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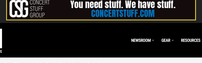

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Brewed to Perfection: Supporting the Sonic Needs of a Global Barista Competition

by FOH Staff News December 11, 2025 5 min read

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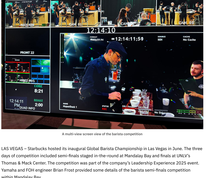
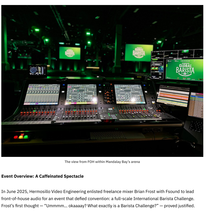


A multi-view screen view of the barista competition

LAS VEGAS – Starbucks hosted its inaugural Global Barista Championship in Las Vegas in June. The three days of competition included semi-finals staged in the round at Mandalay Bay and finals at UNLV's Thomas & Mack Center. The competition was part of the company's Leadership Experience 2025 event. Yamaha and FOH engineer Brian Frost provided some details of the barista semi-finals competition within Mandalay Bay.

More details from Yamaha and FOH engineer Brian Frost (https://found.net/brewed-to-perfection-making-the-barista-challenge)

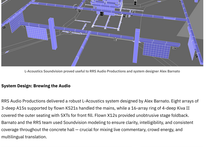


The view from FOH within Mandalay Bay's arena

Event Overview: A Caffeinated Spectacle

In June 2025, Hermosillo Video Engineering enlisted freelance mixer Brian Frost with Found to lead front-of-house audio for an event that defied convention: a full-scale International Barista Challenge. Frost's first thought — "Ummmm… okayyy? What exactly is a Barista Challenge?" — proved justified.

The event blended competitive coffee artistry, sports-broadcast pacing, and live reality-TV energy, staged in the round inside Mandalay Bay Convention Center for 5,000 caffeine-charged attendees. Noisemakers, cheering sections, and the hiss of espresso machines created an atmosphere not far from a mid-season playoff.



L-Acoustics Soundvision proved useful to RRS Audio Productions and system designer Alex Barnats

System Design: Brewing the Audio

RRS Audio Productions delivered a robust L-Acoustics system designed by Alex Barnats. Eight arrays of 3-deep A15s supported by flown K52Is handled the mains, while a 16-array ring of 4-deep Kiva II covered the outer seating with SUTs for front fill. Flown K1s provided supportive stage fill/dash. Barnats and the RRS team used Soundvision modeling to ensure clarity, intelligibility, and consistent coverage throughout the concrete hall — crucial for mixing live commentary, crowd energy, and multilingual translation.

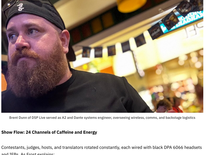
FOH engineer Brian Frost

Control Strategy: Splitting the Console Duties

Two Yamaha Rivage consoles split the load. Frost ran a PM5 at FOH, while Zach Larsen handled a PM7 backstage, managing broadcast mixes and 39 IEMs for translators and judges.

Brent Dunn of DSP Live served as A2 and Dante systems engineer, overseeing wireless, comms, and backstage logistics. He kept the backstage flow organized and coordinated rapid mic-ups, de-mics, and talent movement between the Green Room and Backstage Audio.

With 24 channels of Axient Digital wireless and 16 channels of PSM, the team joked they assembled "like Voltron."



Brent Dunn of DSP Live served as A2 and Dante systems engineer, overseeing wireless, comms, and backstage logistics

Show Flow: 24 Channels of Caffeine and Energy

Contestants, judges, hosts, and translators rotated constantly, each wired with black DPA 6066 headsets and IFBs. As Frost explains:

"We chose the DPA 6066s for their subminiature capsule — they sound fantastic, and they're extremely small and discreet. For a production like this, we needed superior sound quality without compromising the clean, on-camera aesthetic."

Hosts introduced the dueling baristas, who competed in challenges like best foam art or most flavorful cappuccino. Boundary mics captured espresso hiss, grinder chatter, and crowd roar — all adding texture to the live mix.

After each round, hosts interviewed the baristas. Because many competitors didn't speak English, each had an on-stage translator, both mic'd and fitted with IFBs so they could hear one another clearly over the noise. Judges also jumped in with questions of their own, offering feedback on technique and presentation before reporting their scores.

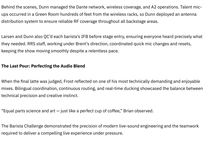
At FOH, Frost said dueling is on Rivage, keeping each translator's IFB channel to their partner barista.

Translation and Ducking: A Technical Ballet

Translations needed to hear hosts, baristas, judges, and audience Q&A; competitors needed only their translator. Producers requested broadcast-style ducking so that a barista's native-language mic rose naturally when the translator paused, then dipped gently when English resumed.

Frost used ducking on the Rivage, keeping each translator's XF channel to their paired barista. Achieving natural transitions required thoughtful tuning of threshold, attack, hold, and decay — multiplied times two, with the East and West stages alternating, one live while the other set up, creating a seamless, nonstop flow of action.

Each 15-minute cycle repeated 20 times, making the event a rapid and precise moving marathon.



Zach Larsen handled a PM7 backstage, managing broadcast mixes and IFBs for translators and judges

Backstage Operations: Order Amidst the Motion

Behind the scenes, Dunn managed the Dante network, wireless coverage, and A2 operations. Talent mic-ups occurred in a Green Room hundreds of feet from the wireless racks, so Dunn deployed an antenna distribution system to ensure reliable RF coverage throughout all backstage areas.

Larsen and Dunn also QC'd each barista's IFB before stage entry, ensuring everyone heard precisely what they needed. RRS staff, working under Brent's direction, coordinated quick mic changes and resets, keeping the show moving smoothly despite a relentless pace.

The Last Pour: Perfecting the Audio Blend

When the final latte was judged, Frost reflected on one of his most technically demanding and enjoyable mixes. Bilingual coordination, continuous multing, and real-time ducking showcased the balance between technical precision and creative instinct.

"Equal parts science and art — just like a perfect cup of coffee," Brian observed.

The Barista Challenge demonstrated the precision of modern live-sound engineering and the teamwork required to deliver a compelling live experience under pressure.

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