

mendo **stadia**

SIGNAL IDUNA PARK

Borussia Dortmund's home ground has its audio system revamped.

AL THUMAMA STADIUM

The latest designs of the proposed FIFA World Cup 2022 venue in Qatar.

SCOTT WILLSALLEN

Auditoria's main man discusses his vast experience in delivering stadium events.



SCOTT WILLSALLEN

Audio Director & Sound Designer, Auditoria

How did you first get into the industry?

I started out as a professional musician, I was okay at it, but others were much better, so I quickly drifted away from making music, and towards making music louder. I worked for an audio rental company in Sydney for a few years, then I went freelance for a while, then settled back into a full-time design and engineering role for an integrator in Sydney.

When and why did you start-up Auditoria?

In 2003, I was engaged as the sound designer for the Rugby World Cup Opening and Closing Ceremonies in Sydney. Immediately after that, I started on the Athens 2004 Olympic Games Ceremonies as sound designer and could see a strong future in major events. I kicked off the company in late 2004 when I got back from Athens.

The flight over to Athens for the tender interview was my first international trip, I had to get my passport hurried through so I had it in time. The significance and pressure of designing and delivering the sound for an Olympic Ceremony was completely lost on me. I was bursting with confidence and never had any doubt that I knew exactly what to do. I was 26 at the time, so I guess I can put that down to youthful confidence and determination.

Can you give us an outline of what Auditoria do?

We are a design consultancy specialising in audio, video, broadcast and show control systems - voice and data communications systems, control systems. We work with venue managers and architects to develop a clear understanding of what project success looks like, and translate that into technical systems to support the vision of the project. On new building projects, we work with the architect and the design team to design these systems and coordinate the requirements into the architectural, electrical, mechanical and structural systems.

What does your role consist of?

I lead a team of very special people with massive brains. We work together to develop systems and experiences that create lasting memories. Being a small business, every day for me is different, from leader to designer, salesman to marketer, engineer to student. Our work covers many areas, but to simplify and summarise our work, we are engaged to solve complex problems in the arts cultural industries.

How do the stadium or sporting venue projects start for you and your team?

My first stadium project as designer was the 2003 Rugby World Cup in Sydney. I'd just finished my Masters in audio and acoustics and my dissertation examined the subjective preference of sound tonality in a stadium environment. In other words, what does a stadium audience prefer in terms of tonal balance.

The rugby was a great success and soon after the event, the creative and technical teams were engaged to design and deliver Athens 2004 Olympic Ceremonies. So I began a journey of making stadium events sound amazing and delivering innovate solutions to complex problems.

We can claim design credits to more Olympic Games ceremonies and major international ceremonies events than any other company or individual including Athens 2004, Melbourne 2006, Doha 2006, Vancouver 2010, Singapore 2010, Delhi 2010, Doha 2011, London 2012, Sochi 2014, Baku 2015 and Baku 2017.

What are the main things you have to take into consideration on a project?

Our work and process can be summarised in three words - listen, design and deliver. So, the single most important thing on any project for us is to listen and understand what the client wants out of a project and understand what success looks like. We do this by asking the right questions. Another important factor for us is to be an enthusiastic and collaborative



contributor to any project. We regularly face situations of competing needs that require patience, cooperation and innovation to resolve. The key is to find the right solution in these situations, not determine a winner. Environmental factors are an important consideration on any project, but especially so in a stadium that spends much of its time not in use. We also consider ease of access and maintenance to be an important factor in maintaining system performance, and reducing ongoing costs for the stadium operator.

Safe and efficient access to loudspeakers and amplifiers enables lower maintenance costs, encouraging more regular work in ensuring the system is performing at its best.

It's important to us that the sound operator for a stadium have access to the right tools to deliver a great mix. This includes specifying the right microphones, consoles, replay equipment and system control interface to create a sound mix that works in a stadium environment of narrow dynamic range and variable background noise.

Which projects have you been working on recently?

Unfortunately most of our work is under NDA until the project is complete, so there's not much I can tell you about current projects. We have recently completed the Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games Opening and Closing Ceremonies, which were staged in the Baku National Stadium.

We were also the audio consultants for the Pink Floyd - Their Mortal Remains Exhibition at the V&A which opened to excellent reviews.

What would you say has been your favourite project?

The London 2012 Olympic Games Ceremonies is my most treasured event project and the upgrade of ANZ Stadium - the Sydney 2000 Olympic Stadium - is my most fond installation project.

London 2012 was widely praised as one of the best sounding stadium events ever and it was due to the work of many people, including us. Whilst

we were responsible for the system design, the implementation of that design required a great deal of work from many other departments to make it a reality. It was a unique situation of collaboration, willingness and determination from all departments of the ceremonies team to make it happen.

Our upgrade of the audio system at ANZ Stadium was a very satisfying project. My first experience in that building was back in 1998, just prior to the opening of the venue, I was involved in the first event in 1999, I spent months at the stadium in preparation for the Sydney 2000 Olympics and delivered my first major event as sound designer in the venue for the 2003 Rugby World Cup.

I was determined to make ANZ Stadium sound better than any other stadium I'd heard and I'm pleased to say that we did. It is most certainly the best sounding stadium in Australia and arguably one of the best in the world. This was made possible by the desire of the stadium operator to deliver the best audience experience possible.

What would you say is the next big thing in terms of stadium design?

So many things come to mind, but all share a common theme: the presentation of sport and entertainment in stadia is a high-quality pursuit that requires state-of-the-art facilities and technologies to engage the audience.

Greater use of visual display to activate stadium architecture is a hot topic and has been for a couple of years. This has an added advantage of helping brand a stadium for the home team, especially interesting for stadiums that host multiple home teams.

Some of the technologies we are exposed to during Olympic Ceremonies will eventually make an appearance in permanent stadium facilities in some form. One example is using field of play projection for sports lighting, enabling on-field graphics, blackouts and side-line advertising.

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