Angels Notebook Audio and Brainspawn Forte setup

November/December 2006 – January 2007

This is my setup for practice at home. It is on an IKEA computer desk (Jerker) in a corner of the living room. My wife does not like all the cables and the computer gear to much in the living room, but at least I´m not completely away in a different room when I do practice or fiddle on sounds.
All other gear like the desktop PC and TFT monitor or the baby-phone do not directly have something to do with my music setup. Ah, well the WLAN/DSL router gives my notebook access to the printer and the internet.

1.
Acer Travelmate 800 (1.3 GHz Centrino, 1 GB RAM, 40 MB 4.200 RPM HD, Win XP SP2)
This notebook is somewhat outdated (3 ½ years old) but still does a nice job (update January 07: well, everything is relative …). I have done 50+ gigs with it. It runs with its very first Win XP install, which is a universal office work, professional scientific applications, internet, multimedia and music installation.

Update: Currently I prepare a Dell Latitude 820 (2 GHz Core 2 Duo, 2 GB, 100 GB 7.200 RPM, Win XP SP2) as my new machine. This time I will use a dual boot system for a general purpose/office/internet windows install and a clean no-network audio install. From first test I am impressed how fast it is! Sample load times for huge multi-sample sounds in NI Kontakt have reduced by a factor of 4 at least. Update 2: The transition of my software and my Forte rack is complete. **It fucking rocks!!** I can run the Echo Indigo IO with 64 samples buffer and minimal latency! And even complex sample-based scenes load in seconds where the old Acer needed 50 seconds.
What's cool, too: even if the display is closed, I still can monitor the HDD activity LED to check if scene change and sampler loading has completed.
And it came with a two-prong mains plug external power supply. No ground or earth contact means no ground loops or his/buzz common with grounded three-prong plug mains PSUs.

2.
Echo Indigo IO cardbus/PCMCIA audio interface. 2 analog in, 2 analog out. No gimmicks. Rock solid. Ultra portable. No hazle with external digital USB/firewire whatsoever patch cables. If you have EM interference on analog cables, you get at worst some noise or hum or buzz in the audio. Interference into digital cables usually crashes your audio driver. By plugging into the cardbus the Indigo is a kind of an internal sound card. Low latency (true 3ms). Excellent sound with headphones or when connected to front of house PA. Powered by the notebook.

3.
USB ports, and Steinberg dongle for Hypersonic 1 and 2. One of my greatest concerns of getting lost when I´m on tour. My main plug-ins are Steinberg Hypersonic and Native Instruments Kontakt.

4.
Korg Wavestation EX as master-keyboard. Great early 90ties wavetable synth, both for warm analogue and digital sounds, nice 61 semi-weighted keyboard (Yamaha built). I have two of them, one staying at home, one travels with me from rehearsals to gigs and so on. Honestly, I do use the WS sounds only for 5 percent of all my sounds. Mainly, I use the master-keyboard functions (8 key and velocity zones) and step sounds in Forte by program changes coming from the WS performance up/down keys.

5.
Edirol PCR-30 MIDI controller/keyboard/interface. Great amount of rotary knobs, each assigned to the volume of one module in Forte. Faders are assigned to sound parameters of modules (filter cut-off, volume balances) and push buttons to mute/unmute sounds during performance. One button is assigned to panic/all notes off in Forte. Acceptable keys. I`m thinking of getting the successor, the Edirol PCR-M30 with better key action and some other improvements. Powered by the notebook.

6.
Sennheiser HD 595 head phones. One of my best buys. Excellent sound. All sounds I design with these phones do not require much EQing during rehearsal or for live playing. Basses which are impressive with the phones will shake the earth over the front PA. Harsh sounds are readily detected and can be well EQed with these phones.

7.
External 160 GB USB 2/firewire HD. Used for sampler sound libraries, software backups and for full HD disk image backups of the notebook. I make HD backups of my notebook once a week. And before every gig after having checked, that the whole audio and song setup runs fine during the rehearsal. So I have both safety for data loss and a reference if something screws up the system. I take this HD with me when I´m on tour.

8.
Simple foot switch for sustain, pedal hold.

Cable connections, not numerated:

L/R line out of the Wavestation runs straight into the audio in of the Indigo. This is mixed with zero latency to the digital audio from Forte and is routed to the analog outs. Audio out of the Indigo goes to the headphones or to FOH of the PA. Midi out from the Wavestation goes to the MIDI in of the Edirol PCR. Both Wavestation MIDI data and PCR MIDI/controller data go to the notebook via a USB 1.1 connection.

My live rig

Big point for laptops: The have a built-in battery. I had it many times the lights and mains power went out in the middle of the show. Too much lighting, bottles of beer or glasses with Jack Daniels/Coke spilled into the power sockets on stage and so on. As the audio interface and the MIDI interface/keyboard are powered by the notebook there are no issues with restarting/rebooting to get ready. As soon as power is there I can start over. The Wavestation needs 5 seconds to be ready after power-on.
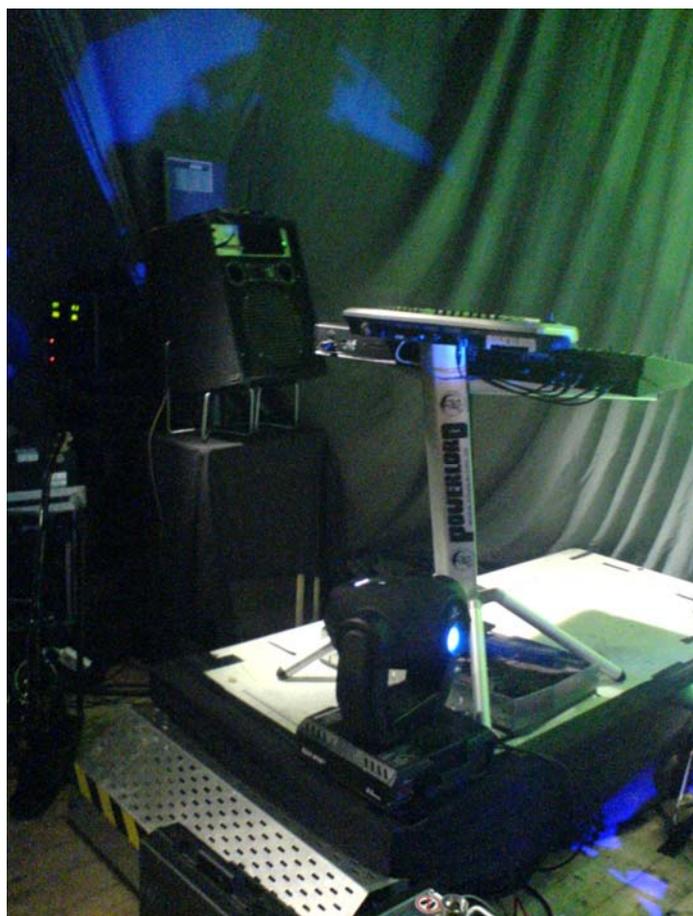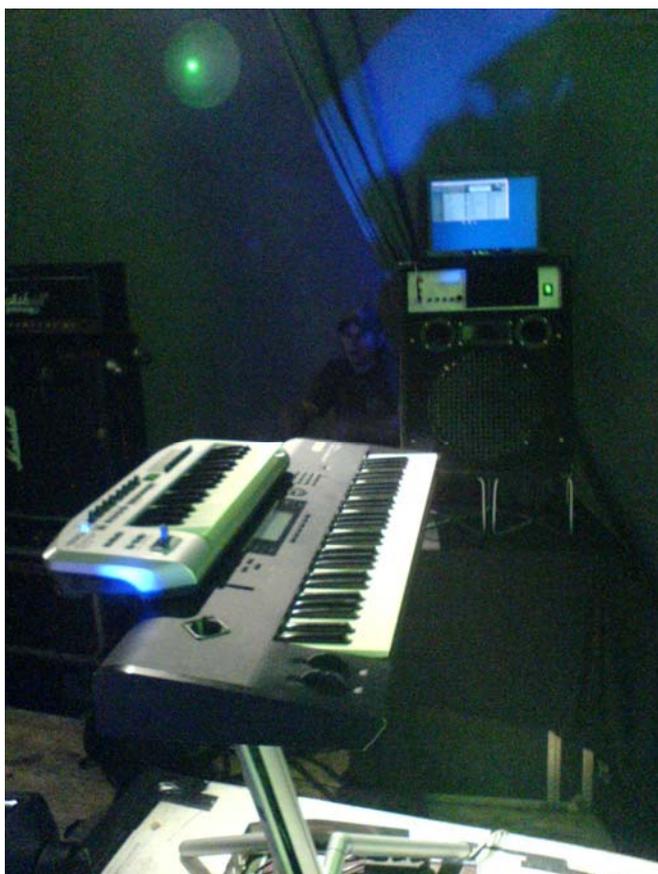
Well, technically my live rig is quite the same as in my living room. It is important to have the same equipment all the time, for practice at home, for band rehearsals and for live gigging. So you can spot errors and trouble-shoot problems at home or in the band room and not on stage.

As stand I use a König+Meyer Spider Baby which I cut back in height by five cm. I like people to see me and not only the keyboard stand. Beneath the "spider" legs I can put my pedal board under the stand. Much better than the Apex stands. You have place for your feet and the pedals. And table-like or X-type stands suck from an optical point of view.

On the broad there are two foot switches (routed to MIDI note hold and effects switch) and two controller pedals, routed to different MIDI controllers. All cables can be hidden in the central post, I really hate cable chaos on stage. The PCR-30 is hold by Velcro strips on top of the Wavestation and the keyboard stand. During the gig the laptop display is blanked and closed. When people see computers on stage they usually think its all .mp3 playback. I just control the HD activity control LED to see when sound loading after a scene change is complete.

The laptop again is velcroed on top of my own keyboard monitor amp and secured by a laptop lock wire. The stereo mix out of my laptop goes via a pair of DI boxes to the FOH PA. From one DI box I pick the right audio channel to my own monitor amp. On this I have nothing else than this right keys audio channel. On the left (seen from behind the keys) side of the raiser there is a monitor wedge box from the PA. On this I let the monitor tech guy give me the left keys audio channel only and a selection of the rest of the band. Thus, I have stereo monitor sound on stage. This really kicks ass, in conjunction with the huge earth-shaking bass sound from the front PA we usually have … and I always can adjust the volume of my own key amp quickly without acrobatic mimics to the monitor mix engineer. I'm a maniac when it comes to sound. And my stage sound is so grrrreat (thank you, LiTo and Soundcheck PA) that I usually get a hard XXX anytime during the show … In-ear monitoring sucks because it takes away the feeling for the band, the sound and the audience.
No, I do not sing any vocals. I like to rock, jump and pose behind my keys without having to think on the microphone or have to concentrate on lyrics.

Have fun with Forte! It seriously rocks!
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