

Lighting & Sound America

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Lou Mannarino

Lou Mannarino, owner of L&M Sound & Light, has an unusual client list, including many of the tenants at Lincoln Center. He also recently became a distributor of products for the Italian loudspeaker manufacturer K-array.

Lighting&Sound America: Can you describe your educational and professional background?

Lou Mannarino: I have three degrees—a BA in music performance and BS in music education from Wagner College, and my masters was in music (from The Aaron Copland School of Music, Queens College). By my 16th birthday, I had a rental/design company servicing mostly theatre productions. I made more money in high school doing audio than I did my first year teaching high school! My production company, L&M Sound & Light, is about 35 years old now.

LSA: How did you start working with Lincoln Center?

LM: About eight years ago, I was asked by the operations manager of the [New York Philharmonic] if I would take a stab at a problem they were having. They had met me from working with the American Composers Orchestra, when I did an event for Danny Elfman. They saw that I had influence into the landscape of the audio with respect to the performers and composers working. I think that they remembered that because they asked me to come back again. Since then, I have been mixing and designing the concert audio on a regular basis. They trust me, so it's really fantastic; they give me total creative license to be a greater part of the audio landscape. Simultaneously, I have been designing audio for The Metropolitan Museum of Art. I have created designs for many styles of events in multiple galleries, including the Temple of Dendur.

LSA: How did you come to work with K-array?

LM: I had thoughts about speaker design for years. I had pitched my ideas to a couple of American companies, to no avail. Somebody from Sennheiser told me they'd seen this company in Italy that was doing exactly what he remembered I was looking for. At the time, K-array wasn't available in the US. I had to order it through a Canadian distributor. I ordered over \$100,000 worth of product that I had not even listened to. It just felt right to me, both from a creative and manufacturing standpoint. I knew that it had to work and when I got it, we were blown away! That was 2009, right after the crisis with the economy; K-array helped get us through a tough time. We received calls from new clients looking for great sound with respect to style and aesthetics.

The products sounded better and looked better. This year, I became a distributor for their Firenze and Concert products.

LSA: How have K-array's products helped you?

LM: K-array's sonic subtlety and musical sound with respect to design have allowed me to respectfully integrate audio dynamic reproduction into the complete musical experience. Let me put it this way. If a review says, "Oh, the effects of the audio were fantastic," that would mean I totally blew it [laughs]. But if they say, "I felt immersed in the choir," I think, Well, my surrounds really worked! If you can avoid putting big speakers out front, that will help stop people from thinking about the audio. My last review was, "The singer sounded so natural and beautiful, it didn't even seem like they needed a mic!"—and that's a great review! They were wondering whether they were even hearing a microphone or not!

LSA: What is your opinion on the Tony Awards' recent decision to remove the Sound Design category?

LM: An award show is not designed to educate the public. With respect to the Academy Awards, people don't necessarily notice if the soundtrack or sound design is good in a movie. They notice how immersed they were—by that shark [from *Jaws*] coming out of the water. However, without a musician playing semitones on the bass it would not have had the same effect. It's a similar thing with the Tonys, so we can't be offended by it. If it's extraordinary, maybe the designer should have a special award.

LSA: What are your goals for with K-array?

LM: K-array's goals are to make something really cool, to be respected within their own community, and keep people employed, too. My goal is to gain the respect of others for doing a good job while becoming a part of the whole creative process, and to bring something to the craft. How can I be more involved in the art, rather than the equipment? We're designers and craftsmen; I'm a welder, an electrician, etc. We all need to be these things, but we're service providers first. So K-array allows me to not worry about equipment and lets me look at the art. That's why it has maintained its excitement level for me, because I'm constantly getting better at what I do. 🎧