

# As the Crow Flies

by Clive Young

NEW YORK CITY—Taking “in-flight entertainment” to a new level, Sheryl Crow performed a 7-song acoustic set on May 4, aboard a United Airlines flight from Chicago to Los Angeles. The show, performed in the economy section of a 777 for a select audience of press, contest winners and corporate VIPs, launched Sony’s connect.com and United’s mileageplusmusic.com music download services. Unsurprisingly, the event was recorded for later release on the websites.

Crow’s concert in the sky might bring to mind the guitar-strumming nun from *Airplane*, but the realities of making the show happen were considerably more serious. A skeleton audio crew consisting of Crow’s longtime FOH engineer, Bruce Knight, and Effanel recording gurus, Randy Ezratty and Joel Singer, began planning the production weeks in advance. “It was a new venture, trying some things we’ve never done before,” noted Knight.

The biggest challenge was to construct an audio system that could set up and tear down quickly due to the takeoff and landing, and which could also run off batteries. “Even though there are 12 volts of DC power in first class, you can’t tie into that without prior approval—which takes 90 days,” said Singer. “The United and Sony people were massively helpful, but we just had to live with restrictions of what we could and couldn’t do.”

As a result, battery-powered Anchor Audio Liberty 6000 speakers on Ultimate Support stands were placed in the economy-section aisles about 12 rows apart, then ratchet-strapped to the seats. Crow and guitarist Tim Smith performed in a bulkhead row, wearing wired personal monitors, while passive DIs captured the guitars, and both performers sang into two Shure SM57s each. “We used an old Grateful Dead trick,” said Singer, “where we threw one mic out of phase to reduce noise coming in off-axis, and it worked great.”



Sheryl Crow and Tim Smith brought new meaning to “playing across the country” when they performed on a United Airlines 777 in May.

That need for noise reduction helped the recording process, which was sequestered in the last row of business class. There, a Fostex PD-6 DVD-RAM location recorder, two PD-4 Portable Timecode DAT recorders and an RME Multiface unit were all gaffer-taped to the seat-back trays. Meanwhile, Knight was in the fol-

lowing row, mixing the show on a Cooper Sound CS-208 battery-powered mixer. “Once the show was going, we didn’t have to sit with seatbelts on, so it was easier to work,” Knight reported. “A flight attendant stood behind me to tap me on the shoulder if I had to kill the PA—for instance, if there

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SEVENDUST IN THE WIND: Sevendust FOH engineer Andy Meyer of E-Tech Systems has been using a Crest CPS-1203 spectrum enhancement processor to punch up assist Vince Hornsby’s rhythmic wallop during the band’s shows.

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soundreinforcement

## Sheryl Crow

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were pilot announcements for turbulence—but they never needed to.”

A test flight from San Francisco to Chicago the day before found the audio crew taping down cables, strapping in speaker stands and ensuring that everything could be stowed away before takeoff. While the recording gear and console fit easily in over-

head bins, the guitars had to be stored in a lavatory. Once in the air, the team unpacked everything and tested the gear with Smith strumming away (Crow was unavailable). Upon arrival in Chicago, the equipment, restowed for landing, was taken to United's Red Carpet Lounge and charged overnight.

After a quick test onboard the 777 the next morning, the gear was stowed until after takeoff, whereupon it was unpacked and set up yet again. Crow used the show to debut a new Byrds-like song, "Light In Your Eyes," and soldiered on without missing a beat when the speakers unexpectedly died during "My Favorite Mistake," the fifth song. Singer explained, "During the test flight, the speakers went for two hours, not a problem the entire time; life was good. We charged all our batteries that night and the next day, Sheryl came in and they worked fine. What we believe happened is that the levels we needed in order for the full crowd of 80 people to hear...just soaked up the battery."

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*Bruce Knight, FOH engineer,  
Sheryl Crow*

After landing in Los Angeles—following yet more packing and unpacking of gear—Crow, Smith and Knight headed for Sony Music Studios for a second concert, while the Effanel crew caught a flight back to New York, where tracks were remixed for Internet release and promotional videos.

Singer enthused, "The Fostex becomes a mounted RAM disk when it's hooked up to your computer, so on the flight to New York, between the Multiface recording WAV files on Digital Performer and the DVD-RAM recorders' recording broadcast WAV surround files, I was able transfer it all immediately to DVD-R, then build it into a Pro Tools file with an M-Box. The next morning, they basically opened up a full session that was built on a flight from L.A. to New York, and just started editing with time code."

If the unusual concert provided a chance to try out new songs, new recording methods and a new venue, it still gave Crow a taste of the old days before fame and fortune, as she remarked between songs: "I can't lie to you. It's been a really long time since I've been in the coach section."

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