows seemed to be more satisfying because of it.

"Still, moving Isaac presented a large logistical challenge and mix challenge, since stage volume played such a large role in the mix in smaller venues," he adds. "There are 14 wedges, two sides fills of three-times KARA boxes over SB28 subs, two Porter and Davies TT6 drum thrones, and lots and lots of stage volume to overcome. Isaac alone has six wedges on three mixes.

[Thunder Audio at Austin City Limits Music Festival](#), Nov. 6, 2013

"And he's notorious for not being the most clearly sung—he's admitted it often!—so it's always a challenge, but I think switching Isaac to the Telefunken M80 and having the S6L made a huge difference in helping get his vocals on top. The mix can get very busy, dynamic and change in frequency range from dance-y to acoustic, so it's always a challenge to ensure that every instrument being played can also be heard in the mix. That's why once the show starts, I'm working! I like it that way!"

The Thunder Package

After 20 years of touring, Modest Mouse carried production for the first time during most of their spring-early summer tour. The package was provided by Thunder Audio, Detroit, Mich.

P.A./Monitor System: L-Acoustics K2 P.A., Meyer Sound and d&b audiotechnik monitors, Shure IEMs for some band members.

FOH Console: Avid S6L, 192 Engine, 64-input stage rack, (2x) Lake LM-44 system drive.

Monitor Console: Avid Profile, 48 inputs.

Main Effects: No outboard gear. Main plug-ins: McDSP AE600 Active EQ, Eleven Rack Studio Reverb, Pro Limiter. Pro Tools for virtual soundcheck. Smaart for system tuning.

Key microphones: Sennheiser 902 on kicks 904s on toms, beyerdynamic M-201 on snare top. Shure KSM-313 + Palmer PD109 amplifier DI on guitar amps. Telefunken M80 main vocal.

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