

# DIALING IT IN

Delivering consistent concert sound for Paramore.

by Kevin Young, photos by Steve Jennings

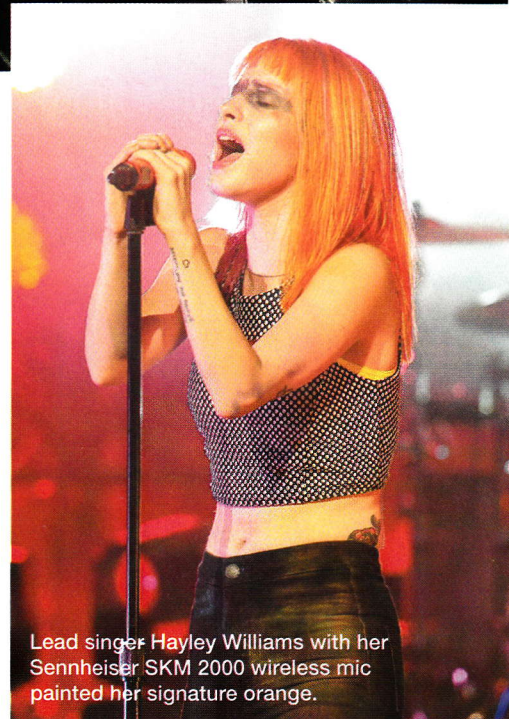


Paramore performing at a California stop on the current tour.

**S**ince Paramore's 2005 debut recording *All We Know Is Falling*, the Nashville-based, rock outfit's popularity has grown substantially, garnering them multiple Grammy nominations as well as plum song placements in soundtracks for motion picture blockbusters like *Twilight*, platinum sales and a consistently growing, global audience.

They've also developed a reputation for high-energy live shows, fueled as much by their musical chops as by a finely honed sense of what they and their audience need to hear in order for both band and crowd to leave it all on the stage and on the arena floor, respectively, every night. The band is currently touring in support of its fourth release — simply entitled *Paramore* — representing the first full-length album and tour they've undertaken since the departure of guitarist Josh Farro and his brother, drummer Zac Farro.

"It hasn't been an easy break," says Travis Bing, Paramore's monitor engineer since 2009. That said, both he and front of house engineer Eddie Mapp had nothing but good things to say about the atmosphere on the road when talking with me from Denver, roughly two weeks into the North American leg of the tour. "The feeling is onwards and upwards. Everyone who's here wants to be here, band and crew, and that makes it fun for everyone, even old, jaded road dogs."



Lead singer Hayley Williams with her Sennheiser SKM 2000 wireless mic painted her signature orange.





Personnel changes aside, the stage setup is similar to previous tours, although principal members, lead singer Hayley Williams, guitarist Taylor York and bassist Jeremy Davis are highlighted more obviously than the players backing them up, including guitarist Justin York (Taylor's brother), keyboardist/rhythm guitarist Jon Howard and drummer Miles McPherson. And the band's attention to detail when it comes to their sound is also as keenly focused as ever, a fact that prompts Bing to refer to them occasionally as "tone freaks."

### Feeling It

All six musicians have a highly defined sense of what they like to hear, and feel

that their on stage mix is integral to their ability to put on the type of performance the audience deserves. "Jeremy, the bass player, is an interesting case. The band is on IEMs, but he wants to feel the sound, so we put a pair of d&b M2 wedges in front of him. They're mainly pushing kick, snare and bass, but the challenge is maintaining decent stage volume and still relying on IEMs over wedges and side fills. Sometimes his mix gets a little cluttered, but when that happens we just dial it in again."

In fact, Bing continues, the whole band wants to feel the sound, explaining that he also deploys a d&b Qsub for McPherson and a stack of two d&b Vsubs and one C7 loudspeaker,

all driven by four d&b D12 amplifiers, per side as fills. The Vsubs were a last minute addition, based on a demo at the band's audio supplier, Nashville-based Spectrum Sound, prior to the tour. "I've used d&b loudspeakers for about six years, because I feel they get that we need gear to be lighter and more compact without sacrificing audio quality," Bing adds.

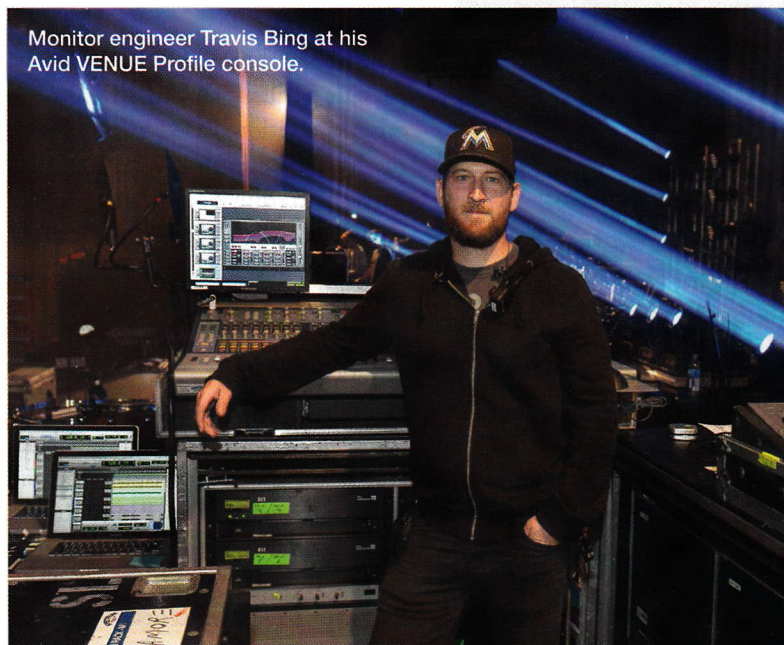
While both backup guitarist's amplifiers are rear-firing, Taylor York's and Davis' amps are pointed downstage; a compromise, Bing admits, but – unlike the iso cabs and other options they've tried, it's an approach that allows the two to hear what they want without compromising their performances. "Mixing monitors is a psychological game. You're dealing with six different minds, personalities and sets of emotions that affect the show. It's more than just providing what they need to hear, it's giving them confidence and building mutual trust."

Bing's approach to doing so informs his choice of console. "I mix monitors like a FOH engineer, polishing stuff to make it sound as much like the record as possible and I'm using an Avid VENUE Profile, partly because of the layout, and partly because we've grown inputs exponentially. When I started we were at 32 inputs, and now we're at 64," he says, citing the recent addition of glockenspiel and a pair of toms and a snare for Taylor York that's located downstage.

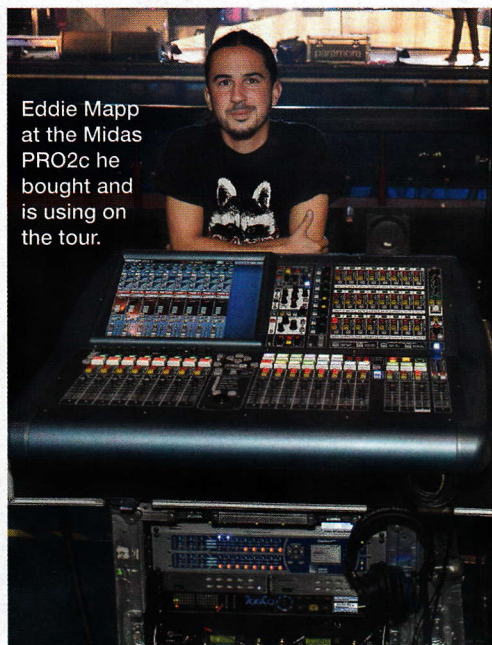
"All of my mixes are in stereo, post fader," Bing adds. "This isn't an overly complicated band, so I operate the desk like an analog console and make changes on the fly. With the Profile, a button push here and there and I'm where I need to be. It's intuitive and I love the plug-ins, especially the Cranesong Phoenix. Essentially it takes something digital, warms it up and makes it sound more natural."

He references Waves PuigChild 660, CLA-2, and SSL Channel as other





Monitor engineer Travis Bing at his Avid VENUE Profile console.



Eddie Mapp at the Midas PRO2c he bought and is using on the tour.

key plug-ins, and also cites aWaves C6 multiband compressor, specifically, as integral to sculpting the overall tone of the band's IEM mix. "I'm also using the C6 on Hayley's vocal over EQ now, because it allows her to hear the frequency spectrum she wants, but doesn't knock any frequencies out completely."

Wireless IEM systems are all Sennheiser, a combination of ew 300 IEM G2 and G3 systems, joined by an AC 3200-II active 8-channel transmitter combiner and A 5000-CP passive antenna. Band members sport Ultimate Ears UE11 earpieces. "This is a very transparent, natural and warm-sounding IEM rig," Bing notes.

### Rock Solid

The primary goal of New Orleans-based FOH engineer Eddie Mapp, who took the reins just this past February, is maintaining the same consistency that Bing provides on stage despite not traveling with a house system. "We're doing theatres now, and then we go to Europe, mostly for festivals. Obviously, with the PA changing nightly, that's a challenge, but I'm traveling with a Meyer Sound Galileo 616 loudspeaker processor and a Mac mini running (Rational Acoustics) Smaart 7, which helps me maintain consistency."

Mapp landed the Paramore gig on the recommendation of tour manager Andrew Weiss, who'd worked with him previously with Evanescence. Based on previous experiences with Midas PRO Series consoles, and seeking a smaller footprint, he chose a PRO2c for this run. In fact, he actually bought the PRO2c he's carrying.

"I use the console for mixing, but not for system EQ or delays. I prefer to do that externally," he explains. "With Galileo and Smaart, I can walk in anywhere and say, 'give me a desk.' Now, with my own console, no matter where we go, when I load my show file I know everything is rock solid."

Mapp also works with the band on microphone selection and placement, and has largely continued the previous approach. However, he recently re-did the drum kit, with a Shure Beta 91A on kick in, Audix D6s on kick out and toms, a DPA 2011C for snare top, and DPA 4099s on snare bottom, hat and cymbals.

"I don't use the kick in, just the kick out, to eliminate any potential phasing and anomalies," he says. "The D6s are about two fingers off the tom heads. The proximity effect is pretty incredible so I still end up pulling out a bit of 200 (Hz), but in that position, it makes

the toms sound huge.

"As for the DPA mics, Big Mick (Hughes) from Metallica turned me on to them. The drummer, Miles, has a minimal kit, with two crashes and a ride. I'm under-miking the cymbals to get a little more isolation, and then EQ each according to its individual tone. These mics also eliminate stands, so there's less

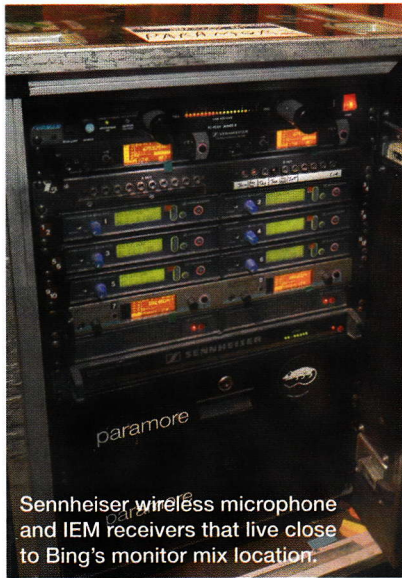


(Top) Dual d&b M2 wedges for bassist Jeremy Davis. Stage fill is provided by stacks of dual d&b Vsubs topped by a C7.



chance of anything falling over.”

Mapp has also implemented Pin-tech RS-5 acoustic drum triggers on kick, snare and toms to open up the side chain of the gates, another practice he credits to learning from Big



Sennheiser wireless microphone and IEM receivers that live close to Bing's monitor mix location.

Mick. “It helps isolate everything and allows you to bring the threshold back on the gate to pick up subtle nuances, even if the drummer’s just tapping the rim of a tom. I never have to look at my gates during the show. I know they’re opening, so I can pay attention to something else.”

Taylor York’s partial drum kit is captured with Sennheiser e 904s, with a Shure SM57 for glockenspiel. “That’s what they had on them before and it’s nice to have a bit of variety, a different sound, as compared to Miles’ drums.”

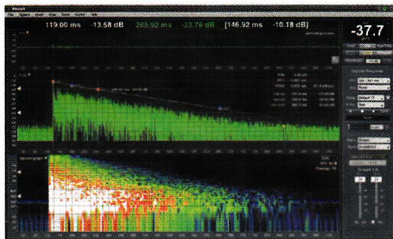
On the bass, where Mapp is seeking both attack and definition, he takes a pre-cabinet feed via a Klark Teknik DN100 direct box (DI), and then post-cabinet feeds from both a SansAmp DI and a Shure Beta 52. Radial J48 DIs take acoustic guitars direct, with Radial JDIs for Howard’s keyboards and drum pad.

### **Making Room**

Each of the three electric guitars plays through two cabinets. An sE Electronics Voodoo VR1 ribbon mic is mounted in the center of the cone of the “distorted” cab in each set, with a dynamic mic positioned slightly off axis to the cone of the “clean” cabs. (Shure SM7Bs are applied to the clean cabs of Taylor York and Jon Howard, while a Heil Sound PR-40 is the choice for Justin York.)

In the band’s IEM mix, Bing emphasizes the feed from Taylor York’s SM7 on Justin York’s PR-40 – choices the band, being the “tone freaks” they are, prefer. “They like that cut in their ears,” Mapp adds, “but I use the VR1s for the house. They sound huge and take EQ well. My thing is getting the guitars as big and in your face as possible, and a lot of that is EQing out a lot of the 2 kHz to 4 kHz range, then clearing up the low mid to make room

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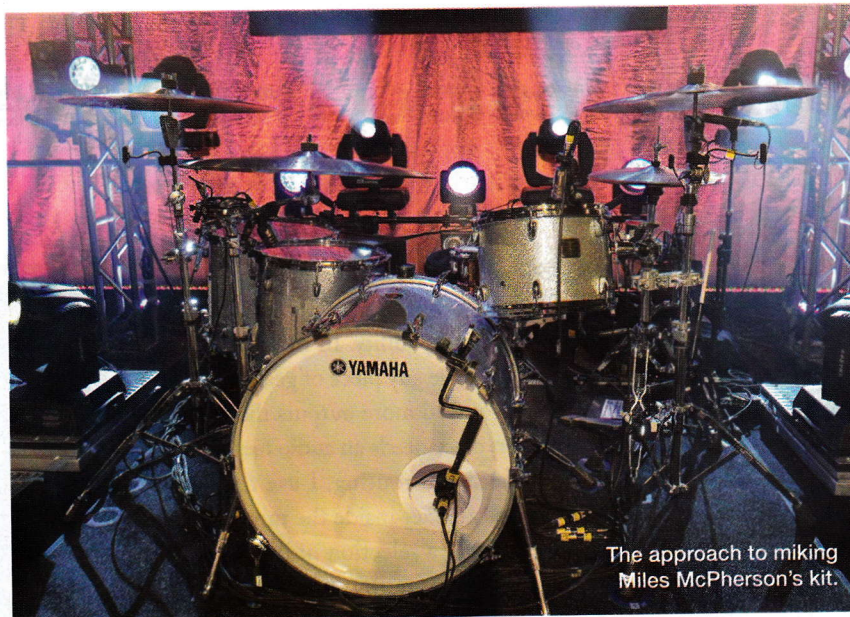
for all three guitars." Mapp also deploys sE Electronics IRF Reflexion filters on the rear-firing cabs to help eliminate initial reflections when the stage is shallow and backed by a hard wall.

In speaking to both engineers, it's clear that Paramore wants to hear everything their audiences do – from the crowd noise Bing mixes into their IEMs via a pair of Shure KSM 27 cardioid condensers positioned downstage left and right, to the often less than pristine vocals provided by the fans that Williams pulls up on stage. "We use one of her backup mics for that," Bing says, "and the band wants to hear it even if they're screaming and off-pitch. I run that post fader so I can mix it in for everyone at the same time."

Mapp also uses the feed from the KSM27s when recording the show to his JoeCo BlackBox BBR 64-MADI recorder, a recording that's as useful a reference for him as it is for the band. "I always love working with a band that cares about their tone and how that's being delivered to the audience," he says. "I've been fortunate that a lot of bands I've worked with get that. And this band really listens to their sound and to each other. Even with three electric guitars going at once they don't step on each other."

Sennheiser microphones are the universal choice for vocals, headlined by Williams' SKM 2000 wireless mic custom painted with her orange signature color. Hardwired e935 microphones are posted for the background vocals of Justin York and Jon Howard.

In the overall sonic big picture, the key for Bing and Mapp is reflecting the level of attention the band pays to the sound they're creating at the source by keeping their mixes well defined and clean on stage and in the house – a characteristic they also strive for when it comes to the actual stage setup, particularly downstage near Williams, York and Davis. "It has to be a very clean stage because the three of them just go



The approach to miking Miles McPherson's kit.

crazy," Bing says. "We try to make it as safe as possible, because when Taylor's in the right mood he'll swing his guitar around, drag it on the floor and knock over drum kits.

"That makes for a good show, but

when it comes to audio gear, he understands that if he breaks it, he's bought it." ■

*Based in Toronto, KEVIN YOUNG is a freelance music and tech writer, professional musician and composer.*

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