

SymNet Radius 12×8 DSP Brings Atlanta History Center into the 21st Century

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ATLANTA, GEORGIA:

The Atlanta History Center (AHC), which was founded in 1926, is in a period of tremendous growth. Its mission to link people, history, and culture through innovative programming connects with 228,000 visitors, including 60,000 school children, every year. In order to accommodate an expanding membership, increasing visitor base and a broadening range of programs, AHC increasingly relied on the 400-seat Woodruff Auditorium that was constructed in 1975. Although minor upgrades to the audio/visual system had taken place over the years, the facility was still using some of the original 1970s vintage equipment – components that were themselves becoming historical artifacts.

“In today’s constantly evolving world of technology, we must be able to connect our visitors with history through a variety of methods, not just traditional exhibitions and displays,” said Hillary Hardwick, vice president of marketing communications with AHC. “We must adapt

our methods to meet the current and future needs of our diverse and growing audience, and having the right technology plays a significant role in how we deliver innovative programming.”

AHC consulted with Rogers Dixon, president and owner of Atlanta’s Cape Dixon Associates Incorporated (CDAI). In addition to having worked on a number of exhibits and new facilities over the years, CDAI had consulted on a significant renovation to the Woodruff Auditorium’s acoustics a number of years before.

CDAI first reviewed AHC’s system requirements with Jackson McQuigg, AHC’s vice president of properties. These requirements include AHC’s historical theatre program as well as a wide range of lectures, presentations, and other types of events being held in the Auditorium. CDAI and AHC concluded that to accommodate AHC’s new and expanding requirements, a comprehensive replacement of the existing audio/visual and stage lighting systems was needed. The Atlanta History Center was able to undertake this project thanks to a grant from The Goizueta Foundation, but the use of grant funds meant that the project team had to make every dollar count.

CDAI realized that, while modern technologies existed that would meet AHC’s needs, the budget posed several challenges to the project team. CDAI proposed that AHC consider a different approach for the project. CDAI brought in Sound Design & Innovation (SDI), a new audio/visual system integration company started by Aaron Catlin, a former CDAI employee. “It was interesting the way the project evolved into a collaboration between CDAI, SDI and AHC,” explained Dixon. “I think the critical component that made this approach work was the high degree of mutual trust and respect between all three parties.”

A number of outstanding products were considered for the project but all of the original options posed challenges for the tight budget. Ultimately, the team decided on Symetrix’ Radius 12x8 Dante network audio DSP as the best “fit” for the project. The key element of the Symetrix system is Dante audio networking protocol, for which SDI wired the facility with CAT6 cabling.

“The Symetrix SymNet Radius 12x8 DSP is the cornerstone of the system; without it, a system with these capabilities would not have been possible within the budget constraints. When Symetrix announced the release of the Radius 12x8 DSP it was like the heavens opened up and smiled on us,” said Catlin.

The Symetrix Radius 12x8 has a powerful open-architecture DSP. It is fully and reliably controllable from a third-party application and its I/O is flexible and expandable for the future via the Dante network. In this installation it’s handling all of the processing for the main auditorium and the two overflow rooms, including room combining, but we’re only using about twenty percent of its DSP horsepower. Because the whole place is now wired with CAT6, AHC can easily expand or bring in additional Dante-compatible equipment for larger events.”

Bose digital amplifiers power a pair of discrete three element Bose column arrays and subwoofers that, in combination with the CDAI-designed acoustical environment, provide an amazing sound quality improvement in the space. “We set up a demonstration of the Bose system for AHC and the decision to use it was made on the spot,” says Dixon.

Six new Shure ULX-D series wireless microphones provide the workhorse, day-in-day-out inputs to the system. “Because AHC is in the Buckhead area of Atlanta – an area that can be an RF interference nightmare – I was glad to have Shure’s new Dante-based system to provide a reliable front end,” said Catlin. Outputs from video players, microphones from two overflow event rooms, and a stage box comprise the remaining inputs to the system. Since they interface seamlessly into a Dante network, the Shure system is fully available for processing and matrixing within the Symetrix Radius 12×8 DSP and doesn’t use any of its twelve physical inputs.

A Key Digital® Compass Control® system provides iPad and iPod-based touch control of every aspect of the room’s functionality. It controls a new Digital Projection E-Vision 8000 lumen Video Projector, new DMX controlled stage lighting, the existing stage curtains, the projection screen, and a variety of music and video playback devices. It also integrates with the Symetrix SymNet Radius 12×8 DSP to control room combining, input selection, volume, and other relevant system controls.

“With this new technology, we can deliver high-quality programs that will engage a broader audience. It allows us to explore the ways in which we convey history – whether through lectures, music series, film series, our newly-launched museum theater performances, and a variety of other types of event,” said Hardwick. “This system was not only conceived and designed to meet AHC’s needs for a long time to come, it brings AHC into the 21st Century, where a cutting-edge history center belongs,” Catlin concluded.