



GRAVITY RIGS

Gravity Rigs, AKA Alex Turner and Matt Cox, is a two-man powerhouse that create bespoke, touring playback systems and music tech performance rigs. The duo has built some challenging and unique rigs for all manner of artist and genre, and as the company gears up for a new era in portable, airport-friendly rigs, Alex Turner talks to TPI's Kel Murray.

The last time TPI spoke to the Gravity team, they were camped out in STS Touring's offices building a custom system for The Chemical Brothers. Their history with the electronic act goes back some years, and would in fact become the catalyst for the formation of the company. Turner began: "Matt is actually quite a force when it comes to keeping an eye on developments in music technology used in world tours. He himself tours for at least half the year, so he has the up to up-to-date, real world touring experience." His absence for our interview is due to his current touring commitments.

"This ties in with my non-touring position quite nicely," Turner continued. "Matt has a studio and workshop in Manchester, and I'm based in our central London design office and workshop. The nature of our set up now means that we can say 'Yes' to the interesting projects we're keen to undertake, and this is why the business is able to expand.

Between them, Cox and Turner cover a lot of bases: they're both innovators with a real passion for what they do, not to mention an

"Matt has a very deep understanding of and ability to innovatively work with music software; he's one of the best programmers out there. I personally studied 3D design and IT project management, so I have a great understanding of space and physics, as well as a thorough design process," he added.

"Looking back 2 decades when we started touring we both left good opportunities in 'other worlds' to follow our joint passion for music technology. Matt was actually in the army and I was at design college. We both gravitated away from those career paths to work in recording studios which led to us becoming music technology technicians during the early '90s when music tech was becoming more widely used in the live & touring environment" he explained.

In those early days Cox left the studio to tour with The Chemical Brothers, and working closely with the kind of acts that were pioneering live electronic music on a big scale mean that their talents were noted. With a business model that is somewhat different, and with a service and skill set which is clearly sought after, the pair had to make some decisions about moving forward.

76



"I can actually remember first conversation with Matt about how we could utilise our experience. We were both thinking the same thing at the same time, but Matt proposed pooling together all of our expertise and skills to work collaboratively, under one brand. I knew with a bit of planning we could be become the go-to company for live music tech rigs," Turner mused.

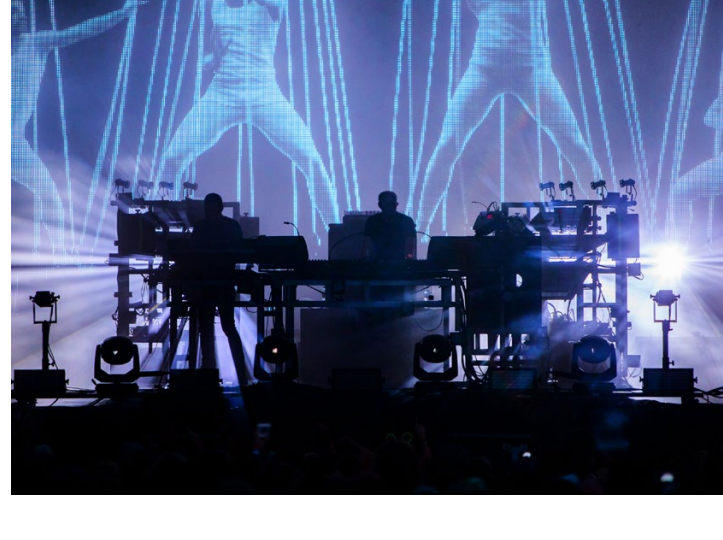
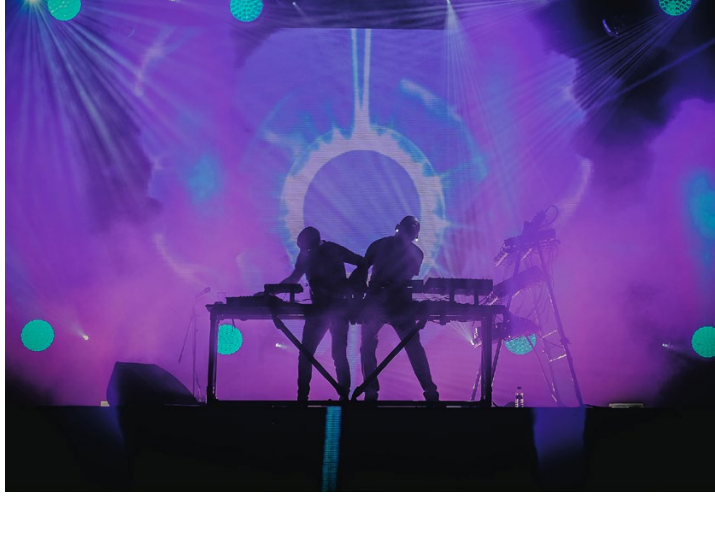
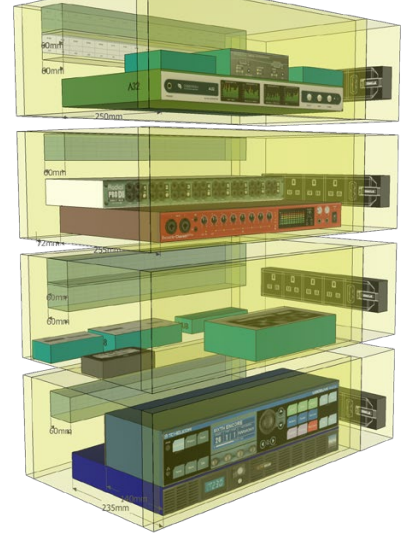
He was right: "When you work with us, you get two perfectionists with mortally 'anti-fail' work ethics," he laughed. "Plus, we could feel the demand in the market growing; both artists and their management were beginning to see the logic in using fully experienced techs like us to exclusively design and build. We create systems that are ultra-reliable, and tick all the boxes for all the agendas from the rest of the crew. From the supreme build quality, to the intricate knowledge of what touring crews need, Gravity has indeed become the go-to playback rig brand for those in the know.

The Chemical Brothers' design had an innovative brief, featuring networked audio at the heart of it, allowing all aspects of the backbone audio streams to be recorded from one single point within.

"So many more artists use music tech as their instruments, so with a bit of good design, their own tools can be made reliable and practical. The worldwide festival circuit now provides so many good artists with a touring business model, yet they need to be safe from losing out on performing due to technical failures. For a lot of acts, it's key now that designs can be both festival and airport friendly, and we build them as reliable systems with protection from failure."

Disclosure was another feat for the pair. Using RME Madifaces XT's all-round, digital switching, and a parallel relay system to switch the AES, analogue and midi I/O simultaneously. Turner furthered:

77



All three show computers had to be located off stage while maintaining stadium level reliability. The design also had to allow for expansion and flexibility.

On this project, the removable rack sleeves in the dual bay rack allowed the conversion to airport mode. The miniaturising of the onstage I/O satellite box containing all the connections needed to take the USB, HDMI, relays, midi and audio through their 20m loom.

Tours have been known to turn down large TV shows because their backstage needs are so vast; once upon a time, they had to be freighted, but Gravity Rigs offers a real solution to that.

"For example, for Maluma's new convertible B rig, they had a different pack down routine if they needed to move it in airport friendly cases. Yet in road freight mode, it can be set up in an arena in just 35 minutes, so they enjoy the best of both worlds, without the worry."

This sort of an achievement is what allows clients priceless adaptability in world of performance booking. To achieve it, we worked with a great flight case company that allows us to realise all our ideas and whose quality of work is outstanding. We actually create all our flight case designs 'in house' in a proper software package, so we can very quickly design any design. Nailing the client's brief is key; our designs must cover all the bases, and we often create new features within the designs that the clients haven't even thought about!"

Currently out on the road with a Gravity package is the Snow Patrol camp. "With our eye on ever shrinking technology, we found the right hardware and software solutions for them, and adapted the new modular lightweight sleeve design and Pelican road case combo. What we delivered was taking a 20u rack to just two Pelican cases.

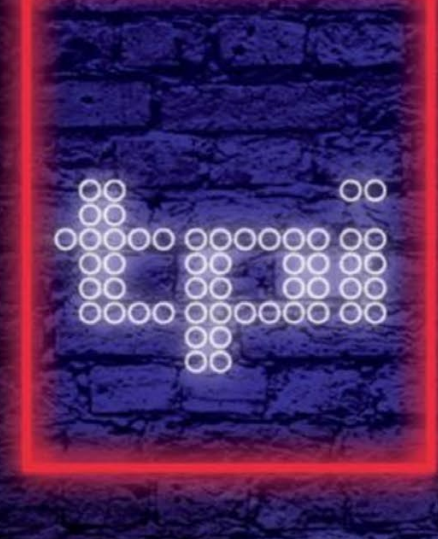
"To make sure a rig is airport friendly, we project the weight and size of all the components fit, making sure that there is easy access to the equipment by hand in each sleeve. Not only does each case have to be under 23kg, but it must be safe from baggage handler abuse. We've developed a database of all sorts of measurements that are matrixed out in custom spreadsheets. Only then do we have a design!" he proclaimed.

Gravity Rigs has also begun to utilise a new software which Turner describes as "such a time saver!" The AV design platform in which schematics are created or adapted from previous templates easily, along with rack drawings, automatically outputs the equipment list, cable schedule and basic schematic. "It really automates the whole process, and makes it so much more flexible and speedy than doing everything in lots of different packages. We want to give our clients some really useful functionality that they won't be able to get anywhere else... we're going to be releasing two bits of software ourselves, FOC, but exclusively for our clients. An easy to use and integrate autocue plug in and the Holy Grail of dual switched computers - a solid sync app, so that USB controllers like the APC 40 or machine appears to control both computers."

As Turner made time to live to TPI, he was in the middle of lecturing a Music Tech 'masterclass' at the Academy of Contemporary Music in London, naturally. It's set to be another interesting, fulfilling and busy year for the self-confessed tech perfectionists, and no doubt you'll visit many a tour with their playback systems being put to good use.

TPI www.gravityrigs.com

78



Gravity Rigs TPI Feature



AWARDS 2019

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
VARI*LITE

RECOGNISING PRODUCTION
TALENT FOR 21 YEARS