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Point Source Audio Celebrates Their 10th Anniversary

Innovative miniature mics shaking up the theater world and beyond

By Kevin M. Mitchell

When asked if there was a “highlight” moment of the company’s 10 years so far, James Lamb, president of Point Source Audio, exclaims, “Every year!” The microphone design/engineering/manufacturing company is having an especially big year, having been recently called on to supply wearable mics for Hamilton, arguably the hottest ticket in America. “There are always moments where you pause and go, ‘Well, that’s pretty cool!’ And then you get back to work. You have to prove yourself every day.”

In addition to many hit Broadway and touring shows, the company’s client list includes theaters like the San Francisco Opera, the Smith Center for the Performing Arts in Las Vegas and the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris; music halls ranging from the Berklee College of Music to the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Pops orchestra; and many schools, colleges and houses of worship.

Point Source Audio’s array of successful products includes the CO-8WD omnidirectional headset, which is especially popular with corporate speakers and churches. A more recent addition is the patented, concealable and easy-to-fit Embrace mics used in theaters and schools, among other applications.

Any company making it to the decade mark deserves to celebrate, and Point Source certainly does, having received a number of awards from a variety of trade publications. But despite all that, the company isn’t making their 10th Anniversary all about themselves.

Part of this celebratory year includes supporting the arts, in the form of a \$10,000 gear contest. The giveaway kicked off in January of this year with a posting on its website (point-sourceaudio.com), calling out to public and non-profit schools; non-profit performing arts and music-driven organiza-

tions; community theaters; and church performance groups. Prize packages totaling up to \$10,000 in Point Source Audio gear will be awarded to three organizations selected after this month’s NAB show.

“As a company, we believe it’s important to give back to the community and foster organizations that are doing great work,” Lamb says. “We want to encourage success and growth and help these organizations that are so important to their communities.” Lamb adds that a wide variety of non-profit groups have entered the contest already and each have an amazing story to tell about the work they are doing in their communities.

» Over Dinner and a Napkin

Speaking of stories, Lamb has an interesting one of his own. He was raised in L.A. and attended Cal State Northridge as a music performance major, studying trumpet, conducting, and composition. After that, he hit the road with one of the country’s most prestigious musical acts — the U.S. Navy Band. “I traveled the world playing in rock, jazz and concert bands, doing live broadcasts and public performances,” Lamb says. “It was an amazing time.” After 11 years, he landed in New York City, where he became a freelance musician playing on Broadway, also working as a session musician for recordings and a musical director.

Lamb returned to L.A. in the 1990’s and went to work for Apogee Sound, followed by a business development role with Digigram, a digital audio company serving the broadcast market. Then an opportunity presented itself. “Over dinner, some of us started talking about product ideas sketched on a napkin,” Lamb explains. “We were trying to do something that was new and different at that point in the microphone world.” This led to the



This scene from Paris’ Théâtre du Châtelet’s production of *Singin’ in the Rain* illustrates just how rough the stage environment can be for headworn microphones.

founding of Point Source in 2008. The group must have had some good ideas, because the young company landed a big OEM client pretty much on day one — in fact, it’s still one that Point Source Audio continues to serve today.

Point Source’s approach has been to look at the market and offer multiple entry points. “We wanted to offer products at various price points, as every client and community needs something different, and so we’re always creating products that address different aspects of the market.” But it’s all a moving target, as the demands change and evolve constantly. “It’s the job of sound designers to work with directors and producers to bring their vision to life,” and the technical aspects, like placement, figures heavily into that big picture. They’re challenged with achieving optimal performance, while often having to camouflage the mics and the wireless packs. As manufacturers, it’s incumbent upon us to offer products with optimum quality that can stand the rigors of a performance.”

Actors under hot lights for hours sweating on the mics is something productions are always fighting against. “There have been some productions where the sweat-prone actors go through dozens of mics during a production run and that can have serious impact on the production’s budget. So we work to create stronger mics that also last longer.” Another aspect is the actor’s comfort level — quality mics that can be well-hidden and not impede movement are always desired.

» Every Customer is Equal

“We don’t focus on what our competition is doing; they all do good work creating good products. Our focus is to create tools that fit the application of what is happening in today’s theater environment at the quality audiences demand,” Lamb explains.

Asserting that the process is a journey, not a destination, he added that “we watch how people use our products and are always trying to find ways to improve on them.”

One example of this is how performance demands are constantly changing. “Directional mics may achieve the isolation you need but are prone to wind noise, yet we’ve

started seeing more performers use cardioids in very specific applications. There’s always a give and take,” says Lamb. “What you gain in one may create challenges elsewhere, so when choosing which product is right for your application, it’s important to also consider all technical aspects. These are tools used to help tell your story.”

With the increasing trend in the musical theater world moving toward more pop/rock shows (*School of Rock*, *American Idiot*, *Rock of Ages*, etc.), so is the demand for more mic options, such as smaller, sturdier and stealth-like mics. “We were recently backstage on a new hit show where the guitar, bass and piano are all on stage. This requires careful consideration of the acoustic conditions around the performers.”

Today, all of Point Source Audio’s administration, service, assembly, warehousing and shipping takes place in its headquarters in Petaluma, CA — a city within the states’ laid-back Sonoma County wine region some 45 minutes north of San Francisco. Yet PSA’s focus is on business — and technology, as the company continues to grow its worldwide footprint through an exclusive network of resellers, contractors, and distributors.

“Our client types run the gamut from schools, churches, to the biggest Broadway shows,” Lamb says. “And we treat all of them the same — that is one of our goals. Every customer is important. Whether it’s a school production or a touring theatrical production, we will treat every customer with the same care and attention.” FOH

Company Snapshot

Point Source Audio

Founded: 2008

Location: Petaluma, CA

Key Technologies: Lavalier and headworn microphones; intercom headsets

More Info:

point-sourceaudio.com



James Lamb, president

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Sometimes a Great Notion

Innovation has long been a tradition at Point Source Audio. A few recent examples of this include the Embrace earmount microphone, which was issued U.S. design patent D786,220 and utility patent 9,706,285 last year. The Embrace approach combines the company’s popular SERIES8 capsule with a mount that allows mics to be easily concealed and quickly custom-fitted for a consistent and stable placement on the wearer.

Also new from PSA is the EO-8WR Embrace dual earmount microphone, a fully redundant mic in the Embrace embodiment, with the convenience of a custom-fit, ear-mount combined with two sonically matched, waterproof elements, for redundancy in critical, no-fail applications.



The dual-capsule EO-8WR offers fail-safe redundancy.