



Dialing it up: Ashish Saksena on how Monitor Mixing can Elevate a Performance

*What does it take to create a technically accurate monitor mix and put the stage performance on a pedestal? **Ashish Saksena**, Live Sound Engineer for Shankar Ehsaan Loy & Late KK, spills the beans on crafting a good monitor mix in **PALM + AV-ICN conference** session titled, 'How Good Monitor Mixing Can Boost A Performance.'*



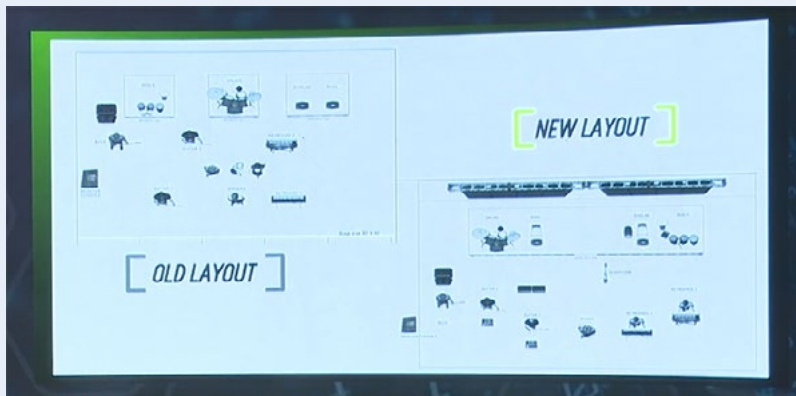
With an undiluted passion and an ever-evolving mastery in the field of sound engineering, **Ashish Saksena** has been the backbone of major stage shows involving the greatest singers of this generation, including the famed trio of Shankar Ehsaan Loy and the evergreen late KK. As a live sound engineer for the top artists in India, Ashish Saksena has had the front seat with regards to the nuances that go into the profession, and how, even the minutest change in monitor mixing can amp up a performance beyond imagination. In his conference session titled, 'How Good Monitor Mixing Can Boost A Performance', Ashish Saksena takes his audience through the nitty gritty of creating a worthwhile monitor mix, the tips and tricks to achieving a great mix, and dealing with the challenges that present themselves while attempting a jaw-dropping monitor mix. Read the excerpt here.

The Difference Between Monitor Mixing & Front of House Mixing

Amateur sound engineers sometimes find it hard to distinguish between monitor mixing and Front of House mixing. Ashish Saksena has an apt response to explain the difference. He shares, "The difference between monitor mixing and

FOH mixing is the creative aspect of the mixing. Monitor mixing is more technical, while FOH mixing is more creative, where the engineer is just catering to the audience, and to some extent, for himself or herself. But, in monitor mixing, you are not mixing for yourself, but for all the musicians and the singers on the stage. Depending on the number of musicians and singers, you are creating that many mixers. For instance, if there are five musicians and two singers, you have to create seven mixers. So it becomes more technical."

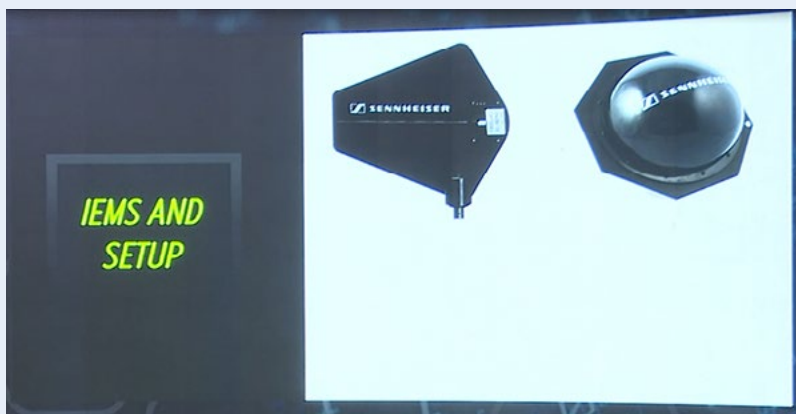
Going Back To The Basics



When it comes to churning up a memorable monitor mix, Ashish Saksena talks about how essential it is start from square one, with the basics. He comments, "The first step to success when it comes to creating a good monitor mix is to position the musicians a little better. A very basic rule of thumb is to not place the sitar player next to the drum player. For instance, in the old layout for SEL (Shankar Ehsaan Loy), the percussion and drums are at the back, the melody section is at the front, which includes the bass, guitar, and keyboards. It's nice, but feels a little messy too. So, we tried a new layout, where the drums and the dhols are placed together, the dholaks and percussions together, and the melody players are placed with the saxophone player at the front of the stage."

How To Create The Perfect IEM Setup

Stressing on the importance of



IEMS and setup in making a performance-boosting monitor mix, Ashish Saksena shares, "The IEMS and the setup are very important. The correct antenna placement, the correct placement of the bulk packs – all of this also very, very important."

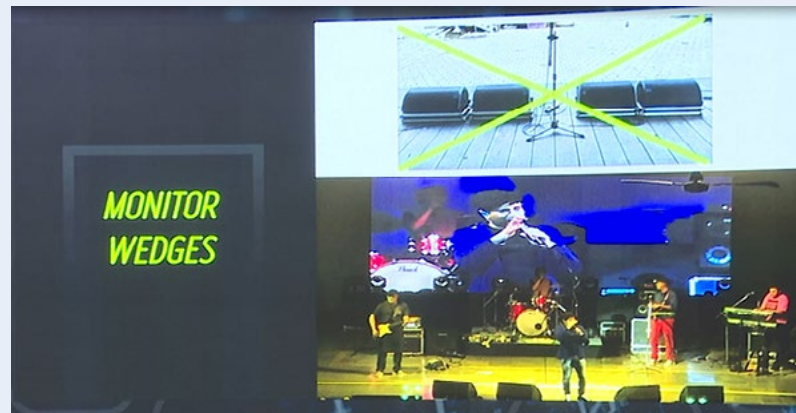
He continues, "We use fish antennas, since these are more prevalent in the industry. I recommend all sound vendors to buy the fish antennas to replace the stick antennas. Because with fish antennas, you can combine four to eight units and have them run off one antenna instead of having eight different stick antennas, which could

interfere with one another as well."

Saksena cautions against placing the IEM and microphone systems together, because, according to him, One is transmitting the signal and the other is receiving the signal, and they are bound to cancel each other."

He also further amplifies his point with an apt example. "If you have an IEM and a microphone, never place the IEM antenna behind the microphone antenna, because the latter is usually more stronger. Always put the IEM antenna in front of the microphone antenna." He adds, "Normally, there should be a distance of six feet between the transmitting signal and the receiving signal. I think a distance of two to three feet is also ideal. If you're using short antennas, keep them at a distance of at least 6 inch between the two units. Do not stack up the antennas on top of one another. People usually do this because of lack of space, but this actually interferes a lot with sound."

The Correct Way To Angle Monitor Wedges

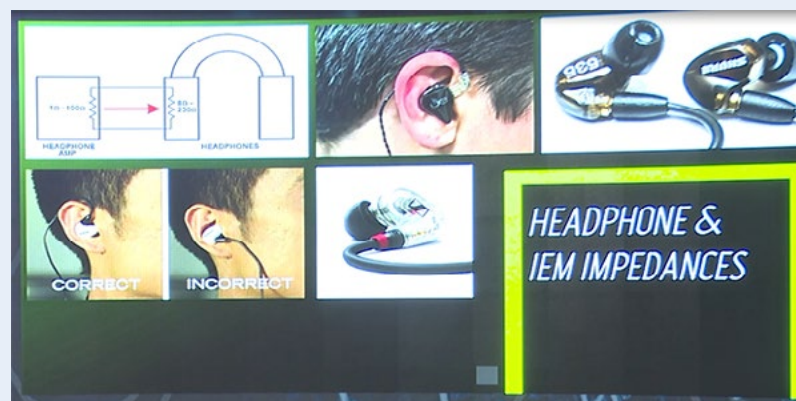


To maximize the role of monitor wedges in the creation of a perfect monitor mix, Ashish Saksena has a simple tip up his sleeves. He shares, "If you want to get more efficiency out of monitor wedges, observe what kind of microphone the singer is using, and accordingly, angle the wedges. If your wedges are placed in a straight line, and there is a 60-degree dispersion while the microphone is in the middle, then it's going to leak into the microphone. Instead, what you need to do is angle them correctly in a way that if the singer stands in the middle, the angle becomes like a null point and the possibility of feedback reduces. This, I would say, is only true for certain patterns of microphone, like a super cardioid microphone."

He drives the point home and states, "For a cardioid microphone, because the null point of microphone is right at the back, if the singer is using a SM58

important to ensure that the moment before the sound check is also properly monitored. Ashish Saksena is a firm believer of the aforementioned statement and shares tips on the right way to approach a sound check. He comments, "Before you begin the sound check, you can put up a RTA microphone, run some pink through the monitor wedges, and on the graphic or on the parametric, you can flatten out the peaks. The moment you flatten the wedge, it will automatically give you a little more volume. So, if you had a wedge with nice high mid punch to it, the moment you play a high mid instrument such as a guitar or there is a singer who sings in the upper registers, it automatically starts peaking and ringing like a bell."

Investing In Headphones That Don't Turn Into Mush



microphone, or even a wireless cardioid microphone with a SM58 capsule, it is okay to put a monitor in a flat position. But if the singer is using a Beta58, which is a super cardioid microphone or a cordless microphone with a Beta58 capsule, then it is better to angle the monitors so that they again go into the null point."

Before The Sound Check...

Sound check is crucial to crafting a sound monitor mix. But it is even more

Cheap headphones might be good to go with our phones, but for an aspiring sound engineer, these are a bane. Ashish Saksena, while talking about the perils of going for cheaper headphones, shares, "Most of the time, musicians buy the cheapest headphones that they can find. It may have low impedance, but unfortunately, it is so low that the headphones can just give up when it is connected to a pro system which is outputting at a line level. These headphones also start saturating so much

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