

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM: SHUT UP AND PLAY THE HITS

Capturing A Landmark Performance, Recording An Intimate Portrait



LCD Soundsystem's James Murphy

On April 2, 2011, LCD Soundsystem played its final show. The event took place at Madison Square Garden in New York City. LCD front man James Murphy had made the decision to disband one of the most celebrated and influential groups of its generation at the peak of its popularity, ensuring that LCD Soundsystem would go out with the biggest and most ambitious concert of its career. The instantly sold-out extravaganza moved the thousands in attendance to joy and grief, with *New York Magazine* calling the event “a marvel of pure craft” and *TIME* magazine lament-

ing, “We may never dance again.”

Shut Up and Play the Hits is a narrative film documenting this once-in-a-lifetime performance and an intimate portrait of Murphy as he navigates the personal and professional ramifications of his decision. The documentary premiered at Sundance earlier this year, with an encore presentation at SXSW, before getting picked up for distribution by Oscilloscope Laboratories. In an unusual move, Oscilloscope released the film nationwide for a one-night-only engagement on July 18, with the event quickly selling out in cities across the United States.

Prior to embarking on *Shut Up and Play the Hits*, directors Dylan Southern and Will Lovelace had completed the Grammy-nominated feature *No Distance Left to Run*, which chronicled the career, disintegration and reunion of the English band Blur. Eager to begin another documentary project, the duo considered a number of subjects, but they weren't sure they wanted to do another music film. A mutual friend introduced them to Murphy, and they began to kick around ideas.

“We were very clear that we weren't going to do a standard band biography documentary,”



“Through the narrative use of the cameras, we were able to reveal the relationships between band members, the relationship between the audience and the band, and the emotion on everyone’s face as they realized this was the final time any of the songs would be played live.”

—Dylan Southern, director

Lovelace relates. “We wanted to make a film that had a story and affected people emotionally, and that came from a very specific moment in time.”

Two months later the band announced the show at Madison Square Garden, and the filmmakers knew they had the moment around which the film would be centered. Spending roughly six months

in preproduction, they planned the logistics for an 11-camera shoot that would include director Spike Jonze, who had worked with the band previously on music video projects.

Southern and Lovelace chose ARRI Alexa for the project because of its high image quality and low-light capabilities. “The intention was always

that the final product would be seen in theaters, so we wanted the highest possible quality,” says Lovelace. “We knew we would be spending a lot of time backstage, with very little available light, and the Alexa gave us the look we wanted while also being able to handle very different types of situations.”



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“We wanted to capture the experience of the concert in a very different way,” Southern adds. “Rather than hiring camera operators who just shoot live music shows, we wanted to get DPs and cinematographers who work on feature films. I’d say the film is experiential, very in the moment. A big part of our intention was to film it in a way that felt immersive, like actually being there at the show. We told all our camera operators, ‘Don’t just cover the band—film your experience of the show.’”

Reed Morano, the film’s DP, was bolstered by a team of camera operators that, in addition to Southern and Jonze, included Ivan Abel, Eli Born, Stephen Consentino, Giles Dunning, J.M. Hurley,

Yorick Le Saux, Daniel Trapp and Carlos Verón.

“We had a fantastic team,” says Southern. “It was incredibly hard work because it was a long shoot, and half of those cameras, big Alexa rigs with prime lenses on them, were handheld for hours. It was tough, but once the adrenaline got going it was amazing.”

Editing more than 40 hours of concert footage along with backstage material and coverage of Murphy during the days leading up to and following the show took place over a four-month period, with Murphy participating in sessions with editor Mark Burnett and even re-cutting some of the material himself. Working from a London

studio, Murphy personally mixed the sound for the film, which the filmmakers insist should be experienced with a good, and loud, sound system.

“Alongside making a story that worked, the biggest challenge was taking a four-hour concert and deciding which parts you’re going to show,” Lovelace says. “So you’re selecting one out of every four songs, and you find yourself with 20 songs or so that you can’t use—every single one of them a hit, or memorable for some reason. That was really tricky.”

“It was a case of choosing the songs and performances that best suited the film,” Southern concludes. “There were a lot of tough choices to make, but we had it in the end.” **dv**

“The decision to structure the film with cuts between both the concert and the day after came from a desire to explore the reasons behind, and the ramifications of James’ decision to end LCD. Our thought was that seeing James adjusting to the first day of his post-LCD life was a good position from which to explore some of the ideas in the narrative.”

—Will Lovelace, director

