Church Production Magazine Online Update

04.22.10



Despite the fact that speech intelligibility was almost non-existent, potential solutions were limited due to the historic nature of the building.

Steerable Line Arrays Restore Intelligibility to Historic Church

Taming an historic 155-year-old church building with a 2.3 second reverb time can be a daunting task when you're charged with installing contemporary technology into the space. While the church itself is even older, what is now the narthex and the nave of the current St. John's Episcopal Church in Montgomery, Ala. was built in 1855. Some of the historic accoutrements included painted ceiling medallions (1869) and stained glass windows, including works from Louis Tiffany from 1924, which line the walls of the nave. In 1861 St. John's was host to the historic Secession Convention of Southern Churches. During his stay in Montgomery, Confederate President Jefferson Davis attended services at St. John's.

"The decay time is right for the room but the intelligibility is nil, so that was the primary issue," says Chuck Walthall, president of Walthall and Associates, a consulting firm specializing in acoustics and technical systems based in Pensacola, Fla. "Of

The new Renkus-Heinz Iconyx loudspeakers are focused specifically at the seating area minimizing reflections that would degrade intelligibility.

course, doing any kind of acoustical treatment on the walls which have been there for 155 years was out of the question."

Walthall initially investigated using acoustical curtains, however the cost was on par with the cost of a Renkus-Heinz Iconyx IC16-R Digitally Steerable Line Array system. Walthall recalls, "So we talked with the guys at Renkus, and Scott Pizzo, Renkus-Heinz's eastern regional sales manager came down with a pair of IC16s. The church demo'd them for a couple weeks and they were like...Wow!"

With the Iconyx system Walthall was able to focus the output of the loudspeakers specifically at the seating area in the nave minimizing reflections that would degrade intelligibility. The main function of the system is to amplify speech that enters the system via an assortment of Shure microphones, including several goosenecks and three primary wireless systems.

The previous sound system, which was installed six years ago, utilizes Lectrosonic mic preamps, Symetrix DSP system processing with a Creston wireless control panel, and a Mackie mixing console for manual operation when needed. The clergy performs basic control of the system via a wireless Crestron touch panel. Walthall opted to retain the existing control system and added a wireless gateway and an X panel to provide control with a laptop computer for backup if required.

"It's a 155 year-old building and now it has 2010 technology in it and people can hear. It turned out to be real nice," Walthall adds,

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