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Dream Team - Sonalysts and Aerosmith:

Creating the opening video for rock legend's tour garners a hit for Media Center

Waterford—It's a rock 'n' roll fan's dream to someday work with legends in the music business.

For three members of Sonalysts media department, that dream came true when legendary rockers Aerosmith spent a few days rehearsing on the studio's sound stages.

With only about three days before they opened at the Mohegan Sun last month for the first night of their two-year tour, the band needed an opener for their show. "We had a huge time constraint," creative director Ralph Belfiglio said. "Pretty much in the 11th hour," producer Jonas Sanchez continued, "as the band was getting ready to rehearse here at Sonalysts, the visual director and the production designer for the tour still did not have an idea of what was going to be the opening for the show. Though there was over 150 tapes of footage, there wasn't much that was usable, and the band's opening night was just a few days away." Working under extreme circumstances with an ultra-tight deadline, Belfiglio and Sanchez were given complete creative control of the visual landscape, keeping in mind that the video could in no way date the band or even look like a chronological documentation.

"They didn't want to show their aging or make it seem like this was a band at the end of their career, but they wanted to maintain a feeling of the passage of time," Belfiglio said. "So we came up with this look which is this classy, eclectic montage."

The group had to work with 30 years of Aerosmith footage and condense it into two and half minutes of visual nirvana. The team knew that fans would react to old clips of the band and used special effects in a subtle way so as not to take away anything from the rawness of past performances or the exhilaration of candid backstage shots.

"I think we used just enough special effects. We didn't want to overpower it – we didn't need to – and the video is really just some of the best material of their career," Belfiglio explained.

While Belfiglio was putting together the clips, audio engineer Seth Zowader also had his work cut out for him.

Sanchez explained: "Once we had decided on a style, visually, Jeff Clare, who is the visual director for this show, brought us the idea of doing something a bit more risky for the band – to do something different, like take a bunch of their hits and cut it up in some weird kind of way that would make it closer to a complete remix."

It was then Seth Zowader's task to take the most memorable moments from Aerosmith's repertoire, chop them into pieces and then mix them up and put them back together in a recognizable but completely different way.

"They had given us a few CDs, one of which had this blues drum beat on it that apparently the band loved and that was the foundation of the entire piece," he said. "And with that underneath I was able to slice up the undeniable moments of their hits, time compress them, pitch shift them and make them fit the groove that I had put together."

Seth Zowader said he grabbed some of his favorite phrases from a song and had fun with it. "I took the guitar lick from 'Walk This Way,' that well known phrase, and chopped it in half, using it in the beginning and at the end and, yes, that was me having my way with one of my most favorite pieces," he added. With the music and video synched together, the opening was a brilliant success. When shown for the first time to the band, lead singer Steven Tyler reportedly said, after the ending flash of white light and the crashing downbeat, "You guys are geniuses."

For Belfiglio, Sanchez and Zowader, it was a dream gig. To have the opportunity to do what they love and have it appreciated by a band as legendary as Aerosmith was some serious icing on their cake.