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Enhanced Summer Sounds at Tanglewood

By: David Barbour

The famed venue places a bet on the latest loudspeaker technology

Founded in 1937, Tanglewood Music Festival, in Lenox, Massachusetts, is one of America's most storied classical music venues. The summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, it has hosted some of the great conductors in history, including Serge Koussevitzky, Charles Munch, Erich Leinsdorf, Gunther Schuller, Seiji Ozawa, and Leonard Bernstein. It hosts a full season of symphony programs, this season featuring stars like Renée Fleming, Joshua Bell, and Yo-Yo Ma. It also hosts the Boston Pops and the Popular Artist Series, which this year will include Paul Simon, James

Taylor, Cynthia Erivo, Carrie Underwood, and "Weird" Al Yankovic, among others.

Tanglewood has, for some years, employed d&b audiotechnik loudspeaker systems. Last summer, the venue updated its speaker rig with an installation overseen by Kingston, New York-based Firehouse Productions. It features d&b's CCL compact cardioid line arrays and CCL-SUB subwoofers in the Koussevitzky Music Shed, Seiji Ozawa Hall, and the expansive Tanglewood Lawn.

The Koussevitzky Music Shed is the centerpiece of Tanglewood, seating 5,000 and accommodating as many as 13,000 on the surrounding lawn. (Longtime BSO fans often stage elaborate picnics on the lawn, adding to their enjoyment.) A primary challenge was the highly reflective nature of the shed's permanent stage shell.

The CCL system, which premiered at NAMM in January

2025, provides broadband directivity control with low-frequency cardioid behavior in a passive design, enabling single-channel amplifier operation—an industry first in the compact line array category, the company says. It also features a revised implementation of a patented d&b design to bring the cardioid directivity and electroacoustic performance, formerly only available in d&b SL Series models.

At the heart of the CCL system are two 7" front-firing drivers, two 5" side and rear drivers, and two 1.75" high-frequency transducers of a completely new design. This approach, the company says, combines improved low-frequency and broadband with exceptional high-frequency headroom and minimal distortion, qualities that seem eminently suited to an indoor-outdoor venue like the Koussevitzky Shed.

The new installation combines the CCL range with other d&b products. For the Koussevitzky Music Shed, eight KSL8 loudspeakers were installed per side for the main PA, complemented by eight SL-SUB ground subwoofers, a four-box XSL8 hang for the center cluster, five sets of three CCL8 delays, dead hung from the catwalk, and eight 44S as front fills. The lawn system now features forty XSL8 loudspeakers in five hangs of eight, alongside twenty-four CCL8 compact loudspeakers for side hangs and out fills. The 1,200-seat Seiji Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood's other key performance venue, received a dedicated CCL rig consisting of sixteen CCL8s hung eight per side, complemented by four

CCL-SUBs, and four xS-Series 44S front fills. All components are powered by D80 amplifiers.

Dave Harris, BSO's main front-of-house mixer and system designer for the Tanglewood installation, says, "We had a d&b J-Series hanging in the Shed forever, going back to when I started there in 2008. I've always been a J-Series fan. I think they're fantastic. But when we got to planning the upgrade, we went with Firehouse, and they like to go with the latest, greatest technology. I know the KSL Series is great, but I was dragging my feet because I'm such a lover of the J-Series. But I had to make the change, and I'm glad I did."

"I think everybody makes great boxes," Harris continues. "But I just love d&b. They're musical; they're transparent. And, with a space this sensitive—it was built in 1938 to project an orchestra without amplification—it does really, really well. d&b has cardioid coverage down so well. The word 'game changer' is overused, but, onstage, the effect is mind-blowing." Among their best qualities, he says, "They're voiced beautifully, and they blend seamlessly from zone to zone."

The cardioid coverage aspect is, in many ways, the key. Harris says. "The technology is unmatched in the industry and was crucial for our orchestral setting. It keeps frequencies from stacking and projecting in the shed's highly reflective acoustic shell and prevents sound from the lawn system from bleeding back into the shed. Plus, the orchestra loves



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playing on a quiet stage.”

The installation process itself was efficient, completed in just seven days—three for the lawn, three for the Shed and Ozawa Hall, and just one for tuning—using only a lull ladder instead of heavy machinery.

The CCL system is useful in other ways, because pop acts playing the Shed must use the house sound rig. “It’s non-negotiable,” Harris says. “There are no points in the shed. The rig has been taken down twice in 19 years. There’s just no way to do it.” Fortunately, he adds, “Even the guys who are against [using the house system], by the time they see the place, they get it. They’re happy not to deal with it.” It no doubt helps that d&b is a well-known brand.

Vinny Siniscal, account manager at Firehouse Productions, noted that the decision to deploy CCL was largely based on the BSO’s prior positive experiences with d&b. Although chosen in part because of their small size, Siniscal notes that the speakers “exceeded our expectations in coverage and frequency response,” delivering “more comprehensive coverage with fewer boxes than the BSO’s previously installed systems.”

There are separate mixes for the shed and the lawn. In the shed, Harris has a DiGiCo Quantum330 console; Cole

Barbour, the sound engineer for the lawn, has a DiGiCo SD10. Also at the front of house, Harris has a DirectOut PRODIGY.MP processor, which, among other things, manages dual network audio, DSP functions, and sample rate.

Everyone involved seems happy with the new speaker systems. “Attendees are saying it’s the best-sounding season they’ve experienced at Tanglewood,” says Barbour, who adds that the sound “is the best it’s ever been, because of its fullness, control over low-end frequencies, and even distribution despite obstacles like trees.” Jake Moerschel, vice president of production for the BSO, concludes, “We have always tried to have the best-sounding outdoor venue in the country, and I think the d&b SL-Series and new CCL loudspeakers have helped us achieve that.”

The first concert in the Shed this summer will be June 21 and features Yacht Rock Revue. The BSO’s summer season begins on July 5 with an America 250 program devoted to works by Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, and John Williams, giving audiences another chance to hear the d&b system put through its paces. The BSO season ends on August 23 with a program that includes Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, and Popular Artist Series concerts continue through Labor Day weekend. 