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BARBER

# SOUND & LIGHTING

## THE WINTER OF OUR DISCONTENT'

When it was first suggested that a column dealing with the specific problems of touring a Sound & Lighting system in the winter would suit the theme of this issue, I decided to get some opinions from Westbury's staff technicians. So, I posed the musical question, "What do you do about touring in winter?" The answer varied only geographically from: "Get a gig in Florida!"

Since somebody will have to contend with the problems created by ice, snow and cold, here are a few pointers which may help you to avoid some of them.

The cold makes things hard and frozen solid, obviously a problem for any moving parts. The cold also causes condensation which can freeze things solid even better. All your equipment will be brittle and fragile and more susceptible to cracking and breaking if dropped or moved.

Cables become brittle with cold. The PVC plastic type of multi cables in particular will crack and/or break if you try to unwrap them while they're still frozen solid.

The seals on Gas Genie Lifts will crack and leak terribly unless they are allowed to warm up before use. They should be stored and transported upright so that the tubes are not stretching the rubber seals.

Watch out for condensation and wipe it off wherever possible. Fortunately most clubs and theatres get pretty dry in the winter so the moisture will tend to evaporate once the equipment warms up. The same does not hold true for hockey arenas which are never dry and never warm up.

Condenser microphones are particularly susceptible to condensation and will often fizzle and crackle when they are first turned on due to the moisture that forms in the capsule and preamp. Allow them time to dry out and they should be fine.

Vocal microphones have hot, moist air breathed on them constantly. Moisture on the diaphragm will affect its response adversely, thus degrading the sound quality. If that moisture freezes, it makes the mic even more susceptible to any jarring movements which could shatter or otherwise destroy the diaphragm. In cold weather, handle your mic box with extreme care and pack it where it will get bounced around the least.

Faders and pots can snap if you try and adjust them while they're frozen. This is particularly true of liquid damped pots.

Diaphragms in compression drivers and tweeters, particularly drivers filled with ferro fluids,

could shatter if you fire them up immediately after being in sub zero temperatures. As with the microphones, they can be severely damaged if they are knocked around while frozen solid.

Don't stack your horns bell up in the truck for fear of water dropping in and rusting out your drivers. This holds true year round but it's not just a leaking roof you have to worry about; in winter, snow can get inside your truck and stick to wheels and cases. Snow turns to water when it's brought inside and we all know that sound and lighting systems can't be mixed with water.

Basically, any moving mechanism - be it a microphone, speaker, air lift or level control - should be brought up to room temperature before it is turned on or used. When you haul your equipment in, take all the covers and lids off and let it warm up before operation.

An important exception should be made for instruments with a lacquered finish. They should be allowed to warm up very slowly with the case closed, otherwise the sudden change in temperature will crack the finish.

One of the most important considerations in winter time is transportation.

Transport Canada provides taped road reports for different areas. Check your local listings for the information service nearest you.

Generally, just allow more time for travelling and keep your truck in good shape and well supplied with windshield and gas-line antifreeze, booster cables, lock de-icer, salt and even sand and a shovel. And spare gloves for those helping you out of a snow bank. A heat shield blanket and related emergency gear could save your life. Remember, bands and roadies are required to travel when sane human beings stay at home.

Ramps and lifts get very slippery with snow so take your time and watch your footing.

Get some loading gloves, not bulky ski gloves because you'll invariably lose your grip and damage someone or something.

This is all pretty common sense stuff when you think about it, but why get your fingers and shins bashed a few times before you remember that hidden dangers lurk in the great white north?

In summary, when winter comes, allow more time for travelling and loading, handle the equipment carefully, don't operate anything until it has warmed up and dried out. And if at all possible, don't do any outdoor shows.

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