

We were suddenly aware of the advances the Americans had over us when it came to P.A. equipment, and although we were frequently offered large sums of money for our British-made guitar amps, much in vogue in the States, we set our minds and muscles to making enough money to buy an American-style P.A. rig which we then knew would be necessary if we were to compete with other bands.

The other major awakening of the year was to witness the fate that befell amplifiers and drum kits shipped as excess baggage without proper protection, and so, in due course, the flight case was born.

These armoured containers, now the standard for every group, however small, often cost as much as their contents but soon became invaluable for the ease of transport and orderly set-up they afforded.

When, in 1971 /72, we began to headline the big shows in America and Europe, the whole scale of touring dramatically increased and we began to employ union crews for all the supporting facilities - i.e. lighting, P.A., electrical and carpentry functions and so on, and kept our British stage-crews for the on-stage duties and maintenance of equipment. This meant the provision of correct entry visas, work-permits, carnets for the legal transportation of musical equipment and the posting of huge bonds with the London Chamber of Commerce to comply with regulations.

Six 40-foot trailers were needed to ship the equipment by road and certain items, like the P.A. cradles for 'flying' the system and lighting trusses, were duplicated in order that the riggers and crews could 'leap-frog' each other, playing alternate shows, while the 'A' trucks containing the P.A., lights and stage gear and instruments, worked every show, along with the stage crew itself.

The multi-range modular P.A. became the order of the day, with its electronic cross-overs, racks of Crown DC300 power amps and lengthy rows of multicore cables. Mixing was through an Alice 30channel desk and later on a custom Cadac with 32 inputs, 6 subgroups and all recording studio facilities for patching-in effects and outboard equipment. A real-time frequency spectrum analyser pointed the way at each concert to the fine-tuning of the system to suit the individual acoustic temperaments of the venues.

Monitoring on-stage, to allow the band to hear each other, was evolved around a custom mixer with separate output mixes for each band-member to his own taste and requirements.

The sophistication of digital equipment, both musical and soundprocessing, came into play and the customising of guitars and keyboards was undertaken to keep pushing towards some reasonable replication of our records.

Our own 60 foot stages were constructed and our contracts with promoters became ever-more complicated but, we felt, still eminently reasonable in their requests. Pre-production mini-tours were made by Tull representatives a month or two before the tours themselves to ensure that all would be as we wanted.

Compromises were, and still are, made and each night a hundred things continued to go wrong, but you only spotted the deliberate mistakes. Crew members and band members came and went, but the ghost of the old Transit van lingered on in the heart of the corporate beast that IS Jethro Tull.

On-road running costs became enormous and only by careful management could we still show profits where, as was accepted in the industry most other bands typically lost money through touring, and considered live appearances to be for record-promotion only.

It all became rather good fun in the mid-seventies and the team of people who work the shows today gradually came together - each one skilled in his own particular field, although often without formal qualification - to build up the touring organisation that trundles forth every time the call goes out.

The basic equipment list remains stable these days, but with full-time effort as necessary to up-grade, replace, and maintain the whole in good order.

Having been through our flamboyant period of production excesses, the accent is now on practical, well-run concerts where all that the musicians have to worry about is the musical performance itself.

A Jethro Tull concert is by no means the most extravagant production around. We have neither the biggest road crew nor the mightiest P.A. system, and smoke machines, flash-boxes and special effects lie dormant in some warehouse. BUT, fourteen years on, we are still ON THE ROAD and the thrill remains, for us at any rate, whenever the house lights dim and cigarette lighters ignite and the firemarshall tears his hair out.

This year, the concert programme serves as a tribute to the road crews management and support personnel who have served us and you, our audience, since those early days, and illustrates some of the concern that goes to make the nightly event seem like just another turn of a well-oiled machine.

So, as the last Coke can is swept away from the floor and the doors close on the trucks after the load-out, look behind the slick facade of easy professionalism and imagine us drifting into the night in that same old rusty Transit van. For, at heart, we know that it still takes that bit of magic and good luck to get us to the gig tomorrow night in spite of all the planning - In fact, 'midst the grime and confusion of a rehearsal room on the outskirts of London, as I write this, it all seems so incredibly unlikely!

Ah, well - gigs don't just happen. Or do they?