



INTERVIEW WITH Michelle Sabolchick Pettinato

Michelle Sabolchick Pettinato is a Front of House (FOH) live sound mixer who has mixed Melissa Etheridge, Indigo Girls, Gwen Stefani, Jewel, Natasha Bedingfield, Spin Doctors, Joan Osborne, Collective Soul and Thievery Corporation, among many others. WAM caught up with Michelle via e-mail recently. She is finishing up work with Ke\$ha and heading out on a tour with Mr. Big.



Deanne Franklin and Michelle Sabolchick Pettinato (Right) during a rehearsal for the Ke\$ha Tour.

Could you talk about why you chose an audio career and the path to your success?

As long as I can remember music has been an important part of my life and I've always been more of a behind the scenes kind of person rather than someone who craves the spotlight, so that combined with an interest in science and figuring out how things work led me to explore the recording aspect of the industry. I quickly jumped from studio to live and never looked back. I took whatever jobs I could get in the business, I worked at a radio station for a brief time, then a small local sound company, I ran sound and lights at a few nightclubs, worked in the A/V department at an entertainment complex, mixed local bands, worked as a stagehand....I just took every job I could get and learned everything I could from it and from the people I worked with.

What are some of the necessary skills for someone wanting to become a live sound engineer?

Two of the most important things to learn are signal flow and proper gain structure. Knowing signal flow inside and out will make troubleshooting a breeze and proper gain structure is crucial to getting the most out of your system.

What did you do to prepare for your career?

A long, long time ago I did attend two different technical schools for recording engineering, but the best preparation comes from actually getting your hands on the gear in the real working environment, and learning how to hear. Learning how to listen to recordings and pick out all of the different instruments, hearing specific effects, really training you ear to hear the details.



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What is your favorite part of your job?

Being a creative part of a great show.

What is your least favorite part of the job?

Airplane travel. Not because I'm afraid to fly just because it's become such an awful experience.

What are some of your "go-to" gear choices?

I am an old analog girl so my favorite console is a Midas XL4. A few pieces of out board gear I can't do without are Empirical Labs Distressors, Eventide H3000, and TC Electronics M5000 reverb. I'm also a big fan of Aphex gates, Dbx 160a comps, Summit Audio and Avalon .

Describe a typical tour day.

We load in around 9am and I set up and tech my own FoH. Once the PA goes up I'll tune the system and after that's done I'll help mic and wire the stage. We'll line check as soon as everything is wired and the back line techs are set up, usually around 1pm. Sound check is around 3 or 4pm. Then it's dinner and hopefully a chance to relax for a bit before the show. After the show I strike FOH and help with load out, then it's on to the bus to wind down for a bit before heading to my bunk....and do it all over again the next day.

Any last advice for someone considering becoming a live sound engineer?

With regards to touring, this is a very grueling and difficult lifestyle and it's not for everyone. It's not near as glamorous as it seems. Your days are long and at times can be very difficult, it takes someone who has a lot of self discipline and can work well under pressure. I'm not trying to discourage anyone but a lot of people get into this business for the wrong reasons and find out they hate it. This is not the job for you if you just want to "hang out and party with the band". Most of the time you'll find out you want to spend as little time around the band as possible, even if you do like them. Having said that, I would love to see more women get into live sound. If you really love what you do the payoff can be great. You'll form incredible relationships with people who will become your second family, you'll have the satisfaction of being a creative part of some wonderful music and you get to see the world while someone else is paying the bill! Once you get touring in your blood, it's hard to stop.

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