The Big Bet

By: Dan Daley

Photos: Courtesy of Yaamava' Resort & Casino

Yaamava' Resort & Casino's new theatre keeps it competitive in a crowded entertainment market

The first Native American-owned casino was built in Hollywood, Florida by the Seminole tribe in 1979. Other indigenous American nations quickly followed suit. By 2000, more than 150 tribes in 24 states had opened casino or bingo operations on their reservations; a decade later, they were doing an estimated $27 billion in annual revenue, growing to $34.6 billion in 2019. H2 Gambling Capital's Tribal Gaming

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Dashboard, which tracks that unique sector, predicts casino revenue will reach $40-plus billion by 2025.

This gold-paved easy street began to see bumps in 2018, when the Supreme Court issued a decision striking down a longtime federal ban on state regulation of sports betting, paving the way for a new generation of gaming venues. Competition for punters' bets was no longer limited to Las Vegas, Atlantic City, and the reservation homelands fortunate enough to have established their own casinos. Even more recently, the slow, but steady, return of live-event production has patrons back, looking to be awed as much by venues as the shows that host them. At the same time, touring shows are scrutinizing destination venues like never before, looking for ways to contain costs as travel and logistics become more expensive.

That was the situation that the Yaamava' Resort & Casino, owned by the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, was facing when, in 2022, it opened its new 2,600-seat performance venue, the Yaamava' Theater, topping off the property's four-year, $760-million expansion. Located in the Los Angeles exurb of Highland, it's an area already teeming with entertainment and gaming options, including the Hollywood Park Casino in Inglewood and Pechanga Resort and Casino in Temecula. With that in mind, the band sought to distinguish its new theatre—part of one of the largest casino properties on the West Coast, with eight restaurants and eight bars, plus a new on-site hotel—from the competition. To do that, it placed a big bet on audio, lighting, and video.

A strategic venue

With a capacity of 2,500 seated and 3,000 total when the seats nearest the stage are removed, the theatre also sports three Planar video walls and a Ross production system, a touring-grade L-Acoustics sound system, and 3,800 sq. ft. of stage space. The installed seating consists of custom wood-backed Jezet Seating with custom cup holders; Jezet also provided the retractable platform system for the lower seating section. The room is ringed by nine luxury suites with capacities ranging from ten to 22, offering private restrooms and dedicated drink service. It was designed by consultants Auerbach Pollock Friedlander, with additional design assistance and installation by Sound Image's Escondido, California office; the latter also sold the lighting fixtures installed by Bandit Lites.

Among Auerbach's contributions, a walkable grid over the stage area offers ease of access and rigging adaptability. A system of rigging beams at approximately 10' on center provides an arena-style rigging grid, allowing larger events to play this intimate room, using their touring setups. An additional arena-style rigging grid was designed over the forestage and flat floor seating areas to allow touring acts to use their own front-of house lighting rigs. A catwalk system pro-

Auerbach Pollock Friedlander's services included planning, theatre design, facility programming, theatrical lighting and rigging systems, automation controls, and audio, video, and broadcast systems. Newsom Brown Acoustics provided acoustical consultation.

vides access to the rigging beams and house rig lighting positions.

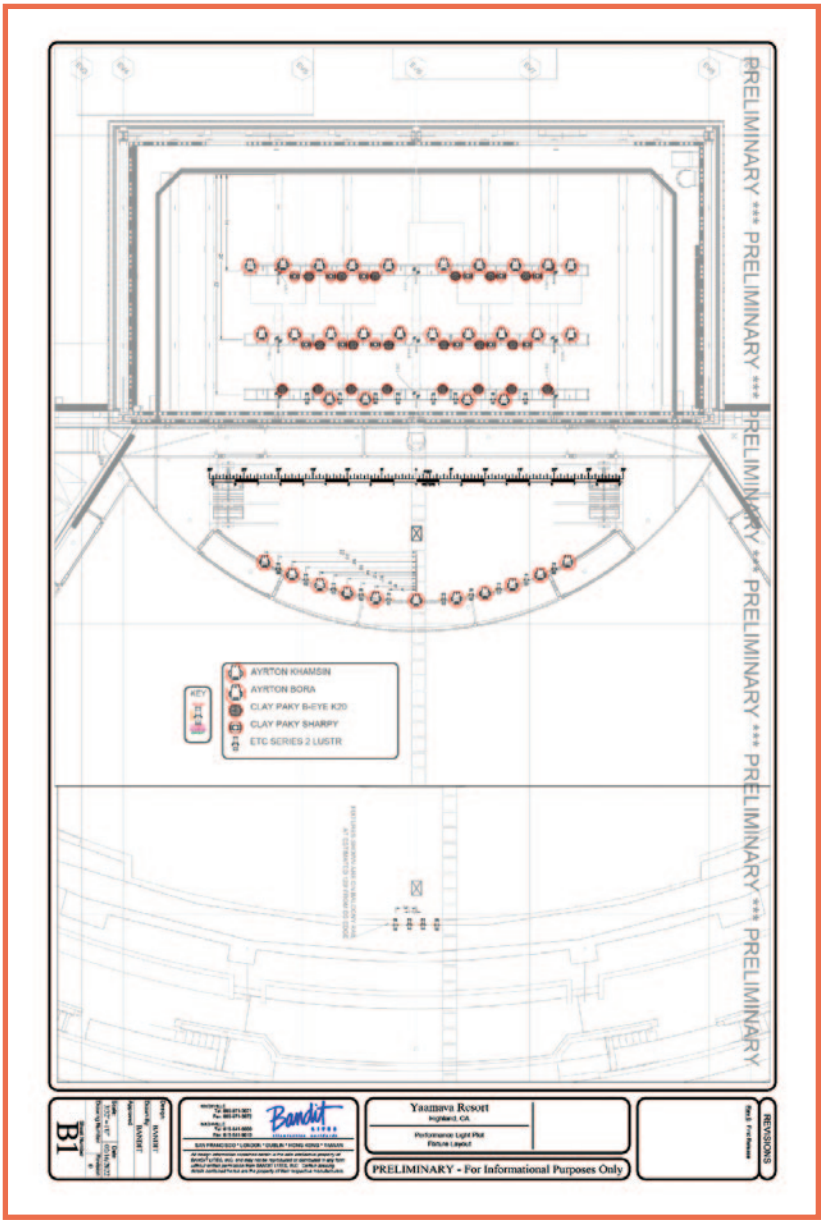
In addition, distributed chain hoist power and controls allow for groups of up to 48 motors to be controlled from the stage. The system allows for selective patching of motors so that several different groups can be operated at different times simply by repatching at the stage. A complement of ¼-ton, ½-ton, and one-ton chain motors, as well as motor-distro, is part of the house equipment. These include motors to lift the house loudspeaker clusters and IMAG screens. A load cell system is provided as an alternate for load sensing and safety. Additional power was provided to allow touring groups to use their own systems.

A permanently installed rigid fire curtain and motorized main drape and border were installed by Protech Theatrical Services. Additional masking drapery and traveler tracks and drape were also provided by Protech.

"The goal was to make that venue a destination for regional and national touring artists and shows, and to make it a turnkey venue for them, with sound, video, and lights ready to go out to a production truck," says Scott Coyle, business development manager for Sound Image's contracting division. "The technology had to all be 'rider-ready,' [featuring] what top touring artists would expect to find, because this is a very entertainment-dense and competitive area. They also looked for what could help them keep costs down by not having to take equipment off their own trucks." Similarly, Coyle says the tribe emphasized the need to also keep technology choices consistent throughout the entire casino—there are four other areas on the property that were fitted with appropriately scaled L-Acoustics sound systems and Yamaha mix consoles.

The big stage, big sound

The theatre's house sound system officially debuted with a private performance by the Red Hot Chili Peppers on April 14. (The actual commissioning show was a performance a week earlier by hip-hop artist The Kid LAROI, for the benefit of the San Manuel Tribal Youth Committee, which hit the SPL meters at 108dB, underscoring the system's muscle.) The main PA consists of a dozen L-Acoustics K2 boxes flown per side, each backed by four flown K1-SB subs and buttressed by four stage-stacked KS28 subs per side. Nine coaxial X8s are used to provide stage-lip front fill, plus two more as out-fills, while nine A15i enclosures—a mix of Wide and Focus types—are paired with six KS21i subs serving as balcony delays. The nine VIP suites on the theatre's second level are each fitted with pair of X8s, while monitoring for the massive stage is done via eight X12s, two X15 HiQs, and two KS21 subs. A dozen LA12X and eight LA4X amplified controllers power and process the entire system, which was designed by L-Acoustics' senior applications engineer for installations



The show lighting system includes Ayrton Bora and Khamsin automated luminaires, Claypaky B-EYE K20s and Sharpys, Lycian 1295 ELT spotlights, and a suite of ETC Source Four Luster+ Series 2 Lekos, with some supply-chain-delayed Robe ColorStrobes and Spikie+ units on the way.

André Pichette and integrated by Sound Image integration techs. "Clarity, coverage, and sound quality were the keys to what the clients were looking to accomplish with the theatre's sound," says Coyle. "The K Series gives us the power and sonic quality we need, with the X8 and A15 nicely providing fill coverage in the front and balcony areas. But there's also plenty of low-frequency energy in the room, supplied by all of those flown K1-SB and stage-stacked KS28 subs. When the Peppers performed, the kick drum sounded simply awesome." Mixing the system is done through three Yamaha Rivage desks: two PM10 consoles for front of house and monitors and a PM3 for video production. All are on a Yamaha TWINLANe network loop along with RPio622/RPio222 I/O racks.

While the new venue was a ground-up build, several architectural elements, such as beams that weren't in the original blueprints and thus not inputted into the Soundvision 3D system-design modeling program, affected the room's coverage. "We had to adjust the delay locations to get the balcony sound fully aligned," Coyle says. Other changes in speaker positioning were prompted once the Planar video walls were hung and seven Panasonic cameras were installed, to ensure that both seat and lens sightlines were clear. Another consideration was how to deal with the floor as an acoustically reflective surface when the front rows were removed for ballroom applications; that was solved by programming the lowermost boxes in the hangs above the floor to be able to be turned off, using L-Acoustics Network Manager, when that room configuration was used. "There were a lot of individual parts that had to fall into place and work together, which isn't necessarily easier just because you're working with a new-construction blank canvas," Coyle adds.

Many design changes were made in concert with Auerbach Pollock Friedlander (in tandem with architects Wimberly, Allison, Tang & Goo), who were brought in by the tribe early in the planning stages, between two and three years before the installation began, says Ryan Ash, project engineer at Sound Image's San Diego office. "Much of the design was done a couple of years earlier and, in the meantime, technology changes fast," he says, pointing to HD video, which impacted the size of the displays, and the later decision to go with a fiber infrastructure for SMPTE applications, such as camera locations, as examples. Paige Datacom Solutions' Gamechanger cable, which pulls and terminates like Cat-6 but can carry 1Gbps and PoE+ over 200m, was also added to the infrastructure, for networked connections.

The venue's sound system rides on a Dante network, using a QSC Q-SYS Core to manage audio routing and switching between consoles and the Core, and which, Ash points out, can accommodate analog front-of-house desks. "It's surprising how many artists travel with analog consoles," he says. The QSC Core also manages the 70V house-sound system, covering other zones besides the theatre proper, as an IP-based Clear-Com intercom system. A Cisco Meraki cloud-connected management system is the network infrastructure that ties the system together.

Rounding out the audio, Sound Image also installed L-Acoustics systems in four other areas on the property—Rock n Brews (a Kara II/A10/SB18/KS28 system), Tukut Lounge (Kara/SB18), Bar Bar Bar (X8/SB15), and George Lopez Chingon Kitchen (Syva/Syva Low/KS21). "They're little rooms, but with a lot of PA, even if it didn't take a lot of boxes to make that happen," Coyle says, noting that the Kara IIs in Rock n Brews are ideal for the room's steady stream of high-energy tribute and cover bands, while the SB18 subs in the Tukut Lounge are just what the EDM and Latin artists that perform there like to hear. "Everyone is excited about the sound quality across the entire site, and especially in the new theatre, of course." Carlos Morales, the audio lead and front-of-house mixer for the theatre, says the use of L-Acoustics sound systems throughout the various venues creates a pleasantly consistent sonic signature for the property. "The continuity from one part of the property to the next is pretty amazing," he says. Ash experienced the sound system's debut a bit more viscerally, though. "When we turned the subs on it knocked some [construction] dust out of the ceiling," he recalls. "That was pretty awesome."

Fiat lux

When Ryan Kimble, the theatre's lighting lead, walked into the venue earlier this year for the first time, he confronted a huge jigsaw puzzle comprising three distinct control systems for three main zones. "Bandit Lites did the lighting system design, and Pixels & Bits did the installation, but there were three disparate control systems: Lutron for the exterior like the lobby, ETC for the interior house lighting, and MA for the theatrical lighting."

Kimble says the first order of business was to determine which systems needed integration most, and which the least. For instance, he says the Lutron system can largely exist on its own. He programmed that control system for lobby flashing to signal show starts and intermission ends. "It can pretty much exist in its own universe for most of what it has to do," he says. "The Lutron system can tie into ETC through the system," which includes software, touch screens and wall stations, modular control electronics, dimming, and control enclosures. "We did connect it with DMX, but not for the lobby lighting functions and areas like the bars, because I don't like to

overload transferring systems That would have been more control than we needed. We wanted to keep as much separate as possible to minimize latency between systems."

The house lighting, on the other hand, is very much tied to the DMX control, using ETC Response Mk2 DMX Gateway interfaces. "We wanted these lights to have their own theatrical aspect," he says. "We have DMX control over every can in the ceiling, which allows us to do a very theatrical sweep, dimming lights from front to back as the show starts."

This control also extends to the VIP suites' lighting, and the ETC Gateways are used on the catwalks for theatrical lighting elements. These include Ayrton Boras and Khamsins, Claypaky B-EYE K20s and Sharpys, Lycian 1295 ELT followpots, and a suite of ETC Source Four Luster+ Series 2 Lekos (with, Kimble adds, some supply-chain-delayed Robe ColorStrobes and Spikie+ units on the way). All are run using an MA Lighting grandMA3 full-sized lighting console.

"The silver bullet for resolving all this was really to take the nuts and bolts of each control system apart and isolate the elements that were needed for either linking them together or leaving them as they were," he says. "In some ways it's still a work in progress, and anytime you put in a new system there will be gremlins you don't see until you begin manipulating it. You find them and you fix them."

Video

The three video screens are arranged in landscape format for the 49.21' by 22.97'/2.6mm-pitch Planar CarbonLight CLI series main backdrop screen and in portrait for the two Planar 21.33' by 13.12'/1.9mm-pitch flanking screens, all on multiple one-ton Chainmaster motors. "The side screens are a very tight pitch because they're closer to the audience seating," notes Kelly Barger, Sound Image's project foreman. The rest of the video system is equally high-end, using two Ross Ultrix Carbonite switchers (a 5U rack for the main switcher and a 2U for the house distributed video system) with Ross' TouchDrive 4 touch- and gesture-enabled work surface, a Carbonite Mosaic for processing, and Ross' Abekas Tria production server for video playback. On the input side, three manned Panasonic AK-UC4000 broadcast cameras are buttressed by three UE150 PTZ cams, a Panasonic AK-UB 300GJ camera, and a Telemetrics PTZ robotics processor and controller, operated from a video production room that also holds a Yamaha PM3 audio mixer. Video components are on a LAN, one of several IP networks that manage AV in the house and beyond.

Coyle says the audio and video domains are largely independent of each other but interact for synchronization, using a Ross SPG4500 clock generator. "The video system is HD because that's what was the state of the art at the time the system was designed," Barger says. "But it's ready for 4K—all they'd need to do is secure the appropriate system licenses and some additional cabling. In terms of capabilities, they could produce the Grammy Awards from here. It can support that level of production."

Dan Pferschy, director of theatre operations, says the sense of competition, in the area and nationally for touring acts, is palpable. And he would know, having come to Yaamava' in late 2021 after stints as director of entertainment at over a half-dozen other regional properties. "It's all about being best in class and better than the competition," he says. The AV technology choices—both the original ones and the updates over the last year or so—made for the venue have been working out well, he says. "When the Black Crowes were here, they barely had to take anything off their trucks, and that made a difference for them, because they had to be at the BottleRock festival in Napa the next day. Artists remember that."