

PARTNER STORY



PERFORMING ARTS



OPPORTUNITY

As part of the renovations to the Erie's historic Warner Theatre, venue officials wanted to install a new house audio system that could support the majority of incoming productions.



SOLUTION

Production manager Ryan Patsy, consultants David Bateman of Acentech and Todd Pander of Dobil installed state-of-the-art JBL VTX Series loudspeakers and Crown I-Tech Series amplifiers.

WARNER THEATRE, PENNSYLVANIA

Commissioned in 1929 by the then-named Warner Brothers Productions and opened in 1931, the Warner Theatre is an iconic landmark located in Erie, Pennsylvania. The venue operated as a cinema theater until it was sold to the city of Erie in 1976 and converted to a performing arts center. In addition to being the home of the Erie Philharmonic, Lake Erie Ballet and the Erie BROADWAY Series, the Warner Theatre regularly hosts concerts and performances by touring artists like Kenny Rogers, Jerry Seinfeld, ZZ Top, Kenny G, Alice Cooper, Rob Zombie and many more.

In order to provide world-class experiences for such a wide range of events, venue operator Erie Events conducted extensive building renovations to improve the facility in the downtime of the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of the renovations, venue officials wanted to install a new house audio system that could support the majority of incoming productions. The theater's production manager Ryan Patsy partnered with consultant David Bateman of Acentech and Todd Pander of Dobil to outfit the historic theater with a state-of-the-art live sound reinforcement solution featuring JBL VTX Series loudspeakers and Crown I-Tech Series amplifiers.

"They were looking for a house sound system that could meet as many of the touring acts' riders as possible," said Bateman. "Erie Events was bringing in more Broadway-style big performance bus-and-truck type shows, and it wanted to be able to facilitate that. The JBL system is rider-friendly because of name recognition, performance and longevity. If JBL was doing something wrong for all these years, it wouldn't be here this many years later. If you see JBL on a rider, you know it's going to work and it's going to sound good."





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“I've had a lot of experience with JBL in the past,” said Patsy. “It's as rider-friendly as they come, in my experience making bands happy on riders. I knew that JBL is where we'd get the most value for the dollar.”

To ensure wide and balanced coverage with power and clarity, the main left-right hang consists of 18 JBL VTX A8 line array speakers, suspended nine per side. VTX A8 combines two 8-inch woofers, four 3.5-inch midrange drivers and two 2-inch high-frequency drivers in a single low-profile cabinet to provide productions at Warner Theatre with unmatched performance, efficiency, and a consistent 110-degrees of horizontal coverage. Additionally, the team installed four JBL VTX B18 subwoofers deployed on the ground for reinforced bass response throughout the venue.

“The A8s are crisp and clean. We've had no complaints with the new system,” said Patsy. “We used to have complaints before, largely in part because we'd do shows in one day, and they wouldn't have time to tune the system properly under the gun. We've eliminated that step for a lot of our smaller performances. We just need to hook the system up and it's going to cover the space great with intelligibility everywhere in the room.”

In addition to the VTX A8 and B18, JBL AC25 and AC26 loudspeakers serve respectively as front fills and balcony fill speakers. Finally, Crown I-Tech 4x3500 amplifiers supply the entire system with clean and ample power, while the Crown plug-in for QSC QSys systems enable the production staff to easily monitor the status of all amplifiers remotely from front-of-house.

“The Crown plug-in for QSys is really cool,” said Patsy. “I can put it on a touch screen display at FOH that's easily visible by anyone on the crew so we can just look at a glance and make sure we're running the system within the right parameters without blowing anything up.”

Patsy noted that the new JBL VTX system helps the Warner Theatre in-house crew support a vast majority of the incoming productions without having to rely on outside rental companies.

“Because the JBL VTX system is so rider-friendly, a wider variety of acts will accept it and play on it,” said Patsy. “It ultimately saves the promoter quite a bit of money. It costs thousands of dollars to rent a PA for the day, no matter what it is. We made this investment and charge the promoter a smaller fee than rental companies. It's a win-win because the promoter saves money and it generates revenue for us.”



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On the rare occasion that a touring production insists on bringing their own sound system, the VTX A8's innovative auto-locking rigging mechanism helps Patsy's team streamline the breakdown and subsequent re-deployment processes rapidly, saving the show promoter time and money in the process.

“It takes us less than an hour to completely strip the PA,” said Patsy. “When the promoters are here paying for every minute that the guys on the clock, it's a huge time saver that the VTX arrays go up and down so quickly.”

Consultant David Bateman spoke to the importance of aligning speaker selection to room acoustics when designing the system, and praised the VTX A8 as the ideal fit for the Warner Theatre.

“A system needs to match the acoustics of the venue itself—if those two things don't work together, it can do more harm than good,” said Bateman. “If the box is too big for the room, it can be overpowering and sound horrible. I've seen it before. This particular JBL A8 is the right box for the room.”

After two years of being closed, the Warner Theater reopened on January 23, 2022 with a performance by the Erie Philharmonic. Both Patsy and Bateman related the satisfaction of all parties involved with the sound quality and coverage provided by the new JBL VTX system.

“JBL has some very happy customers here at the Warner Theatre,” said Patsy. “Bands and production crews are really happy when they roll in and see the JBL VTX system in the air. They know their artist is going to be happy with the sound that their audiences get. We are ecstatic with it. We've heard nothing but compliments from everyone about how good our new VTX system sounds.”

“The people I spoke to at the opening event—including the Concertmaster of the Erie Philharmonic—told me it sounds great,” said Bateman. “To my ears, it sounded incredible, it really did. I went through the venue, took multiple measurements from the front row, back row and upper balcony. The coverage within the entire space was +3dB or -3dB in every seat, which is the standard for audio coverage uniformity. It was a thing to be heard. Everybody involved from the venue and consulting team was happy with the way this turned out.”





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Patsy noted that Todd Pander of Dobil played a significant role in selecting the VTX A8 when the speaker originally indicated in Bateman' initial design proved to be impossible to procure due to global supply chain issues.

“Todd Pander of Dobil did a great job of walking the line,” said Patsy. “Because I have a live sound and integration background, I was more demanding than your average customer. He did a great job of walking the line between what was originally specified, and adapting to make changes to what we really needed in the venue. It turned out great largely in part to the craftsmanship that Todd brought.”

Bateman also praised the role played by HARMAN installed audio expert Keith Caggiano in the final tuning of Warner Theatre's JBL VTX system. Bateman also spoke highly of HARMAN's commitment to ensuring the final solution aligned with Bateman' vision for the venue.

“It is nice that JBL was there until the end,” said Bateman. “The weekend of the grand re-opening, Keith Caggiano from JBL was tweaking and making sure everything was right from the JBL side of things. They were making sure it was hung right, aimed right, tuned right, from the manufacturer's side of things. They were communicating with me along the way. There were supply chain issues that ended up changing which box we went with. JBL kept checking in with me every step of the way. They actually wanted my opinion because they trust that I know the client's needs. They asked me what I thought, instead of dictating to me. That's the difference between HARMAN and other brands.”

As a graduate of nearby Mercyhurst University, Bateman also related a special satisfaction in being involved with the revitalization of Warner Theatre.

“I went to school in Erie at Mercyhurst College (now Mercyhurst University),” said Bateman. “When I graduated, I walked across the Warner Theatre stage. While I was going to school, I had done a few private events at the theater. So there was a personal connection to this project for me. It was like a full circle moment for me, to help this theater remain a vital part of the community across generations.”



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PRODUCTS USED

CROWN ITECH 4X3500HD AMPLIFIERS

JBL AC25 LOUDSPEAKERS

JBL AC26 LOUDSPEAKERS

JBL VTX A8 LINE ARRAY SPEAKERS

JBL VTX B18 SUBWOOFERS



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