

# Engineering the Sound of History

## Behind the Mix at Opry 100's London Debut

When the Grand Ole Opry decided to celebrate its centennial by crossing the Atlantic for the first time, the stakes were monumental. Royal Albert Hall—a venue steeped in its own deep and historical legacy - would host Nashville's most iconic institution for a one-night-only event that fused tradition with global ambition. For the 5,000+ fans in attendance, the night was about music and memory. For the audio team behind-the-scenes, it was about precision, pressure, and the pursuit of sonic authenticity. Engineers Kevin “Sarge” McGinty (FOH) and Brady Reuter (MON) embraced the challenge of translating the Opry's unmistakable Nashville sound for a London audience, ensuring it resonated beautifully within one of the world's most celebrated venues.

### From Nashville to London: A Mission of Authenticity

The Opry's centennial wasn't just a milestone; it was a mandate. “We weren't trying to create a new sonic experience,” Sarge explains. “The goal was to bring the Opry sound - the sound we do every night in Nashville - to London.” Every decision, from console choice to microphone selection, reinforced that mission.

For both engineers, Yamaha RIVAGE PM Series consoles were essential. “For me, it was a no-brainer,” Brady says. “I wanted to be on the console I use every day so I could port my files and keep everything as close to home as possible.” Sarge agrees: “If I had to build a file after landing, it wouldn't have worked. We went straight to Abbey Road.”

The RIVAGE PM platform delivered more than familiarity - it provided seamless workflow under extreme time constraints. Show files were prepped in Nashville, emailed to London, and loaded onto identical consoles at Abbey Road and Royal Albert Hall before the team arrived. “Reliability was never a question,” Sarge adds. “The desk sounds great and does everything you need.” Brady highlights Yamaha's UK support: “They even pre-patched my outputs for Albert Hall before I walked in.”

### Abbey Road to Royal Albert Hall

Before stepping into Royal Albert Hall, the team spent three and a half days at Abbey Road Studios, rehearsing with the Opry band and artists like Luke Combs, Carly Pearce, Ashley McBryde, and Darius Rucker. For Brady, walking into Studio Two - the same room where The Beatles recorded - was surreal. “People talk about chills walking across the Opry circle. For me, walking into Abbey Road was that moment.”

Technically, Abbey Road offered a dream scenario: pristine acoustics, a controlled environment, and time to refine snapshots. Sarge leveraged Nuendo Live for virtual soundcheck, building a foundation that would carry directly into the live show. “Snapshots were laid out, the event list was set, and we tweaked during rehearsals,” he recalls.

The pace between rehearsal and show day was intense but exhilarating. Rehearsals wrapped at noon; by 2:00 PM, the crew was loading into Royal Albert Hall; by 4:00 PM, they were already running songs with artists. The preparation at Abbey Road paid off in full. “If we hadn't prepped everything, it wouldn't have worked,” Sarge says.



Opry 100's London Debut at Royal Albert Hall



Right to left: Kevin "Sarge" McGinty (FOH) and Brady Reuter (MON)

Royal Albert Hall elevated the moment. Moving from the precision of Abbey Road's studio environment into a storied 6,000-seat room gave the team a rare chance to let careful preparation meet iconic acoustics. With snapshots refined, workflows locked, and confidence earned at Abbey Road, they walked into Royal Albert Hall ready to honor the room and the occasion - translating the Opry's Nashville sound with poise, intention, and a sense of history befitting one of the world's most celebrated venues.

To best accommodate the many artists and the well-orchestrated behind the scenes choreography to make it all work, Brady worked from an unusual monitor position tucked behind a video wall, without a direct line of sight to the performers. "I'm used to reading body language," he says, "so this setup pushed me to lean more on communication after rehearsals and make thoughtful adjustments on the fly." The team created a smooth relay system—band members would stop by post-rehearsal to request fine-tuning, and



Rehearsal at Abbey Road Studio Two

Brady adapted scenes quickly to keep everyone comfortable and confident, supported by the trust, preparation, and collaboration built throughout the week.

### Gear Choices: Familiarity Over Experimentation

In high-pressure, one-off shows, reliability takes priority over novelty. The engineers resisted the temptation to try new microphone patterns or exotic setups. The only deviation came from Mumford & Sons, who requested a single Neumann U47 FET for their set and opted for no monitors, singing entirely off the house mix. "It worked out great," Sarge says. "We've since bought a few for the Opry House."

Plugins were kept simple: Dynamic EQ6 and Dynamic EQ4 were the workhorses, with occasional Bricasti Y7 reverbs for wedge mixes. "I almost wish Dynamic EQ6 was a standard channel EQ option," Sarge laughs. "I use it everywhere now."

For all the technical rigor, the emotional weight of the event was undeniable. "It was a healthy combo of stress and excitement," Brady admits. "You're in a different country, working in legendary spaces, with last-minute input changes. But then you look up and see Marty Stuart in Abbey Road Studio Two, and it hits you."



Brady Reuter (MON) at Royal Albert Hall

Sarge echoes the sentiment: "Once the show kicked off and you heard the crowd response, saw the pipe organ in the back - it was exhilarating. Then you snap back to reality: okay, time to work."

### Workflow Innovations: File-Based Prep and Virtual Soundcheck

The success of Opry 100's London debut underscores a broader trend in live production: remote preparation and file-based workflows. By pre-building show files in Nashville and transferring them digitally, the team eliminated hours of on-site setup. Virtual soundcheck technology further streamlined the process, allowing engineers to refine mixes without artist presence - a critical advantage in compressed timelines.



Opry 100's London Debut at Royal Albert Hall, Yamaha RIVAGE PM Series FOH

### Maintaining the Circle: Authenticity Above All

Amid the event, one principle anchored every decision: authenticity. “Country music is lyric-driven,” Sarge says. “You can’t bury vocals. Our job was to make sure London heard the Opry exactly as Nashville does.” That mission extended beyond sound to symbolism - the iconic Opry circle of wood was shipped from The Opry House and placed center stage, a tangible link between past and present.

For Sarge and Brady, the gig was more than a technical challenge - it was a career-defining moment. “Being able to call Abbey Road and Royal Albert Hall places I went to work? Incredible,” Brady reflects. “I never thought I’d do that.”

The success of Opry 100 in London signals something larger: the globalization of country music and the technical adaptability required to make it happen. As cultural institutions like the Opry expand their footprint,

audio teams will continue to navigate the intersection of heritage and innovation - ensuring that, no matter the venue, the sound remains true.

### A Century of Tradition, Amplified Worldwide

Opry 100 brought the Grand Ole Opry’s century-old tradition to London, delivering the authentic sound and spirit of Nashville - and a cultural icon - to an eager audience at Royal Albert Hall. The Royal Albert Hall played a meaningful role in making this event possible, amplifying the sense of occasion and giving the performance a home worthy of its legacy. This wasn’t just a concert - it was a statement. For audio professionals, it highlighted the power of preparation, the value of familiar workflows, and the trust required to deliver excellence on a global stage. For fans, it proved that the circle remains unbroken - even when it crosses oceans.