Written by Kevin M. Mitchell
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WASHINGTON, DC — Maryland Sound International's (MSI) Matt Snyder knows as well as just about anyone that the White House Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony involves more than a mere flip of a switch. MSI has handled sound for the event for the past decade, and Snyder has been involved for 23 years of the White House's 90-year tree-lighting tradition.

"The evolution of the tree lighting has been dramatic," said Snyder. "It went from a simple affair, almost just local, to having a clip on the evening news and then a full-blown TV hour."

For the 2012, the ceremony, which took place Dec. 6, ramped up once again. Three stages were required for the multi-faceted production that involved a live audience of 18,000, a TV audience of millions, U.S. park rangers, the White House staff including scores of Secret Service agents and, of course, the President of the U.S. and his family.

FOH Barry Warrick handled main mixing duties on a Yamaha PM1D with another used for monitors. The live P.A. included JBL VT4889s and 4800 subwoofers, with MSI proprietary HEX-15s used as monitor wedges. "We're very proud of those," Snyder said.

The wireless gear arsenal included Shure UR systems. With Washington DC in general and the White House grounds in particular, highly saturated RF signals is a given.

"The intangible curve balls included state security, plus we had to coordinate with the National Park Service for media," Snyder added. "We had to make sure that the media press packages included notification that they weren't allowed to use any unauthorized wireless because there were virtually no frequencies left unused."

Entertainers included Kenneth “Babyface” Edmonds, Ledisi, Jason Mraz, James Taylor and The Fray — plus President Obama himself, who warbled a version of “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” along with First Lady Michelle Obama and daughters Malia and Sasha. (No comment from the White House as to whether he’d consider Auto-Tune for any future impromptu performances.)

A recording of the event is posted at www.thenationaltree.org/tree-lighting .