

Grace Chapel in Georgia Makes Powerful Jump With FBT Line Arrays

Andres Caamano | Jan 07, 2016



From a basic setup using combo speakers, to line arrays, chapel at Toccoa Falls College completes significant upgrade.

When students arrive back at Toccoa Falls College (TFC) in the coming weeks fresh off their winter break, one significant change will become immediately obvious upon stepping foot on campus.

Or more specifically, once they step foot inside the college's Grace Chapel.

For the small Christian liberal arts college, located in Toccoa, Georgia, about 95 miles northeast of Atlanta, the 1,500-plus seat chapel built in 2002 serves a quadruple duty. Not is it the location for services at least twice a week, but also because it handles all of the college's musical performances and recitals, in addition to theatrical productions.

The major change made to the chapel was squeezed in during the break, as it has moved on from its original sound system, which featured a set of Electro-Voice speakers.

As noted by Carlos Ramirez, a TFC student that works in the creative arts department, and who was involved with the planning for the upgrade, he said, " (The old setup) was pretty basic they were not line arrays. For touring artists that go on the road, they are looking for line array systems with subwoofers. The EVs were combo speakers, and we had four of them, but they were not pointed toward the audience, and were hanging from the ceiling."

The old system in the past forced the chapel to rent additional equipment to meet the minimum standards of touring artists who performed at the chapel. With the upgrade set to deliver 10dB of sound pressure level, or SPL, to each seat in the chapel that will no longer be the case. For Ramirez, he voiced a hope that Christian rock or rap artists like Third Day, Todd McCray or John Mark McMillan might soon grace the Grace Chapel stage thanks to the new setup.

While the install of the new system took only about a week and a half, as noted by Facility Professor/Pastor Chris Stratton, the process began months earlier.

"(The system had) maxed out its capabilities by last spring. We started gathering quotes at the end of the summer, and were able to pick that back up in September," said Stratton, who began in his position in August. "Once we got the requisite number of quotes, we provided them to our business office and (shortly thereafter) we gained approval by the first of November, where we could move forward with the purchase of the materials and products."

The most significant issue before moving ahead with the install work that was done by RPAV, a firm based in Bowerville, Georgia, was for the chapel to complete some prep work, so to make the install run as smoothly as possible.

"We first had to do some electrical work on the stage and prepare the catwalk for new outlets," said Stratton. "We also had to do the hanging and rigging for the speakers, and that was a project that took a little over a week," which included installing some supplemental hardware in a precise manner "to ensure the right sound quality."

The new speakers at the chapel are a series of two FBT line array stacks, paired with two 12-inch FBT subwoofers, to go along with a pair of Bose L1 tower monitor speakers that were purchased prior to the upgrade this summer, explained Ramirez.

One of the benefits by going with the FBT speakers is that they are powered, added Ramirez, allowing for the chapel to no longer need separate amplification, as had been part of the old speaker setup.

"We got rid of all the amplifiers in our production booth, so now we have increased space," he said.

The work with RPAV began once the winning quote was selected, and they were integral in finding the appropriate gear for the chapel and completing the work of the install.

"They were able to identify and purchase the material in a 2 1/2 week period," said Stratton. "They were able to begin the process of installation by the beginning of December."

By the time the students left for winter break, the plan was for the work to take about two-and-a-half weeks, but it ended up requiring a week less to complete.

While the new system won't be heard by the student body until the third week of this January, Ramirez, who has been working with the system since the installation was finished, said,

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"I think the FBTs are great. The biggest difference is in the clarity of the FBT line array speakers, as they have a real good high end and the subs provide a great low end really good bass. The way they were placed in our chapel allows for a great audio experience."

In the days leading up to when the system will be heard by the student body for the first time, Stratton noted that Ramirez has had to experiment with the system and work out a few "kinks," which included getting a better understanding of how to modify equalization settings on things like the new subwoofers and pertaining to coverage.

Beyond that, Ramirez could only think of a single minor obstacle that he's encountered following the install—the identifying of the new signal chain. "Our sound system now runs the line arrays to the subs, to an input using two S16 digital snakes." That was different from the previous system, where the chapel was "running straight to the EV speakers to analog snakes."

Stratton also explained that he expected Ramirez, in the coming days, will need to work with the rest of the production team when they come back to the campus, to "work with them on the system, and conduct whatever training is necessary to have (the team) ready by the third week of January."



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