

JENNIFER WOLFE

RED EPIC AT RED ROCKS

Capturing the Mumford & Sons Concert Film



Last October, the British folk rock band Mumford & Sons announced *The Road to Red Rocks* concert film, to be distributed by Pulse Films. Featuring footage from the last two concerts of the group's Gentlemen of the Road tour, which ended at the celebrated Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Golden, Colo., the documentary was released internationally last November and arrives in the U.S. on January 22.

Cinematographer Giles Dunning, who also shot the Mumford & Sons 2012 tour documentary *Big Easy Express*, as well as *LCD Soundsystem: Shut Up and Play the Hits* and the White Stripes documentary *Under Great White Northern Lights*,

chose RED EPIC cameras outfitted with Canon L series and Angenieux Optimo zoom lenses to capture live concert footage for the film.

"We shot the LCD Soundsystem Madison Square Garden show on the ARRI Alexa, which gives a great image, but you're stuck with these giant lenses, which for concert situations can be quite confining," Dunning comments. "It worked for the LCD show because we had rolling tripods for many of the cameras. That show was four hours long, and those cameras are heavy and clumsy, so everyone traded off—you'd do a section on handheld and a section on sticks because there was no way you could do four hours of handheld."

For the 90-minute Mumford & Sons shows, Dunning deployed nine cameras shooting a combination of 2K and 5K widescreen footage. "The beauty of the EPIC in this situation is that it can shoot 2K, which means you can shoot 16mm lenses," he enthuses. "Three of the cameras were shooting 2K widescreen, and three of them were shooting 5K widescreen with Angenieux Optimo zoom lenses. And then there were three handheld cameras set up with Canon mounts using the Canon L series lenses."

Camera choice was influenced by the types of lenses that could be used on them. "It was an experiment I'd been wanting to do for a long time and when I suggested it, the directors were totally



up for it," Dunning relates. "It really allowed us to get a range of optics. The 16mm 10.5-180 Canon zoom is probably the best zoom lens ever made for 16mm. It's very sharp, has some nice flare characteristics and incredible range. It really held up to the 2K widescreen, and the EPIC did too. I just love the idea that you can shoot live concerts at 2K."

Treating the RED EPIC cameras like they were DSLRs, Dunning configured them with 15mm rods. "We set the EPICs up almost like they were Canon 5Ds," he explains. "The freedom to be able to do an hour and a half with a very light camera liberates the cameraman from having to just be physically fit enough to carry it. The lighter the camera, it stops getting in your way, so you're making choices aesthetically, not just physically."

Dunning points to the 1960s revolution in filmmaking and the new, lightweight cameras embraced by the French New Wave. "Then cameras got heavier and heavier again," he says. "The creativity that comes from having a lightweight camera, when it's just about your eye, and thinking about things, as opposed to just trying to carry something, is what filmmaking needs to be."

One of the main challenges for Dunning and his crew was the venue itself. "It's so steep," he describes. "The rocks are so far above you that you would need a fisheye to capture it. Luckily we were there two nights, so the night before I was able to go around with a handheld camera and spot the positions."

During the shows, Dunning sat with the directors, keeping an eye on things. "The people we hired in Denver didn't necessarily have big music backgrounds," he comments. "They did a great job. I was very impressed with the talent."

Given the opportunity to return to Red Rocks, Dunning says he would add more light and would light the rocks differently the next time around. "We were out to light the audience, trying to capture the venue and the feel," he says. "If you don't light the audience, you just have a band playing on a black soundstage. It worked out great, but it would have been nice to have the rocks lit up at night. I'd like to do more with the rocks. Next time I'll definitely add more lighting, and from a different place."

"Having been on tour with them two years ago, it's very gratifying to see how far they've come," says Dunning, who compares the band's show at Red Rocks to U2's seminal 1983 concert film *Under A Blood Red Sky*, which was shot in the same location. "They're such incredible, nice, intelligent people, eloquent and accomplished musicians, and they've grown so much creatively." **dv**