

FRANCE

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Having a bal

A former dance hall with an illustrious history has been refurbished and reinvented as an intimate live music venue. **Tom Bradbury** reports on the audio system chosen to carry its varied musical programme

The delightful Bal Blomet is a new addition to the vibrant live music scene in Paris, although its cleverly refurbished interior draws on a colourful history.

Six years in the making, the venue now offers Parisians a diverse selection of musical entertainment, each genre being well served by a NEXO GEO M6 compact line array, prominently installed above the stage.

Entrepreneur Guillaume Cornut spent many years in London before returning to his home town to discover the near-derelict ballroom in the 15th arrondissement of Paris. Formerly known as the Bal Nègre, the venue had quite a reputation in the early 19th century, as an exotic dance hall: indeed, it was to become one of the sources of 'biguine', the rhythm-centric style of music that originated in Guadeloupe and Martinique, fusing French ballroom dance steps with African rhythms. Among the artists of the Roaring Twenties performing and attending were Joséphine Baker, Maurice Chevalier and Mistinguett, watched by Jean Cocteau, Ernest Hemingway and Joan Miró.

Cornut purchased the building in 2011, and spent three years gaining his licences, planning the reconstruction and convincing his neighbours that the new renamed Bal Blomet was a good thing. So it is has proved, with the immaculately designed venue now offering a 70-seat restaurant, and concerts for just €20 a ticket.

Double height

Following the excavation of 10m of Parisian earth, the double-height theatre is now below ground, its dressing rooms on an even lower floor. It has a U-shaped layout, with two levels of audience areas on either side of the stage as well as in front.

A talented pianist in his own right, Cornut's decision not to specialise in any one genre of music has given Bal Blomet a wide appeal. The objective for Cornut and his installer, Jean Michel Gache of Paris-based company Nanolink, was a sound reinforcement system that would provide even dispersion throughout the 250-capacity venue without disrupting sightlines or losing the intimacy of the space.

Installed

Audio

- NEXO GEO M620 line array modules
- NEXO GEO M6B bass cabinets
- NEXO ID24i compact point-source speakers
- NEXO ID S110 subwoofers
- NEXO NXAMP4x4 controller/amplifiers
- MIDAS audio console

With the programme material spanning acoustic jazz, spoken word and small ensembles, he wanted a smaller low-profile cabinet that wouldn't dominate the space.

Gache has an extensive record with NEXO installations in the 'cool' clubs of Paris. Nanolink's design process made use of NEXO's proprietary NS-1 modelling and prediction software to anticipate the dispersion and SPL of the suggested configuration.

The solution was the newly launched NEXO GEO M6 compact line array system, which is equally suited to jazz, classical, cabaret, comedy

About the installer

- Located just over 5km from the centre of Paris, Nanolink has been established for more than 20 years
- Recent installation clients include the Paris Palais du Justice, the Museum of Fairground Arts, the University of Reims and numerous clubs and event venues
- In addition to installations, its services include the sale of equipment and consumables, after-sales service, equipment rental, technical co-ordination at events, and training

and chanson. It has the format-to-power ratio to deliver in the Bal Blomet space: other systems use bigger bass cabinets than the GEO M6B.

Val Gilbert, from NEXO's Engineering Support Division, comments: "Of course there are gain-before-feedback restrictions, but the GEO M6 is the optimal solution to achieve the desired levels in Bal Blomet."

The arrays are affixed to the back wall, high enough above the musicians not to cause feedback issues. The choice of location is a pragmatic one: this wall is the only place where there is a weight-bearing structure.

The GEO M6 design allows the system to be split, with mid-high boxes at the top and at

the bottom of the array, and the bass modules in the middle. With the top three GEO M620 cabinets covering the top balcony, the use of the three M6B bass cabinets in the middle means that system stays coherent in the low frequencies while, at the same time, optimising HF for the balcony and the floor without getting unnecessary reflections off the balcony itself.

More power

The GEO M6B low and mid-frequency module is designed for applications that demand more powerful reinforcement, such as live music. With one 6.5in 8-ohm long-excursion driver, the M6B shares the same physical footprint as the M620, allowing the cabinets to be arrayed together in the same column. With a flare-shaped port tube to increase LF efficiency and linearity at high power, the M6B offers a usable range of 70Hz-1kHz @-6dB; the M620 delivers a frequency response of 80Hz-19kHz ± 3 dB. With NEXO-designed long-excursion high-efficiency 6.5in LF driver and a 1in throat driver, the M620 can offer HF dispersion of 80° or 120° horizontal, with 20° vertical coverage, 0° to 20° splay when arrayed.

The loudspeakers are mounted as far above

the stage as possible, but, thanks to the long length of the line, spill in the LF is reduced. The bass goes forward, not up and down, and there is no feedback in the low frequencies; coverage from the lowest box in the array goes over the top of the stage.

To cover the balconies to the side, and the seating below them, NEXO ID24i compact point-source loudspeakers have been used, located at the top and bottom of the GEO M6 arrays. These high-powered compacts have twin 4in drivers plus an HF compression driver with rotatable horn, which allows the horizontal dispersion to be 'tuned' precisely for the application.

Sub-bass is provided by a pair of ID S110 10in subs on either side of the stage. The partner sub to the ID Series, these compact and powerful cabinets deliver punchy and powerful sub-bass performance within a 43-130Hz range, ideal for Bal Blomet's performing artistes.

The GEO M6 compact line array is entirely powered by NEXO NXAMP4x4 controller/amplifiers, and a MIDAS mixing console completes the audio system. **1**



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The array clusters comprise mid-high boxes at the top and at the bottom, and bass modules in the middle