

Video Directors Jason Harvey & Christian Lamb

Eye candy extraordinaire

Artists behind the scenes on the Madonna Confessions Tour bring stunning visuals to the stage using Adobe® Production Studio software and Adobe OpenHD™ workstation



Combine the energy-charged atmosphere of a show like Cirque du Soleil, performance-art commentary, and dance-party explosion, and what do you get? The Madonna Confessions Tour, among the most action-packed music and entertainment spectacles of 2006. The production is elaborately staged, dazzling crowds in packed venues throughout the United States, Europe, and Japan.

Madonna knows how to build anticipation and create an audiovisual experience that makes other shows pale by comparison. Imagine the impact, for instance, of Madonna performing after being lowered to the tip of her stage's catwalk via a mirror ball that opens like flower petals. In addition to an elaborate set, Madonna's performance is accompanied by dramatic video footage, displayed on giant, wraparound screens. Behind the scenes, video and audio producers bring Madonna's show to life using Adobe Production Studio software, including Adobe Premiere® Pro, After Effects®, and Photoshop® CS2 running on an Adobe OpenHD HD/SD Editing and Finishing Solution powered by an HP xw8200 Workstation and an AJA Xena HS HD/SD capture card.



Jason Harvey of Short & Spikey worked behind the scenes during the Madonna Confessions Tour to bring three different video streams to seven screens. He used Adobe Production Studio software to edit and bring consistency to video content coming in from a variety of different vendors.



“Without the flexibility and power of the Adobe OpenHD and Adobe Production Studio system, the visuals for this show literally wouldn’t be possible.”

Jason Harvey, assistant video director, Madonna Confessions Tour

“Without the flexibility and power of the Adobe OpenHD and Adobe Production Studio system, the visuals for this show literally wouldn’t be possible,” says Jason Harvey, assistant video director for the Madonna Confessions Tour.

Wow factor

According to Harvey, who has been working in live entertainment video for 10 years and video editing overall for 20 years, the Confessions Tour is the most complex live performance he has ever worked on. Transporting the turntables, screens, stages, mirror balls, and other props requires 22 giant trucks. The show is video-intensive, with 23 films and 3 video streams showing on 7 different screens.

Christian Lamb, video director for the Confessions Tour, explains that artists today are all raising the bar by seamlessly blending

their music and performances with sophisticated visual artistry that blurs the line between music and theater. He should know, having worked on films such as *Titanic* and designed show visuals for performers such as Faith Hill and bands such as ColdPlay. “How do you ‘wow’ a crowd of people that is hooked on TV and changing channels every two minutes?” says Lamb. “Shows today have to be more sophisticated visually, and that’s where Adobe software comes in.”

Lamb and Harvey worked closely together to create and deliver superb eye candy for Madonna’s latest sensation. Lamb and his production company, Frank the Plumber, designed and produced many of the visuals for the songs, including ‘I Love New York.’ During the song on her promo tour, Madonna is singing at KoKo’s (formerly Camden Palace). Behind her in the club is a dramatic backdrop of the New York City skyline. To create the backdrop, Lamb brought still photos of New York City into Adobe Photoshop CS2, where he transformed the buildings into white neon silhouettes filled with stark black. For the Confessions Tour, he expanded this idea and brought the outlines into After Effects and animated them, turning the lines into a giant Etch-a-sketch that draws the New York skyline

“What’s inspiring about Madonna is that she’s incredibly sharp and has a strong visual mind. She sees something once or twice and knows exactly what she wants. Once that’s established, Adobe software allows us the flexibility to make quick changes to various layers and deliver another cut.”

Jason Harvey, assistant video director, Madonna Confessions Tour

as Madonna performs. As the song ramps up and Madonna launches into a guitar solo, the buildings break apart and start marching toward the audience. The whole cityscape begins to spin in a circle around Madonna. It eventually wraps tightly around her and then, just as the song ends, the buildings transform back into a skyline and, like a rope that is being pulled taut, the cityscape snaps and disappears.

“What stands out for me, and the reason I rely on Adobe After Effects and Photoshop CS2, is the diversity of what they allow me to do,” says Lamb. “After Effects and Photoshop CS2 let me cross so many thresholds stylistically that anything I can imagine, I know I can achieve.”

Let the show begin

Once all of the initial video content for the show was ready, Harvey’s job was to make it consistent. He started with a wide array of formats from different vendors: digital files on hard disks, tape, digital betacam, uncompressed HD QuickTime or AVI files, and more. He notes that strong color-correction capabilities and the ability to jump with ease among SD, HD, and other formats in Adobe Premiere Pro is essential to combining video from so many sources. Rich video manipulation and compositing capabilities helped him bring consistency to the varied footage.

Harvey also streams and controls the video content during each night’s show. To make his job easier, he created templates in advance for each screen using Adobe Photoshop CS2 software. The templates provide a way for multiple video sources to play in different boxes that all appear on one screen. Once the files from video-editing houses came in, he loaded them onto his Adobe OpenHD system and positioned the clips within the boxes in the templates. Using multicam editing in Adobe Premiere Pro, he was able to drop in and easily synch multiple camera shots. He then manipulated the clips within Adobe Premiere Pro as necessary, performed color correction for consistency, created comps of the three video streams for each of seven screens, and rendered them out for play during the show.

Harvey is often faced with working with eight layers of video in real time, so sheer horsepower is crucial. His powerful Adobe OpenHD solution is part of a certified line of open, scalable, desktop HDV and HD solutions assembled by Adobe and key industry partners. “Adobe Production Studio and the Adobe OpenHD HD/SD system based on the HP xw8200 Workstation are standing up well to everything I’ve thrown at them,” says Harvey. “I’ve pushed the system to its limits, and it has performed flawlessly—a crucial factor for live performances. Everyone on the set here is impressed.”

Organization

Jason Harvey, Assistant Video Director

Christian Lamb, Video Director

www.confessionstour.com

Challenges

- Ensure that visuals play flawlessly during live performances
- Deliver standout visual effects and video that hold audience attention
- Work quickly in a high-pressure, time-sensitive environment
- Control quality and correct color on video coming from many different sources
- Handle video in a wide array of formats: digital files on hard disks, tape, digital betacam, uncompressed HD QuickTime, and AVI files

Solution

- Use Adobe Production Studio software running on an Adobe OpenHD HD/SD Editing and Finishing Solution powered by an HP xw8200 Workstation for quality control and play during live performances
- Create outstanding visual effects with Adobe After Effects and Photoshop CS2 software

Benefits

- Reliably delivered dazzling audiovisual effects during live performances
- Provided exceptional quality and color for exacting client
- Combined footage from various sources with reliability and ease
- Worked quickly in a demanding environment
- Handled a wide array of formats using Adobe Premiere Pro
- Saved time with features such as Dynamic Link

Toolkit

- Adobe Acrobat® Professional
- Adobe Production Studio Premium. Components used include:
 - Adobe After Effects
 - Adobe Photoshop CS2
 - Adobe Premiere Pro
- Adobe OpenHD HD/SD Editing and Finishing Solution
- HP xw8200 Workstation
- Dual CPU 64-bit Intel® Xeon™ 3.4Ghz 800 FSB hyper-threaded
- 4GB Dual Channel DDR400 (PC 3200) DRAM
- 7200RPM 80GB SATA 150 System Drive
- Dual Channel Ultra 320 SCSI host adapter (HP)
- AJA Xena HS HD-SDI card
- PCI Express NVIDIA Quadro® 4500 512MB video card
- Focusrite Saffire Audio interface
- Microsoft® Windows® XP Professional with Service Pack 2
- DVD RW drive HP Part # PH205A
- Adobe Production Studio Premium
- Adobe OpenHD Support
- Apple Power Mac G5 and PowerBook computers running Mac OS X

Jason Harvey (pictured here) and Video Director Christian Lamb worked together to design and produce visuals for Madonna's performances. According to Lamb, Adobe video software helped him create a wide variety of different looks and styles.



"Adobe Production Studio and the Adobe OpenHD HD/SD system based on the HP xw8200 Workstation are standing up well to everything I've thrown at them. I've pushed the system to its limits, and it has performed flawlessly—a crucial factor for live performances."

Jason Harvey, assistant video director, Madonna Confessions Tour

Saving time via integration

Harvey often uses After Effects to create more complex compositions. As he shifts between After Effects and Adobe Premiere Pro to put together shows, Harvey relies on Dynamic Link, a feature in Adobe Production Studio that lets him place After Effects compositions into Adobe Premiere Pro without having to render them until the project is complete.

"The integration among applications in Adobe Production Studio is leaps and bounds ahead of anything else," he says. "Dynamic Link is a huge time-saver, and that's crucial in an environment like this that's always spinning at breakneck speed."

Delivering when it counts

In an environment as fast-paced as live entertainment, the people putting the show together have to find reliable technology to make sure the spectacle mesmerizes audiences and comes off without a hitch. For the artists working on the Madonna Confessions Tour, Adobe software and Adobe OpenHD solutions are the workhorse technology they need.

"What's inspiring about Madonna is that she's incredibly sharp and has a strong visual mind," says Lamb. "She sees something once or twice and knows exactly what she wants. Once that's established, Adobe software allows us the flexibility to make quick changes to various layers and deliver another cut."

Better by Adobe.™



Adobe Systems Incorporated
345 Park Avenue
San Jose, CA 95110-2704
USA
www.adobe.com

Adobe, the Adobe logo, Acrobat, After Effects, OpenHD, Photoshop, Premiere Pro, and "Better by Adobe" are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries. Apple and Mac OS are trademarks of Apple Computer, Inc., registered in the United States and other countries. Power Mac is a trademark of Apple Computer, Inc. HP is a registered trademark of Hewlett-Packard Company. Intel is a registered trademark of Intel Corporation in the U.S. and other countries. Intel Xeon is a trademark or registered trademark of Intel Corporation or its subsidiaries in the U.S. and other countries. Microsoft and Windows are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

© 2006 Adobe Systems Incorporated. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.
95007658 10/06 R