

Mastering the Monitor Mix for Jelly Roll

J. Summers on Touring, Teamwork and Sonic Fidelity

With decades of technical mastery and a passion for thriving in live sound, J. Summers ensures every Jelly Roll performance delivers unmatched energy, precision, and seamless connections between the Artist, Band, Guests and Audience. He is the harmony in every song.

Introduction

For J., stepping into the role of Monitor Engineer with Jelly Roll is the culmination of years spent mastering his technical skills, navigating unpredictable challenges, and embracing the ever-changing energy of live performances. Summers comes fully equipped with a whatever it takes, can-do attitude and is committed to delivering the highest-level of sonic nuances to his Artists IEM's. "Nothing feels better than to hear my Artists smiling."

Audio Setup and Team Dynamic

The heartbeat of Jelly Roll's touring success lies in a finely tuned synergy between its Sound Image Crew members and all other departments. Summers describes their seamless teamwork: "Ron Gardner (TM/FOH) mixes the show and is our Captain of the ship, ensuring smooth navigation and Team collaboration. Brendan Hines, our System Designer, System Engineer, Crew Chief and Bus Ambassador, always looks ahead and keeps us informed, our Gibraltar. My role as Monitor Engineer is the setup of Mons World, mixing and making sure everything sounds perfect for Jelly and The 36 Hour Band." This collaborative, team-first approach ensures every piece of the puzzle fits and keeps things running with clockwork precision.

This precision is put to the test nightly. Jelly Roll performs on a bespoke 3-tiered arena stage, 2 runway thrusts stretching deep left and right into the audience and the B-stage as well, Summers embraces the unique sonic challenges of managing the inputs, room, crowd, and stage. "The energy from the crowd and the intensity of Jelly Roll's performance pushes us to find new ways to adapt. Having an artist 60 feet in front of the PA isn't easy—but that's part of what makes every night special. Dare I say, a more "intimate" evening in an arena. Brendan and I spend time walking Jelly's RF mic around the stage every day. Keeping ahead of any sonic anomalies."

Technical Setup and Flexibility with Guests

Sound Image's meticulous preparation forms the backbone of every performance. At the core of this workflow is the Riva PM10 console. There are 3 mirror image rigs built and ready to go when the call comes in. "We have done some serious cross-country travel and international flight hops to our A, B and C rigs. In NYC we had all 3 rigs running at once, with multiple gigs in various locations across town. We even had police escorts in between venues to get us there on time. MSG, SNL, The Global

Citizen's Festival, Jimmy Fallon and then Jelly and I popped over for a Duet with Kelly Clarkson on her programme, all in a 3-day weekend. Full On!"

It's that spontaneity of live performances - and the revolving door of guest appearances - that keeps Summers sharp. At Nashville's Bridgestone Arena, a hometown finale for Jelly Roll, Summers and the team faced their biggest test yet. Originally set to end

weeks earlier, the tour extended by popular demand. "We can't end here in Jacksonville, we have to bring it home." Jelly Roll declared, setting the stage for an unforgettable final night in Nashville.

Summers prepared accordingly: "We always have 2 Guest RF mics and 2 discrete mixes ready to go. For Bridgestone, we added more because we knew it was going to get wild."



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On show day the Guests came fast, “We had Alexandra Kay, Ernest, Struggle Jennings, Skylar Grey, Yelawolf and Snoop Dogg. Keith Urban has his own dedicated inputs in our rig as we’ve seen him along with his Tech Chris Miller so much this year. Shinedown’s Zach Meyers needed an acoustic patched in during the show. No worries. This is why we always need to have a clean and clearly designed stage patch system with plenty of options open. We love options!”

Summers thrives in what he calls “organized chaos, handled with surgical precision.” Thanks to Yamaha’s carefully designed matrix system, Summers ensures flawless execution. “Jelly’s got a main and spare IEM, then there are feeds into the Band spares. Guest mixes are always their own discrete frequencies. Everything’s designed so we can adjust on the fly without blinking.” RF Tech Bill Black plays a crucial role, always one step ahead. “Bill’s got our RF world sorted, he doesn’t miss a beat.”

Summers summarizes it simply: “On this show, there’s no deer-in-the-headlights moment. It is a calm and cool-go, go, go gig. Three extra IEM packs? Gotcha. Darbuka input? Done. More RF mics? Ready. It’s about being prepared for anything and trusting the Team to execute at lightning speed.”

The Bridgestone Arena show proved not only Summers’ technical expertise but also his adaptability—ensuring the on-stage IEM sound matched the moment, leaving the Artist, Guests and Audience with an unforgettable experience.

Touring Experiences and Sonic Philosophy

Summers’ career has taken him across the globe and into a vast array of unique venues. Each space, no matter how unconventional, challenges his understanding of sound and reinforces his deep respect for its power.

“I’ve been to some beautiful places; with Sting we performed in Roman amphitheaters and ancient temples around the world” Summers reflects. “With Sigur Rós, we did a recording in the caves outside of Paris, using the natural reverb of the mined chambers. You can’t forget those moments—they’re alive with sound.”

These extraordinary experiences have shaped Summers’ approach to live sound. For him, it’s about more than technical perfection - “it’s an organic connection with the environment and my Artists that makes the music come alive and immerses the audience in waves of sonic emotions.”

Passion and the Right Tools

Summers credits Yamaha for providing the reliability he needs to perform at the highest-level night after night. “Yamaha gives me the confidence to ensure my artists are happy on stage, which translates to a great performance for them and the audience.”

Summary

J. Summers’ journey as an audio engineer is one of passion, adaptability, and technical excellence.

From managing the IEM’s for Jelly Roll’s high-energy shows to crafting soundscapes in historic, otherworldly venues, Summers combines preparation with artistry to bring music to life. His ability to balance technical precision, team coordination, and an unshakeable understanding of the Artist’s vision ensures every performance resonates deeply with audiences and the Artist.

For Summers, live sound isn’t just a science—it’s an art form, one that bridges the gap between artist and audience, leaving an impact that lingers long after the final note fades.

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