



INTERVIEW WITH

GIANNI TOSCHI

CHAIRMAN OF SOUND CORPORATION GROUP

In order to provide an overview of the Professional Audio market, we decided to interview **Gianni Toschi**, Chairman of **Sound Corporation s.a.s.**, a group of 8 companies. Among them **X-Treme** and **peecker sound**, enterprises that work following a co-design and co-makership logic, moving vertically within the *Sound Entertainment* economy sector. We asked Mr. Toschi to talk about the early days of dance clubs, not only in Italy but also abroad, and to describe how the target clients, focused on by his group, have evolved since then.



*“From the do-it-yourself guitar loudspeakers that I bought from England (from a friend living in London to be precise) I shifted to craft production, firstly in my own garage in Reggio Emilia, and then in a real workshop in the same town. My good reputation in the sector rapidly grew and when my first clients decided to build large clubs for hundreds of people, they were starting from scratch. They had made huge investments and were not willing to run any risk in terms of music quality. So they entrusted the **technical aspect** to me: my task was to bring excellent sound diffusion all over these specially-built clubs.*

*The first one in Italy to move in this direction was **Embassy** in Reggio Emilia. Daniele Piombi was the owner and the year was **1968**. It was a very fashionable place with great international artists on the bill. Later on, **Jumbo** (in Fidenza) and **Caravel** (in Mantova) also joined the scene on a much larger scale, in 1971 and 1972 respectively. They were already huge, capable of accommodating up to 1,500 people. By then, the ice*

had been broken and other entrepreneurs had picked up on this promising business.

After providing the acoustic equipment for these first dance clubs by assembling all the components, I was asked to equip many others.

*In the early **1970s** it was the turn of **Shilling**, offering live music, and **Snoopy** (both in Modena). This experience led me to work for an increasing number of clubs in these two provinces, which were home to the main ‘music temples’, as they were called then. In 1975 I worked for **Picchio Rosso** in Formigine and for **Mac2**, not far from Modena, and later in 1976 for Marabù in Reggio Emilia and **Kiwi** in Castelfranco Emilia.*

*In the **1980s** the Professional Audio market emerged with the installation of the first famous high-power and high-performance **PA systems**, and these used the early high-power amplifiers with interchangeable modules. No fewer than 30 different models of acoustic speakers were included in the peecker sound catalogue. We introduced a Research & Development department and our production reached around 6,000 sound diffusers per year. From the point of view of fixed equipment, our company extended its borders towards prestigious international clubs such as **Le Parisienne** in La Havana, Cuba, or the multi-disco **Macumba** in Geneva, thanks to the establishment of a first network of distributors.*

*Then came the early **1990s**, and both I and my partners soon realized the need to orient our product development efforts towards segments bordering the Entertainment*

sector (which had undergone profound changes with respect to the early years) such as sound reinforcement equipment for live events: the so-called "Touring Systems" (and today the Public Address systems as well). By uniting the different business units, speaker models were increased to 60 and production capacity reached a record in 2000: 11,000 diffusers per year. These figures not only strengthened the *X-Treme* brand (which in fact focuses on the Live sector), but also – thanks to the early **digital equipment** and the production of compact and high-performance **amplified acoustic speakers** – encouraged demanding artists such as De Gregori, Modena City Ramblers, Paola e Chiara, Alexia and others to use our products. Their initial reluctance soon turned into satisfaction and then into the present-day confidence.

Today the challenges stimulating the company as a whole, essentially revolve around two issues: firstly, keeping the competitive advantage we have gained in the fixed equipment sector (without forgetting that this edge on our competitors was mainly achieved thanks to our high standards in the strategically important Customer Service), and secondly, the on-going expansion of our market share (following the creation of brands specifically for precise markets such as *X-Treme* and *XTE*), thanks to systems designed by paying special attention to cost control and to large investments in 'smart' processors and controllers, notably to meet the needs of emerging countries such as Russia, South Korea or Taiwan."

Interview by **A. Schiatti** for "**E**" magazine.
