

INTERVIEW: FOH ENGINEER

*Fresh off the electrifying success of **Enrique Iglesias'** second India tour, legendary FOH engineer **Brad Divens** wasted no time before diving back into action. Teaming up with **EventTech Academy** and **JBL Professional**, he hosted an exclusive workshop for front-of-house engineers as part of his acclaimed *fixintogetmixin* series. **PALM Expo Magazine** spoke to Divens about mixing magic on tour, his experience working with *Enrique* in India once again, and the philosophy that drives his approach to live sound. Read on for an inside look at the art and attitude behind the mix!*



L to R: Brad Divens, Warren D'Souza (Founder & Director SOUND.COM) and Manjunath Kambalimath (Director - Retail Sale, HARMAN)

Beyond the Console with BRAD DIVENS

*Interview with the legendary FOH Engineer on *Enrique's* latest India Tour*

1. You've been mixing for *Enrique* for a while and have even done one show in India before. What felt unique about this show?

The challenge this time was the much larger outdoor venue. There were 3 sets of stereo delay towers. Ensuring the transition between the main hang and the delays so that everyone gets the same experience was what made it different. We had to be aware of coverage and everything to ensure consistency across the audience.

2. Talk to us a little bit about your go-to gear setup for mixing and why it's your go-to gear.

With *Enrique*, the go-to gear starts with the console, a **Yamaha Rivage PM10, PM7 or PM5**. They're all similar, and I can use any of them. Another piece of go-to gear for him would have to be the **Rupert Neve Shelford Channel**, which is a channel strip I use on his vocal. It's an external hardware device that allows me to adjust instantly without searching through menus. I also use other outboard gear because I like the sound, Empirical Labs Distressors and SSL compression. I prefer the **JBL VTX A12** for the PA system.

3. You've mixed for a very diverse portfolio of artists. How do you manage to stay true to their unique sounds?

It's a matter of listening to the record and getting a feel for how the band sounds, what their record sounds like, and then comparing that to what they're doing live. Live sound is often a little different from studio sound. You want to capture the essence of the band and portray it to the audience. I never go into a gig thinking, "I'll mix **Disturbed** like I mixed **Cyndi Lauper**," because they're completely different sounds. The approach is the same in how I put it together, but the sounds I'm given make it different.

4. What was your experience working with JBL for this show? Did they perform as expected?

They sounded great. **Warren D'Souza** and the **SOUND.COM** team had everything dialled in perfectly. Warren designed the system and made it very easy for me to mix the show. All the attention to detail was there, so I could push my left-right fader up, make a few tweaks, and away we went. That's a big deal when you're going into a festival situation with a new venue and weather challenges, you rely on the people setting it up to make sure it's done properly, and Warren did a fantastic job.

5. Were there any memorable moments during the show, something positive or unique about the sound deployment?

The coverage was excellent. There was plenty of volume and headroom, and we never ran out of PA. One positive thing was that it poured rain, but then it stopped, so we could have the show.

6. Technology is moving forward in leaps and bounds, with AI on the horizon in almost every industry. You've advised against over-reliance on these tools in the past. What's your advice now for engineers, since AI is much more prominent than it was three or four years ago?

To me, AI doesn't have a place in the audio world, at least not for mixing, because no amount of AI can replace the human ear. Mixing is all about listening to the music and putting it together. Is AI going to put the emotion and passion in the mix? Is it going to create dynamics? I don't know how you replicate that. Maybe it can be learned, but music has already gotten to the point where the human element is almost removed because of the way people record now. Everything must be perfect; locked to the grid, perfect



Divens' 'fixintogetmixin' workshop held in partnership with Event Tech Academy & HARMAN garnered a huge audience comprising of veteran and novice engineers looking to up their game

tempo, no pitch variance. Everything's just too perfect. We as humans are far from perfect, so why should the music we create be perfect?

7. What's your take on using the latest firmware or experimental features during high-profile gigs? Do you try experimenting with new things, or do you stick to tried-and-trusted setups?

I do experiment because you're always evolving. There's always new technology and new products coming out, and you think, "I'd like to try that piece of gear."

8. Anything specific that has caught your eye recently, something new launched in the last two or three years? It could be a plugin or hardware.

Plugin-wise, I really like the **Sonnox Dynamic EQ**. There's also the Soothe plugin that works on an S6—that's really good. On the Rivage I like all of the **Rupert Neve** plugins as well as the **Eventide Harmonizer**. As far as hardware goes, I'm a big fan of **STAM Audio**, **API**, **Rupert Neve**, **Empirical Labs**, and **SSL**. These are all products people use to make records, so why not use them live?

9. Your workshop *fixintogetmixin* emphasises process over gear. How do you make that message resonate with people who are rigid about the gear they use?

The whole premise behind *fixintogetmixin* is that the workshop isn't based on gear at all. I highlight a couple of plugins just to show what you can do outside of the desk, but the point is that you should be able to use whatever desk is put in front of you. Will it be great? Maybe not, but it will be as good as you can make it. You'll have a show, and everyone will have a good time. You should be able to get the best representation of the band possible with the gear you're given. That's the premise, it's not about the gear, it's about the process. Today I might be on a console with a couple of plugins, and that's why I designed the course the way I did, to make it not about the gear.

10. This workshop has already gained global momentum, but could you tell us how the idea for *fixintogetmixin* came about?

It was several years ago. I was out on tour and thought, "I've got all this time during the afternoon, what can I do to kill the boredom but still make use of my time?" I thought it would be cool to have people come in, sit around the console at front of house during the afternoon, and I could run a virtual soundcheck, explain what I do, and talk about music and how to put it together.

But then I realised that would be difficult because of the logistics of the day. I might not have the time, and it wouldn't be consistent every day. One day, I was in Northridge at HARMAN because we had just switched from one PA to JBL, it happened to be the VTX V25-II we were going to take out since the A12 wasn't available for **Sound Image** to buy.

I was sitting in **Greg Jones'** office, thinking about this idea, and at some point, I said to myself, "Just throw the idea out there, now's the right time. See what he says." I did, and he loved it. From there, it went straight into the Experience Centre and discussed how we could make it a reality.

The first couple of classes we did in Northridge didn't have great attendance, maybe ten people at each one, but it didn't matter because I was passionate about delivering what I thought was an incredibly cool way to talk about what I do. It was enjoyable. There could have been one person there, and I would have still had a good time.

11. Are you noticing any specific knowledge gaps when teaching these classes or workshops? Any recurring patterns?

I haven't given that many workshops yet, but we're hoping that changes. I don't necessarily feel like I do anything special, but obviously, I do because people like what I do. I find that the things I talk about might not be things engineers think about when they're mixing. For example, look at the crowd and see how they're reacting to your mix. Is there a way you can make the crowd react based on something you do with the mix? Absolutely. But I don't think people realise that. I think they assume I just dial everything in, set the levels, and that's it, then maybe watch guitar solos, vocals, and delay cues.

But there are so many things I think about during a mix that aren't related to hands-on-the-desk. Watch the band. Watch the artist on stage, the main guy. Watch the crowd. Step away from the console every now and then and listen to your mix as a fan, not as the engineer. That's tough. That's really hard to do.

12. The main event was hosted by JBL in association with Event Academy. Do you have more such collaborations planned? How has the experience been so far?

The experience has been great, and we'll see after today if there's going to be more to come. There very well might be.

13. Finally, what mindset shift would you like engineers to adopt to reach global standards?

I'd like them to listen to what they're mixing, how they're putting it together, and understand that volume is not a substitute for a good mix. No matter how loud you make it, the mix has to be good first.