

CONCERTS



MÖTLEY CRÜE'S FLYING CIRCUS

Conjuring the sinister circus world of the *Better Live Than Dead* tour

By Sharon Stancavage

ALL PHOTOS: TODD KAPLAN



“The whole thing is dirty, very Depression-era, a dust bowl carnival, like the HBO series,” says Justin.

Their offstage antics are reminiscent of a circus. So what could be more appropriate theme for a Mötley Crüe tour? In fact, that is the backdrop for the group’s current *Red, White and Crue: Better Live than Dead* tour.

“Once we mentioned the word circus, they took off running with it. Tommy [Lee] was talking about a gag that involved a carnival ride, and then, of course, the midget got involved.”

“Even before we talked to the band, we kicked around a circus theme, *Cirque Du Mötley*,” recalls production/lighting designer JUSTIn Collie of Artfag (who prefers to go by his first name). However, it *is* Mötley Crüe, so the circus theme isn’t necessarily what one might expect, the designer adds: “It’s a circus vibe—we have elephant podiums for drum risers and we have tent poles. The whole thing is Mötley Crüe—dirty, very Depression-era, a dust bowl carnival, like the HBO series.” [He’s referring to *Carnivale*, the critically acclaimed show in which good and evil battle it out in a carnival touring the Dust Bowl during the early 30s).

The band embraced the circus concept immediately. “Once we mentioned the word circus, they took off running with it. Tommy [Lee] was talking about a gag that involved a carnival ride, and then, of course, the midget got involved,” JUSTIn explains. Yes, there is a midget, not to mention the on-stage appearance of Harley-Davidson motorcycles.

The frame for the Crüe circus is a tent, devised by Artfag and fabricated by Atomic Design. “Justin and Spike [Doug Brant] from Artfag are the production designers, and we, in turn facilitate the development of the design and then fabricate the end result,” explains Soren West, general manager of Atomic. In this case, he says, “They were looking for a circus tent, but it had to be grungy, beat-up, asymmetrical, and a bit trashed.”

The team from Artfag arrived at Atomic with renderings in hand that “clearly illustrated what they were after in big chunky forms—from there, we worked with them to develop and refine the concept,” says West. A flurry of emails between Artfag, Atomic, and the band ensued, and, in the end, the *Carnivale*-esque tent was created. The set is comprised of two top peaks and a semi-circular border, with the band surrounded by a red-and-white striped backdrop (70’ wide by 30’ high) that looks as if it has seen better days. “The backdrop, which is comprised of several different pieces, is somewhat dimensional, in that there is a row of truss that has a lower trim, which is a bit upstage, so that the whole backdrop just sort of swags upstage and supports the illusion that you’re inside a circus tent,” West explains.

The scenic treatments are crucial to the show’s look. According to Justin, “I told Heidi, the scenic artist at Accurate Staging—who did the risers for us—that when I saw the job she did, I could actually smell the elephant pee!” His directive for the tent was in a similar vein: “We had Atomic Design do the tent to look as if it has mold in it—and it has fooled more than one person.”

Inside the tent is a 32’ x 24’ screen, which is used for visuals in the second half of the show. “It has a kind of dirty, moldy feel to it, and has a decrepit velour drape around it that makes it look rather like a cinema

CONCERTS

screen,” Justin explains. It and two 18K Barco projectors work in conjunction with a High End Systems Catalyst media server to interpolate a variety of visuals into the production. “The way Catalyst works, you can do video as you do lighting, to highlight in a very specific and direct way,” the designer adds.

Big-top video

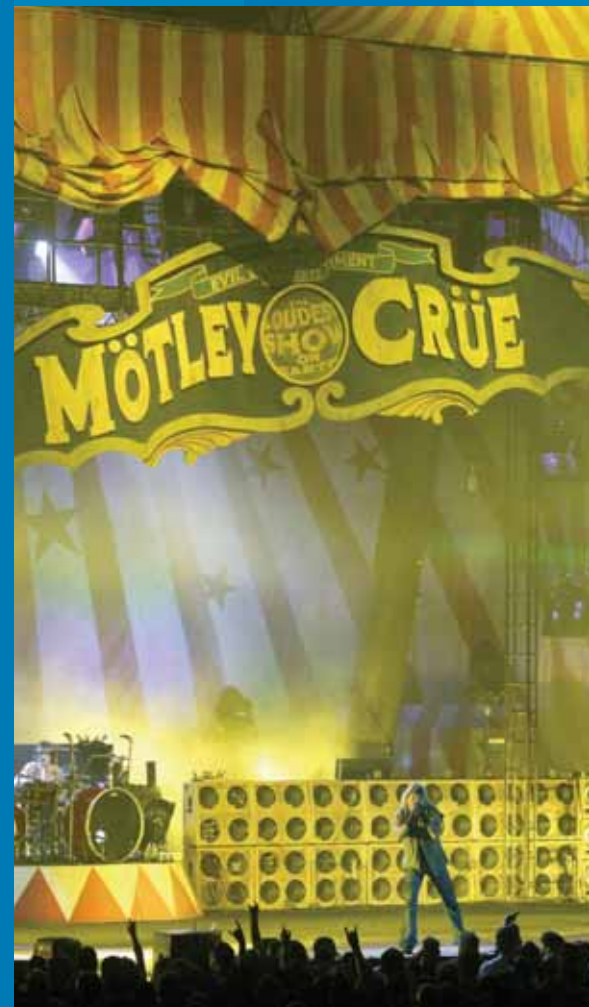
Brian Dressel of OVP Visuals of Chicago created much of the Catalyst imagery. “Tommy [Lee] worked with Brian, and he prepared a bunch of footage for us, and then Brad Schiller came in with Catalyst,” Justin explains. Dressel provided content in the form of videos for 12 songs, including favorites like “Kick Start My Heart” and “Primal Scream.” “Brian edited together a variety of pieces of content to make a video for each song that was synchronized with the music,” explains Schiller, who served as the production’s Catalyst consultant. He adds, “For each of the 12 songs [Dressel] also provided us with, there were different elements in the video in the form of clip files.” These, which were stored in Catalyst, gave them another 800-1,000 pieces of information to use during programming, as well as during the show. “We could play [Dressel’s] video during the song, and then, maybe part-way through, if they wanted to add something different to the pre-made video, we could put in something like a building exploding on a drum hit,” remarks Schiller. Adding these effects during programming and during the show was easy, Schiller notes: “You could just lay out the clips out on the desk in bump buttons in the same manner that you’d hit a bump button to strobe the lights during a drum solo, except instead you could hit a button to show a building exploding.”

One major task for Schiller, who worked with Tommy Lee on his last solo tour, was content management. “I organized nine DVDs of files on the computer,” he says. “I created folders for each of the 12 songs. Within each folder, which is numbered, I’d put the various files that Brian provided that corresponded to each song.” The files included the full edited videos from Dressel, the specific clips that comprised each video, the clips with a variety of effects added, and some bonus footage. “I also brought in content that Tommy wanted from his previous tour, as well as a folder of miscellaneous files.” Schiller admits this is an enormous amount of content, but it provided flexibility. “The point was to have lots of content there during rehearsals, so at any point you

“We had Atomic Design do the tent to look as if it has mold in it, and it has fooled more than one person.”

could change the imagery with Catalyst almost instantly,” he says.

Schiller’s other main duty was to configure the desk to work with Catalyst. “I came out as a consultant to try and show them how Catalyst works, what can be achieved, and help them set up their console with palettes to get it working in the way I find most efficient,” he says. “Catalyst—actually, any media server—has a gigantic number of parameters to adjust, compared to a moving light, and you need to know what features to make palettes for. There are



The circus production sign includes a logo reminiscent of another famous circus, calling the tour “The Loudest Show on Earth.”

so many different parameters and subsets of parameters that it’s hard for someone who’s new to a media server to understand what they’ll need quick access to.”

The last part of the visual picture was the lighting rig, which relied on Martin Professional MAC 2000 Wash and Profile units, festoon lamps on 50’ strings draped across the tent, three Lilli Pods (each made of three Martin Atomic strobes with color-



changers) and five underhung Robert Juliat Ivanhoe spotlights with Wybron color-changers. The effects that punctuate the show include an enormous number of strobes and lots of pyro, which is a favorite of guitarist Nikki Sixx. "There's loads of haze and buckets of pyro," says Justin.

Then there's the infamous drum solo. "They've created a monster with it—they have to try and top it each time," says Justin. This time, drummer Tommy Lee wanted to build the drum gag around a pendulum-based carnival ride. However, there were problems: "It was kind of impractical from a production standpoint, especially for a five- or six-truck tour," Justin admits. Instead, Lee goes up in the air for the solo. "Tommy plays three different kits. There's his regular kit, then he's flown up to a kit on stage right, which is about 25' above the stage, then he swings across to

another kit which is on the stage-left side, about 40' away from the other one," Justin explains. Lee also gets to perform acrobatics and engage in what might be called stage diving. According to Justin, "It's fun for the kids, and Tommy enjoys it."

The roar of the circus

Of course, a major requirement of a Mötley Crüe concert is volume. During this tour, the group has it, thanks to FOH engineer Dave Natale and a Clair Brothers I-4 loudspeaker system. "We're out with 40 I-4s, 36 I-4Bs, 14 S4 sub-low cabinets and eight P-2 front-fill cabinets," explains Natale. This is Natale's second time out with an I-4 rig; the first was with Fleetwood Mac. "It's got great vocal clarity, and good high end, but it doesn't have as many cones in it as the S4s," he notes.

However, Natale does get punch

from the system. "I would think that that anyone who would come to a Mötley Crüe concert wouldn't expect it to be quiet," he states. "My biggest challenge is to make it loud and not painful, which is an oxymoron. The guitars are extraordinarily loud—Mick [Mars] plays through six full stacks of Marshall cabinets, which means that there are 12 cabinets with four 12" speakers in each cabinet, which mean it's pretty loud." So loud, that Natale measured the sound of the guitars one day; they were putting out 105db at 105' away—without the PA.

Natale, who has mixed the likes of Lionel Richie and Fleetwood Mac, finds hard-rock music interesting, to say the least. "It's a different genre, and a different way of mixing for me," he admits. "If the drums aren't loud enough, you're going to hear them bleeding through the vocal mic from the drum monitors, and it sounds horrible that way. Basically, everything has to be loud to get over everything else."

Aiding him in his quest for volume are two Yamaha PM4000 consoles. Why two consoles? Lots and lots of inputs. "Tommy has two microphones on each bass drum, there are two bass drums, there are two microphones on the snare, there's a high-hat mic, three tom mics, four overhead mics, and one ride cymbal mic," he explains.

Natale chooses microphones from a variety of manufacturers. "I don't believe that one manufacturer makes a mic for all seasons," he explains. One favorite is the Sennheiser 409, but they're getting harder and harder to find," he says. "Drummers hit them with their sticks, they break, and it's hard to get them repaired." As a result, he has moved to the Beyer Opus 87. "I first saw them when I was mixing Lenny Kravitz

CONCERTS



These two views of the circus setting show how easily it is transformed by different lighting looks.

“If the drums aren’t loud enough, you’re going to hear them bleeding through the vocal mic from the drum monitors, and it sounds horrible that way. Basically, everything has to be loud to get over everything else.”

three or four years ago, and used them as a replacement for the 409.”

For the rest of the drum kit, Natale uses a mix of Beyer, Shure, and AKG mics; he has the AKG 460 on the high hat, cowbell, and ride cymbal. For the vocals, he’s using the old favorite the Shure SM 58. Then there are the microphones for the Harleys. “They ride in with Shure lavaliers on Shure wireless units,” he explains. “We have little belt packs on them in custom pouches created by one of our crew guys so they don’t scratch the custom paint job. They’re placed right below where the handlebars meet the frame.”

In addition, says Natale, “Tommy’s two drum kits that he flies to are pretty unorthodox. One consists of a 55-gallon drum—I use a Beyer M88 on that—then there’s two empty half beer barrels, I use Sennheiser 409s on them, and then there’s different arrays of saw blades and other pieces of metal that he wails on, those are miked by AKG 414s,” he concludes. Although the Sennheiser 409s are an endangered species, Natale doesn’t mind using them on the kegs: “They’re on the inside, so there’s no danger of them being hit.”

Lee’s other flying drum kit, which is electronic/acoustic, and uses two direct boxes, seems simple—except for the fact that he has a variety of sheet metal up there with him. “The saw blades and the other sheet metal produces a sharp high end. I use 460s on cymbals, so I thought that would be good on the pieces of metal—including a saw blade—that Tommy wails on,” Natale says.

For his outboard gear, Natale is conservative. “I don’t like using a lot of it because the more stuff you put in line, the less signal comes out of the PA, plus there’s less that can go wrong,” he says. For this tour, he uses eight dbx 903 limiters on the bass mic, the bass DI, the guitar left/right/dry, and on the ride cymbal. He also has three Aphex 612 noise gates. “I have them for the drums, just to keep them from feeding back because of the enormous volume,” he notes.

In the end, from an audio standpoint, Natale has the last word: “There’s only one way to interpret Mötley Crüe.” And that way is loud. After finishing the initial America leg of the tour, the Crüe is headed into Europe before hitting the American amphitheater tour in starting in August. 📶



Lighting director Kevin Cauley



FOH mixer Dave Natale and monitor mixer Mike Adams



Production manager Chris Kansy

Mötley Crüe
Red, White, and Crue: Better Live Than Dead

Production/lighting design: Artfag, LLC

FOH mixer: Dave Natale

Monitor mixer: Mike Adams

Lighting director: Kevin Cauley

Media server content: Brian Dressel,
OVP Visuals

Catalyst consultant: Brad Schiller

Production manager: Chris Kansy

Stage manager: Mark Candelario

Showco audio techs: Joe Manges,

Kirk Shreiner, Jonathan Edmonds

Ed and Ted's lighting techs: Sean Kohl,

Steve Schwind, Erik Perry,

Mike Tengdin.

Branum riggers: Gabriel Wood,

Bjorn Melcher, David Lowman

Carpenters: Tim Shanahan,

Randy Robertson.

Pyritz gas man: James Beadmore

XL video techs: Rob McShane,

Mike Casillas

Lighting Gear

(30) Martin Professional Mac 2000 Wash

(18) Martin Professional Mac 2000 Profile

(21) Lloyd Lite with Wybron CXI
color-changer

(10) Martin Professional Atomic strobe

(8) Jem Ball

(5) Robert Juliat Ivanhoe followspot
with Wybron color changer

(4) 50' festoon string

(3) Lilli Pod with Wybron 8-Lite
color-changer.

(4) Reel-Efx Df-50 hazer

(2) ETC dimmer

Tomcat Swing Swing truss

(2) MA Lighting grandMA console

Audio Gear

Loudspeakers

Clair Brothers Audio I-4 cabinets

Clair Brothers Audio I-4B cabinets

Clair Brothers Audio S4 sub low cabinets

Clair Brothers Audio P-2 front fill cabinets

Amplifiers

Crest 1000s and QSC 9.0s on the I-4s
and I-4Bs

Carver 2.0s on the S4s and P 2s

Front-of-house Electronics

Yamaha PM4000 consoles

dbx 900 rack containing eight-dbx 903
compressor/limiters

Aphex 612 noise gates

Yamaha SPX 990 digital effect units

Panasonic 3800 DAT machine

Alesis Masterlink stereo hard drive

recorder/CD player and recorder

t.c. electronic 1128 equalizers

Lake Digital PA processors

Microphones

Beyer M 88

Beyer Opus 87

AKG 414

AKG 460

Shure SM 57

Shure SM 58

Shure SM 91

Shure 184 lavaliers

Shure WH20 headset mics

Shure wireless transmitters with Beta58A
capsules

Shure U4D wireless receivers

Shure PA 821 Antenna Combiners

Sennheiser 409

Audio Technica 4047

Countrymen Direct Boxes

Monitor System

Loudspeakers

Showco SRM monitor cabinets

Showco Prism Blue cabinets

Showco Prism sub low cabinets

Showco 6B1 single 18 cabinets

Amplifiers

Crown 3600 X 12 on the SRM wedges

Crown 3200 on the Prism and 6B1 subs

Crown 3600 on the Prisms Blues

Electronics

Midas 3000 Monitor consoles

Lake Digital PA Processors

Eventide H 3000 harmonizers

Yamaha SPX 990 digital-effect units

dbx 160A compressor/limiters

dbx 903 compressor/limiters

Drawmer ds201 noise gates

Sennheiser EW 300 IEW ear-monitor units

Shure 700 V2 ear-monitor units

Video Gear

(2) Barco 18K projectors

(1) High End Systems Catalyst

Lighting gear supplied by Ed and Ted's

Excellent Lighting

Sound gear supplied by Clair Brothers

Audio / Showco

Video gear supplied by XL Touring Video

Scenery fabricated by Atomic Design

Risers supplied by Accurate Staging

Pyro supplied by Pyritz Pyrotechnics.

Rigging supplied by Branam/West Coast

Trucking: Upstaging, Inc.

Freight: Rock-It-Cargo