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News

Jazz Fest Bops in HD, On Web

Festival Marks Largest Live Music Webcast to Date

by Robert Brilliant

NEW ORLEANS

he New Orleans Jazz Festival undoubtedly ranks among the world's great live music events. This year, 400 bands, headlined by artists like Sting, the Allman Brothers, Alain Toussaint and the Neville Brothers, performed on 11 stages before an estimated 500,000 fans.

This year's Jazz Festival was also special in that many performances were recorded as part of the largest HD television live music production to date. These performances, along with lesser-know acts, will be showcased on the Internet this July in the largest streaming music Webcast ever produced.

Beginning July 5, music fans visiting Riffage.com's Website (www.riffage.com) can see and hear 52 hours of performances from the nine-day music event.

Television viewers will also be able to see the headline acts on PBS and VH-1 specials scheduled for broadcast later this year.

HD/SD LINE BLURRING

The program is being produced by Los Angeles-based Michael Murphy Productions. Company President Michael Murphy, a veteran producer of live music events for broadcast, has been involved with the New Orleans Jazz



Festival since 1989 and has worked with highdefinition television since the early 1990s, making him one of the most experienced HD television music producers in the business.

In recent years Murphy has found the dif-

ferences between HD and standard definition (SD) production to be vanishing rapidly.

"We've gotten to the point where shooting in HD, in terms of the equipment and technical setup, is not too dissimilar from shooting in standard definition NTSC," he said. "The cameras now weigh about the same, the lighting is not much different, so it's much easier on the camera guys and crew to work in HD."

This year's production involved an 80person crew that recorded the main stage headliners in HD and performers on the other stages in the DVCPRO format. The main stage performances were covered with two fixed-position cover shot cameras, a crane camera, another camera mounted on a Steadicam system, and two on-stage handheld cameras.

Roving ENG crews also gathering a considerable amount of B-roll and interview footage in DVCPRO and Betacam SP.

Murphy said

because the finished programs will be seen in both the 16:9 HD aspect ratio and the 4:3 SD aspect ratio, his camera crews had to carefully frame with both aspect ratios in mind.

"We were primarily framing in 16:9 for international markets. but at the same time we had to be conscious of the shows being broadcast domestically in 4:3," he said. "It's a framing compromise that we'll have to live with until HD becomes dominant in the U.S."

The HD aspect ratio also presents the director cutting live-to-tape with new considerations. Murphy and his director have found that the wider view lends itself to a slower cutting rhythm since viewers can see more within a shot.

"Television directing a musical performance in HD is definitely different from SD," Murphy said. "You want to stay with the beat of the music but you also want to use the 16:9 ratio to let action happen within the frame as opposed to within cuts. You don't want to be too passive but you don't want to overcut either."

Murphy and his team worked out of the Panasonic 720p HDTV Mobile Production Unit that has recently been sold by the Panasonic Broadcast & Television Systems Co. to the Seattle-based Ackerley Group for

The 53-foot unit was used last year for producing all of the HDTV broadcasts of ABC's "Monday Night Football" as well as Super Bowl XXXIV, the 2000 NHL All-Star game, and two opera broadcasts for PBS.

The van, built on the 720p HD format, is equipped with four Panasonic AQ7200P 720p digital studio cameras with 66X13.5 Fujinon lenses, two Panasonic AQ720 720p HDTV hand-held cameras with Canon HJ18X7.8B lenses, and a Panasonic AJ-PD900 DVCPRO 50 480p camcorder. Almost 13,000 feet of fiber-optic camera cables linked the cameras

digital D5 HD format with all six stage cameras ISO recorded and dual recording of the live line cut.

Along with B-roll, approximately 1,500 hours of master tapes were recorded by festival's end, making for several months of rigorous post production. The post will be done in both HD and SD formats.

Fifty-two hours of DVCPRO program masters will be delivered to Riffage.com for compression and encoding for the July Webcast. Web viewers will be able to see nearly the entire festival in what will be the world's largest music Webcast.

"It was a great shoot," said Murphy. "The combination of the gorgeous HD footage and

> the really high-end 48 tracks of digital audio

> > we recorded is going to make for some super packages."

Murphy is also excited about the role of HD in electronic cinematography for theatrical release — which he sees as a perfect presentation environment for musical programming.

"In the electronic cinematography theater, we'll be projecting HD 16:9 features on to 50- to 60-foot

screen with 5.1

Surround Sound. The technology and the projection systems are here now. So I can see us using content from events like the New Orleans Jazz Festival in theaters, on the Web, on DVDs and VHS, and for broadcast."

This year's New Orleans Jazz Festival, with its HD, SD and Web distribution, may mark the birth of such a trend, he said.

"We're at the point of taking the highquality content acquired in HD and utilizing it across the board." ■

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with the production truck.

Inside, there are four Panasonic AJ-HD2700 digital VTRs with slow motion replay controls, a Snell & Wilcox HD production switcher, two Chyron Duet HD character generators, and a Calrec Alpha 100 all-digital, 96-stereo input audio mixing console.

The truck features an a 16:9 monitor wall using flat-panel plasma and LCD displays. Two Panasonic PT-42P1 42-inch gas plasma displays serve as centerpieces for the monitor wall.

RIGOROUS POST

The New Orleans Jazz Festival performances were recorded in the component