

Four Flicks: Making the World's Greatest Rock 'n' Roll DVD

*Metropolis DVD and
MX Entertainment
hand viewers
remote control of
The Rolling Stones*

By Doug Pratt

*The Rolling Stones 2003
'40 Licks' concert tour was
a unique endeavor. In
every city they visited, the
group put on a show at
three different venues: a
stadium, an arena and a
small concert hall.*



By the time Metropolis DVD was selected to produce the DVD of the tour by the Stones' management company, TGA (The Great Adventure) Entertainment, an arena concert, at New York's Madison Square Garden, had already been shot and broadcast on HBO. That concert, however, would turn out to be just one quarter of the ambitious DVD package, *The Rolling Stones Four Flicks*. TGA wanted a stadium concert and a theater concert to be included as well, and with the addition of a tour documentary program, the package was immediately conceived as a deluxe four-platter set that would become the ultimate rock 'n' roll DVD for the "World's Greatest Rock 'n' Roll Band."

The DVD was released in November 2003 exclusively through retailer Best Buy, which priced it under \$30.

Beginning in April, Metropolis had about two and a half months to plan the DVD's design and production. Located for the past year and a half in a penthouse suite in the building that houses Manhattan's hottest new siteseeing stop, Chelsea Market,

Metropolis has produced more than six dozen music DVDs since its inception 5 years ago, including the Criterion Collection's groundbreaking *Beastie Boys Anthology*, the innovative *Slipknot Disasterpieces* and the Grammy-nominated *Nappy Roots: The World According to Nappy*.

This was TGA's first DVD, and while they were involved in every step of the production and had specific ideas about how the DVD should be designed, they relied heavily on the expertise of Metropolis to arrive at the final concepts and programming details.

"Our role was to be their hands," explains the Executive Producer and Metropolis president, David Anthony. "The band was really involved and really interested. They were cognizant of all the details and wanted all the options. They asked what they could do and what was available. As hard as the collaboration process is, I'd much rather have that than to work with no input." The result, Anthony feels, is that the DVD, not only in its content but in its design, accurately and palpably reflects the personality of the Stones themselves.

The size of the DVD is unprecedented for a rock concert program, and the schedule was equally ambitious, with a street date

***'Making things simple to
use, without dumbing
them down, is one of the
challenges of all design.'***

David Anthony, Metropolis DVD

planned in time for the 2003 holiday season while memories of the tour were still fresh in the minds of fans. "The way the schedule worked out," says producer Matthew Dillon, "we had to do everything at the same time."

'There are thousands of details on every DVD, but if one is wrong, that is what everybody remembers.'

David Anthony, Metropolis DVD

Three-in-one facility

Fortunately, Metropolis has the flexibility that is ideal for such a unique project. They maintain a core staff and add freelancers as the need arises. Unlike some production houses, all three facets of a DVD's creation - design, authoring/compression and special features production - are managed under one roof. Using a Fibershare Network, each team is in close contact with the others in the Metropolis office, assuring not only a consistency in the

Continued on page 12

MX Covers All the Angles

Multi-angle is one of those sexy features of DVD that, outside of adult video releases, has mostly stayed out of sight and out of mind. "The big problem," says Zane Vella of MX Entertainment, "has been the user experience. It sounds easy, but people are intimidated by the remote control. Finding the angle button on the remote is an issue, because it is undefined in the DVD spec, so it's up to hardware makers to define it however they want. There's no consistency in interface and no comfort level."

Vella and partner Jeff Braun formed MX in September 2001 to offer a "Multiview authoring process for immersive live concert DVDs." Two years later, their big break came in the form of The Rolling Stones Four Flicks DVD, for which they were asked to create Select-A-Stone multiangle bonus features. The result is getting rave reviews.

An alumnus of the MIT Media Lab, Vella's background is in media production, having worked with clients including Apple, Disney and Viacom. Braun's claim to fame is creating landmark PC and video game The Sims.

The MX multi-angle feature uses buttons in the DVD's sub-picture zone and subtitle menu. "We are not licensing a patent," says Vella, "but an integrated solution that includes the R&D and production expertise we bring to a project."

He says making multi-angle a prominent feature of Four Flicks was the idea of the Stones and the band's management firm The Great Adventure (TGA). "[Metropolis president] David Anthony and I have a similar desire to raise the bar," says Vella, "and we exchange ideas."

Learning curve pays off

On a previous use of MX, "Rush in Rio," three of the concert songs on disc 1 are repeated on disc 2 with the multi-angle feature added. Vella says the learning curve benefited its work on Four Flicks, where the branded Select-A-Stone feature is "integrated in-line with the concert."

With MX Multiangle, picture-in-picture images - up to nine at once are permitted in the DVD spec - appear on screen, allowing the viewer to choose which angle to activate, using the remote's arrow keys. The first release MX appeared on was jazzman Herbie

Hancock's Future to Future Live.

"Our objective is to have as many top production companies as possible offer MX Multiangle as a solution," Vella says. The process is licensed to the DVD's rights holder, or publisher, and

then MX works closely with the production facility to implement it. As part of the one-time licensing fee, MX, which employs six full time staffers, provides creative and technical direction, quality assurance through the authoring process, and rights to the MX logo (a la Dolby or DTS) for packaging and marketing.

Vella explains it's highly preferable for his crew to be involved in the shoot and other parts of the production process: "After material has been shot, it's a harder job," he says. "It's

much better to be involved well ahead of the production process."

Beyond the music application for MX Multiangle, Vella is eager to enfranchise filmmakers. "We're working with a handful of A-list Hollywood directors, music video and concert directors who are primed to make better DVDs. We're a think tank, that's how we'll grow. We want to help directors identify remote, high-definition cameras to be sure they get the best material for multi-angle. It's also about servicing and being open to the developer community. I get on the DVD List all the time."

Vella believes MX Multi-angle will "hit its stride with the next-generation of high-capacity blue- or red-laser discs. Storage is one of the biggest obstacles; the number of angles you can include is directly proportional to the bit budget. Encoding at higher bit rate sacrifices multi-angle, so there's a lot of horse trading that goes on.

"Four Flicks is a watershed project, so a lot of phone calls are coming from artists and producers who want to do it that way on their discs," Vella notes. "We're doing heavy lifting for labels and artists to make it cost effective. Our goal is to take music DVD to the next level." - **Bruce Apar**



The Select-A-Stone multi-angle feature is a breakthrough in ease of use by MX Entertainment that is activated by the remote control's familiar arrow keys.