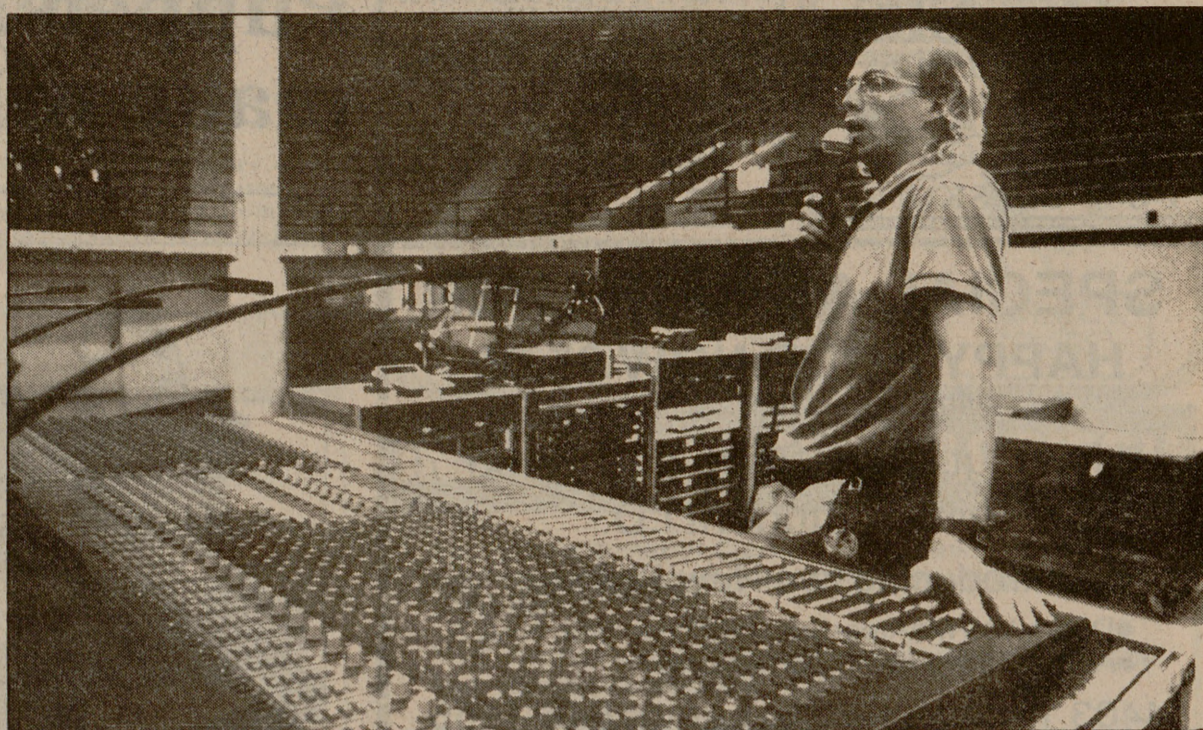
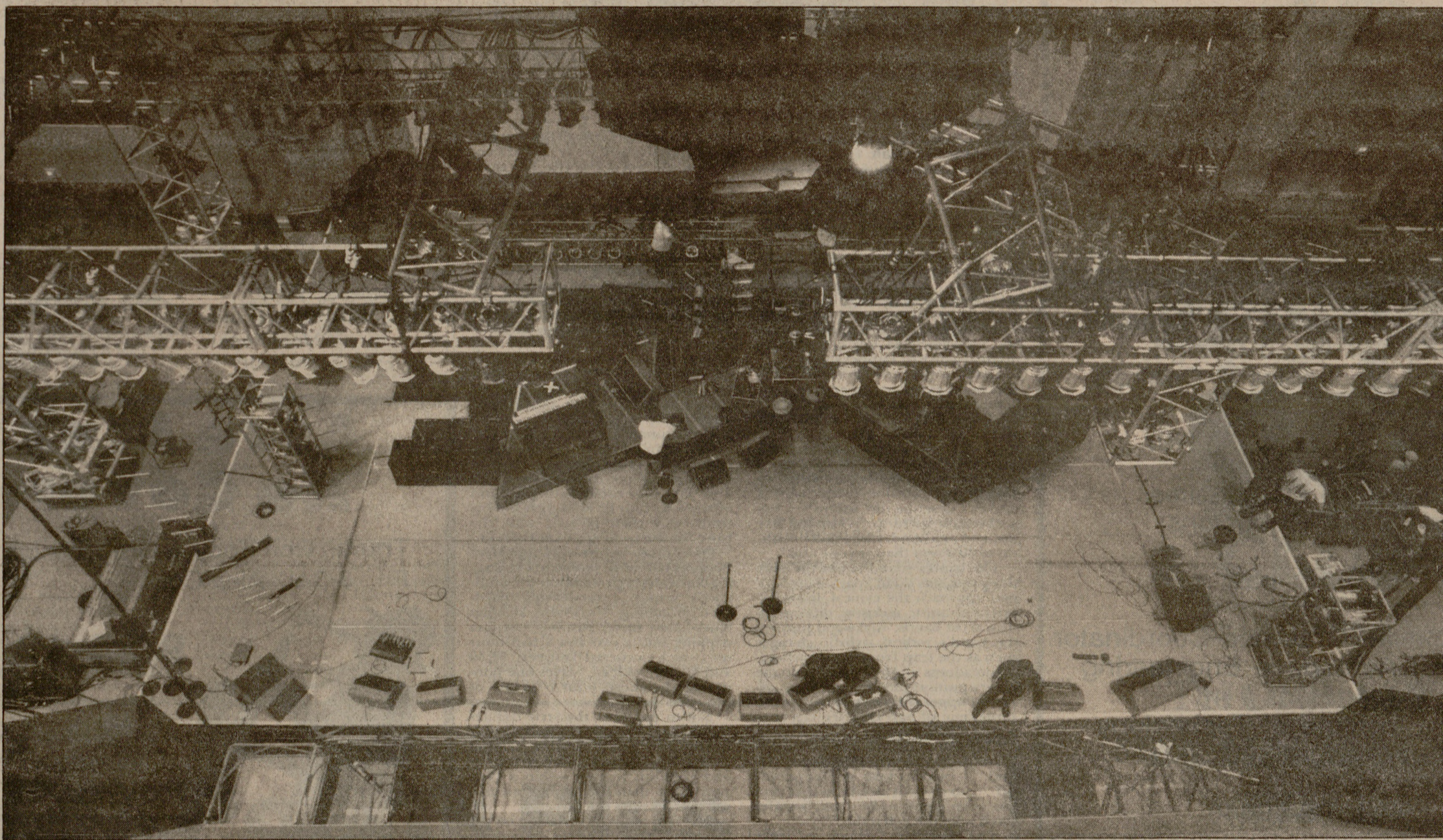


Life as a roadie

Crew members spend long hours doing difficult work



Cliff Atchanson of Clear Brothers Sound fine tune R.E.M.'s sound system to G. Rollie White Coliseum.



The stage is almost complete as roadies put finishing touches on the set.



Bill Thompson, one of R.E.M.'s roadies, sets up Bill Berry's drum kit.

Story by John Righter
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Of The Battalion Staff

After a concert, when the exhilaration is over, the crowd has departed, and the band has already begun carousing their way toward another night of shameless debauchery, there are a few, often forgotten, less fortunate individuals just beginning their night's performance.

Like the offensive lineman in football, the life of a roadie is one continuous, un-recognized toil in the pits, paving safe and successful lanes for their rock 'n' roll quarterback.

Their work, depending on where their group's last performance took place, can start as early as six in the morning, and that's when they're lucky. Many times, especially on weekends or when they are playing several close localities in a row, the crew may spend a whole night dismantling and loading the set only to hit the road so that they can reset the same stage and equipment for the next night. Understandably, this stress can cause hostilities among the crew.

Wes Moore, a rigger from the Local 205 of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, spoke before R.E.M.'s Sunday performance about the difficulties that arise on the road.

"It's hectic because you finish taking down a set and then you hop in a car and you're driving while the band is sleeping," he said. "You can end up doing four or five nights in a row where you haven't slept, 'cause there is no time. You are on a real tight time schedule."

"When we did U2, they (U2's regular road crew) were about ready to kill each other by the time they entered Austin. Talk about an attitude — it was a giant yelling and screaming mess all day long. They had been out together for almost a year straight, with no breaks, one night after one night after one night, with a lot of heavy partying in between."

Glenn Dunn, a coworker from Local 205, adds, "After they finish at three or four in the morning, they drink till they can't stand up anymore and then take speed to get going again. They can only do that for so long. It wears you down and makes you edgy. There's an old say-

ing that if you can't handle your drugs and alcohol on the road, then you don't belong in rock 'n' roll, and they weren't handling it very well."

When a band decides to tour, one of the first things its members consider is how many full-time roadies they need to bring with them. Much of that decision depends on the size of the stage and the extent of the band's lighting, sound, and technical equipment. A young club band will take along one or two personal roadies, who usually double as managers, and then recruit club personnel to help them unload and assemble their equipment.

An arena and large-hall band, like R.E.M., will take anywhere from 15 to 50 people with it on the road to construct and operate a set that can weigh up to 15,000 lbs. R.E.M. on this leg of their tour brought 25 full-time roadies to assist with their 6,000 pounds of equipment that fills four 16-wheeler trucks.

In addition, R.E.M., as most bands do, hired riggers from Texas' union of theatrical stage workers based in Austin. The riggers are responsible for bringing the machinery and equipment to construct the stage, and for determining how the equipment, especially the sound system, will be positioned. In G. Rollie White Coliseum, for example, where the air conditioning already hangs from the ceiling, there were problems hanging the sound system.

"This ceiling already has too much stress on it," explains Dunn, "so we had to stack all the sound equipment on the floor. Normally we would fly it so that the sound covers the whole (coliseum)."

The riggers are the first crew to arrive, surveying the building for structural problems and safety hazards, then mapping the points and deciding what equipment should be used, before finally constructing the stage. While the riggers are filling in the set's base, the lighting starts, with the lighting truss (support structure) flown and the lights assembled.

"The last time we did R.E.M. it was real unusual 'cause they had their lights set totally asymmetrical," Dunn explains. "Plus they had a lot more. But everytime it's something new, which makes our job really challenging."

After the second lighting truss and truss box are flown, the set is finished and the sound is set by points and flown. Then the riggers leave and R.E.M.'s regular roadies take over.

With a major band like R.E.M., the crew is broken down into section heads with a couple of subordinates under each. Usually, sound, lights, band equipment and set construction will all have specific heads who answer to a crew chief, the man responsible for stage design and any necessary set modifications.

Bob Weber, a veteran roadie, has been touring with R.E.M. since January. "I'm in charge of keyboards and guitars for both R.E.M. and Pylon," Weber says. "I make sure they're tuned and ready by sound check, before they go on, and during the set if there are any difficulties. Plus, there's other guys who do the bass, drums and mikes for the show. We're all part of the equipment crew."

An interesting point for A&M shows is that students are hired to help the roadies assemble the sets.

Mark Chaloupka, Rudder Theater's senior stage manager, is in charge of furnishing the stage hands requested by the band.

"I hire student volunteers, who are all paid," he says. "Twice a year we place an ad (in *The Battalion*) that asks everyone interested to come in to the theater (Rudder) complex where we explain what the job is and take their names and phone numbers."

"When a show comes we start calling names until we have enough people to fill a list given to me by the promoter or organizer. It's a good opportunity for anyone interested in production to get their feet wet ... (and) experience isn't necessary."

After spending hours assembling sets, tuning instruments and arranging lights, the show takes place. But, you won't find many of the roadies enjoying it.

"People think being a roadie is great 'cause you get to see all these fantastic shows," explains Dunn. "But hell, that's the only time we get to sleep. We're the last people who want to see the show, 'cause when it's over we go back to work."

Adds Moore, "I'm out in my truck praying they do three encores."