



## America's top punk provocateurs return with a show geared to their take-no-prisoners style

By: Sharon Stancavage

Its members may have gotten together in 1987, but Green Day is a truly 21st-century punk band. The group's current album, *21st-Century Breakdown*, consists of a rock opera, as did the previous effort, *American Idiot*. Whereas *American Idiot* criticized life in the Bush-era U.S., *21st-Century-Breakdown* has been described by the guitarist Billie Joe Armstrong as a "snapshot of the era in which we live, as we question and try to make sense of the selfish manipulation going on around us, whether it be the government, religion, media, or, frankly, any form of authority."

Through all of this, the band's sound has remained consistent, as has its production creative team, headed by the production designer JUSTin Collie, of the firm Artfag. The band's current tour mixes provocative images with raw sound to create another scathing musical experience.

For the tour, Collie (who prefers to be called JUSTIn) looked to the album's artwork for inspiration. "It's a picture of a couple standing on the hood of the car, watching the city go up in flames behind them," he says. "It's a metaphor, a commentary for the 21st-century breakdown." That simple visual, of a couple standing while the city burns, was translated on stage into the representation of a city skyline. "There are WinVision tiles arrayed in such a manner that it looks like city blocks or tall buildings," he adds.

The 18mm WinVision wall provides a low-resolution background for the stage. "The screen has a look the band wanted—they didn't want super-high resolution," explains John Wiseman, CEO of Los Angeles-based Chaos Visuals,



Photos: Todd Kaplan



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provider of the tour's video package. The cityscape, which reaches 28' high, uses 279 tiles. The 18mm resolution lends a sense of transparency to the screen. "It helps us get a better illusion of depth—it's basically a standard stage technique, but with video," says Justin.

Working in tandem with the WinVision cityscape is a 64' wide x 40' high RP screen, which is served by four Barco FLM R20 projectors. "It's a big surface to cover, and, when you spread out the light that wide, you start losing brightness, so we doubled it up to cut through," Wiseman reports.

The visuals for the cityscape and RP screen were produced by Artfag, and created by Infect Productions, led by Roger Staub, based on the artwork of Chris Bilheimer, who created

the original album artwork. "We used a lot of Chris' still imagery, and had Infect animate some of it as well," adds Justin.

Although this is the first time that video has played a prominent role in the Green Day performance environment, it is not the focus of the production. "The band doesn't want the audience watching TV," Justin says. To keep the audience's attention on the band, the designer modulated the video content. "The technique we used is to not tell stories, but rather set tones and moods and environments—people quickly understand that it's just a background or complement to the entire scene."

All of the video, including live cameras, is run through a Control Freak media server from Control Freak Systems. "Control Freak designed a

custom control system for us," says Justin. "You tell them the paradigm, you tell them what sort of video elements you have, and they design a custom solution for you to control from whatever control paradigm you choose."

Besides delivering imagery to the WinVision panels and RP screen, the Control Freak also runs the show's live camera system. "By camera placement, and by using the Control Freak system, they're able to get some unique looks and effects," notes Wiseman. The camera package includes four Sony BRC-300 robotic cameras and a Sony DXC-D50 handheld camera.

Green Day is noted for the use of pyro, and this show is no exception. "Production, from a money perspective, was initially interested in having the [gerb] waterfall, and maybe some concussions, and that was about it," explains Lorenzo Cornacchia, VP/director of operations of Pyrotek Special Effects of Las Vegas. The reality turned out to be vastly different; after witnessing a demo with a variety of effects, the band—and production—opted for a package that includes flame dragons, concussions, mines, comets, fireballs, flashes, a gerb waterfall, and confetti. "This is old-school pyro," Cornacchia comments.

Actually, it's better than old-school pyro, thanks to advances in technology. "The manufacturers are getting bigger and better with their product, and it's a lot cleaner too," Cornacchia notes.

Pyro is featured throughout the show. "'Holiday' features comets, flash, and concussion," Cornacchia says. "'Before the Lobotomy' has concussion and mines. 'Jaded' and 'American Idiot' use concussion. 'Twenty-One Guns' has the waterfall. 'Jesus in Suburbia' is a huge song for them; it has a big look with concussion, flash flames, and comets." His favorite song, however, is "Brain



The WinVision tiles are arrayed to resemble a city skyline.



Pyrotek supplied the tour's abundant pyro effects.



Justin notes that, with 50 songs to program, he used a variety of approaches, from monochromatic to loaded with color.

Stew,” which has apocalyptic flame dragons scattered upstage. “‘Brain Stew’ is so great to do; we’re actually doing chases and hitting all-fire cues during the chase,” he reports.

The extensive use of pyro isn’t easily achieved. “I think the biggest challenge for Kevin Hughes, the pyro operator, is not to repeat the same looks during songs,” Cornacchia says. “There is only so much product you can choose from; if you’re doing eight songs or nine songs out of the 20 that you have, you have to be careful not to make it look the same.” For example, “East Jesus Nowhere,” “Before the Lobotomy,” and “Minority” all feature mines. “With mines, you can get different colors,” says Cornacchia. “Some have crackle; some don’t. You can get them with bigger spreads, or effects that create a splatter-crackle look. Between the crackle and different colors, it all looks different, and that’s the key.”

### **All colors and no color**

Keeping up with the video and effects is Justin’s lighting. “These guys are very big on lighting, and they like it to be an integral part of their performance,” the designer says. The current

set list typically features 22 to 23 songs, but can expand. Because the band did a promotional tour before the tour proper began, Justin and Kevin Caulley, the tour’s programmer and lighting director, cued nearly 50 songs. “With this many emotions and moods and vibes, I try to look at every potential look I can get from my rig, and then find an appropriate place to put it,” explains Justin. Even with so many songs to program, the pair did have one thing in their favor: “Their music is so lighting-friendly, it’s just fun,” the designer says.

Justin’s style leans toward extensive cueing, and the Green Day tour is no exception. “Some songs are so intricate, with so many moves and changes, the cue stacks become incredibly long,” he confides. Caulley programmed the show on a grandMA console, which is being used on the road as well.

The gear, much of which was provided by the Los Angeles office of Epic Production Technologies, includes 37 Martin MAC IIIs, 28 Vari\*Lite VL3500 Washes, 14 Philips Color Kinetics ColorReach units, 12 i-Pix BB4 LED wash fixtures, seven Vari\*Lite VL1000 tungsten units, and

five Syncrolite MX IIs, as well as several custom fixtures from Artfag. “We used to have a fixture, called the Fag Pod, which was six DWEs on three-way strips with strobes in the middle. We updated that to two BB4s with a strobe mounted in the middle,” Justin notes. The new fixture, christened the BB Fag, is an integral part of the performance environment. There are 41 BB Fags located on five trusses above the stage, on two diagonal trusses upstage left and right, and on the floor upstage. The Green Day sign from the last tour is also used within the production.

The number of songs programmed is also directly related to the color palette. “We did everything from the multicolored rainbow to monochromatic,” explains Justin. The rainbow can be found in “King for a Day,” while a monochromatic white is featured in the nine-minute “Jesus of Suburbia.” “We decided we were going to do the song completely in no color and, when I told the band that, Tré [Cool, the group’s drummer] said, ‘That makes sense, because Jesus is white, right?’ We also said we would do it with no strobes, but we broke down with that right in the end.”



Below: Justin's sketch for the video gas-mask look, which is seen in its fully realized version above.

### Analog rules

The man in charge of the tour's front-of-house sound is Kevin Lemoine, who ran an analog 48-channel ATI Paragon II console on the American leg. "This particular console is considered a vintage item, since it was built in '93," he says.

In the past, Lemoine has worked on digital consoles, but, to his ear, nothing sounds like an analog unit. "The sound difference is huge," he begins, "and I don't understand why people would prefer it over tried-and-true options."

Lemoine came across the ATI Paragon II in a roundabout way. After the band's last tour in 2005, digital consoles became all the rage, and he listened to a variety of them in person. "I went to see a bunch of shows, to see how they sounded, and, honestly, after seeing 15 or 16 shows in three years time, I didn't see one that sounded good," he admits.

However, he did like the ATI

Paragon. He had used another analog console—the Midas Heritage—for the American leg of the last Green Day tour, and expected to do so again. "All the outboard stuff was prepped, we went into two weeks of rehearsals in San Diego, and the Heritage wasn't sounding all that hot," he reports. His systems engineer, Jason Vrobel, mentioned that Clair Brothers Nashville [the tour's audio supplier] had a Paragon II, and, when it appeared in San Diego, Lemoine says, "It sounded great."

There are, of course, some inherent issues when touring with an older make of console. "When we started working with it, two channels went down, a stereo module went down, two power supplies went down." He



adds, "But that was all within rehearsals and the first two shows. The last six weeks, nothing's happened at all; it's been fine." Still, another product, the Midas XL 4, is being used for the European leg. "It's a much more reliable analog console," he says.

For his outboard gear, Lemoine has several items, including a Lexicon 960L reverb processor, which has

eight channels of balanced analog I/O and eight channels of AES/EBU digital I/O, as well as two Lexicon PCM 42s. He also has an Eventide H3500 and three Alan Smart C2 compressors on the drums. "The first one I ran across was in Clair Japan," he says about the Alan Smart product. "They had one sitting across the mix at the front

or a snare bottom or something like that, I just use the dynamics of the console," he says. "For the fancy compression, I use the external stuff on the rack, the distressors, and the Alan Smart stuff." He also uses the Paragon II for any gates that are needed.

Given the nature of the band and their music, the show is not effects-

a studio microphone," he notes.

"They have just come out with their live vocal mic and it's unbelievable, so we use that on everybody." The M80 came to Lemoine via Chris Dugan, who is the band's studio engineer. "It's the microphone used on the snare on the record," Lemoine says.

The M80, a dynamic microphone



Working in tandem with the WinVision cityscape is a 64' wide by 40' high RP screen, which is served by Barco FLM R20 projectors.

of house and it sounded cool." The Alan Smart compressor is said to be based on a legendary product—the SSL G master bus compressor, which Alan Smart helped design when he was at SSL. "It's basically six channels of SSL bus compression on the drums," he says.

The console is also part of Lemoine's effects package. "If I need a regular standard compressor for a sax

heavy. "It's mostly just reverbs and delays; there's also harmonizers on the background vocals," says Lemoine. The primary reverbs are in fact on the drums. "The drums have three reverbs; one is a huge, ten-second reverb for 'Are We the Waiting,' which is off of *American Idiot*," he explains.

Lemoine's microphone choices are also unique. Front and center is the Telefunken M80. "They're mostly

with a cardioid pattern, is also perfect for Tré Cool's drums. "He's a very heavy hitter, and, since the snare drum is right next to the hi-hat, the hi-hat's bleeding into the snare mic has always been a problem," says Lemoine. "With this M80 on there, it rejected a lot of the incoming hi-hat."

The M80's noise rejection is also what made a leading choice for the vocal mics. "When we got into

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rehearsals, we started using it for Billie [Armstrong],” says Lemoine. “The tone was a lot better than the microphones we were using in the past, and it rejected a ton of the very loud stage volume.”

Lemoine liked the tone of the Telefunken M80 so much that he wanted to bring it onstage as a wireless mic. However, the M80 doesn't have a wireless version. “We sent Telefunken 20 Shure wireless mics to be retrofitted with the M80 capsule to go on top of it, so we have the only M80 wireless mics in existence,” he says with a smile.

There are three guitarists in the band, and each has his own unique mic package. “Billie Joe Armstrong has two Marshall heads that go into two Marshall 412s; one Marshall is miked up with a Neumann 103 and a Telefunken MK2, the other one is

miked up with a Neumann 105 and a Sennheiser 421,” explains Lemoine. The band brought Jeff Matika along for the tour; Lemoine has a Shure SM7 on Matika's electric guitar. Jason White, an unofficial member of the band, “has two amplifiers that go into two 412 cabinets; one is miked up with a Neumann 103 and the other is miked with a Neumann 103, along with a Copperphone,” Lemoine notes. Which leads one to wonder—what is a Copperphone? “It's a mic made by a fellow in Dallas; it makes it sound kind of telephonish,” Lemoine says. The product, created by Mark Pirro, of Placid Audio in Dallas, is indeed made of copper and has a limited frequency response, from 200Hz to 3kHz. It's featured during “East Jesus Nowhere.”

For the drums, Lemoine has a wide variety of mics, running the

gamut from A (an AKG 414 on the snare) to T (Telefunken MKII 216s on the overheads). There are also quite a few Neumann mics found on stage. “Every cymbal is individually miked with the Neumann KM 184,” Lemoine reports. There's also a Neumann TLM 170 inside the kick drum. If one looks hard, you can also spot an Audio-Technica AE3000 on the floor toms. “It's not my personal choice; I like the AT4040s on there, but they kept getting blown by the pyro, the AE3000s don't blow up,” Lemoine says.

This is a busy time for Green Day; September marked the debut, in Berkeley, California, of *American Idiot*, a new musical based on the album of the same name. Given the show's creative team—including the director, Michael Mayer, of *Spring Awakening* fame—Broadway well may be in the offing. At the same time, the *21st Century Breakdown* tour concluded its first U.S. leg in August, and is currently in Europe. The tour is expected to last well into 2010. 📶



Justin notes that video is not the focus of the performance; instead, it is used to set a mood for each song.