

THE ROLLING STONES:
Let's Spend the Night Together.

Hal Ashby, director; Ronald Schwary, producer; Bob Clearmountain, audio mixer. EMBASSY HOME ENTERTAINMENT 1231, \$39.95 (Beta Hi-Fi and stereo VHS cassette); \$29.95 (CED disc and CX-encoded laser disc).

RUSH:
Exit Stage Left.

Grant Lough, video producer; Terry Brown, audio producer. RCA Videodisc 12127 \$24.98 (CED disc); PIONEER ARTISTS PA 83-035, \$24.95 (CX-encoded laser disc).

Though there are signs of activity in the made-for-the-medium camp, the vast majority of music titles available on video disc and cassette originally were made as movies or television shows. This may seem a waste of a new outlet to some, but it does have its advantages when it comes to capturing a concert on tape. The Rolling Stones "Let's Spend the Night Together" concert tour was designed with a major film release in mind. The Rush "Exit Stage Left" tour was not. The former is, for the most part, an effective home-video presentation. The latter is decidedly not.

In fact, "Let's Spend the Night Together" is a surprising improvement

over its cinematic incarnation. In Manhattan's state-of-the-art Loew's Astor Plaza Theater, the 90-minute condensation of the Stones' 1981 U.S. tour was an endless abomination. Viewed several months later in its Beta Hi-Fi video-cassette form, it is a great take-home rock & roll show that should stand up well to repeated viewings. Using Sony's new Beta Hi-Fi Model 5200 VCR and a 13-inch Profeel monitor and speakers, I found the sound to be far better and the scale of the show more realistic.

In the theater, drummer Charlie Watts's hi-hat cymbal consistently crashed out at you from a rear right speaker, coating the entire soundtrack with a thin, trebly veneer. Bill Wyman's rock-steady bass thud-thudded along to assaulting effect. Mick Jagger's vocals were lost in endless echoes, his lyrics totally incomprehensible. And Keith Richards' and Ron Wood's guitar solos were all but buried in the general din. The six-track mix and "surround-sound" speaker arrangement in the theater did little to help matters. Attempts to pan the mix to correspond to the players' positions on stage only made my head swim.

Going down to two tracks for the video cassette has apparently forced a certain amount of simplification, and less is definitely more in this case. Watts's cymbal is still overbearing, but bearable. You can understand Jagger's lyrics, and there's some impressive instrumental interplay between Richards and Woods that I never even heard on the film's soundtrack.

Unfortunately, what has been gained in audio clarity has been lost in color contrast. At the time I saw "Let's Spend the Night Together" there were only a handful of Beta Hi-Fi copies around and it is possible that further work has since been done in this area. But the bright, contrasting colors and imaginative lighting effects that were so impressive in the shows and on the film are lost on the video cassette. The Stones themselves look ashen—despite all the makeup they wear for arena-sized shows like this one. One can only assume that the general pallor of the tape set in somewhere during the transfer from film. [Embassy Home Entertainment had no explanation for this phenomenon.]

On the plus side, visually, is how

well the concert works on a small screen. Designed on the grandest of scales, the live show's backdrops were as long as an entire football field, with Jagger's perpetual motion an assured focal point. Watching what was designed to be larger than life blown up many times on a movie screen was downright obnoxious. No matter how famous Jagger's lips and rear end may be, seeing a closeup of one or the other of them fill an entire movie screen is an assault on the human condition. The die-hard fans who sat in the front row at the live show were at least spared that. Their perspective was entirely different from that of the majority of the audience; they missed the impact of the full presentation. For most of us, the experience was like watching television—which is precisely why the video cassette works so well.

The flip side, so to speak, of these issues is apparent on Rush's "Exit Stage Left." Viewed on both an RCA stereo CED disc and a Pioneer Artists laser disc, a visually distinctive live show is on a home screen a mess of bleeding colors. The sound of the 59-minute concert (there are a few words from each of the band members between the cuts) is good enough; Rush does not display the kind of precision playing or musical subtlety that would demand great sonic definition anyway. Turn off the picture and you have a typical Rush recording with somewhat better separation and clarity than you would find on a regular LP or audio cassette. You also eliminate the discs' intermittent sync problems.

But the biggest disappointments are in the visuals. While a stage that is bathed in red and blue light can set a mood in a live context, on a video disc those broad washes of color become one great blur and render the complexions of the performers ugly. And the light diffraction that results from pointing the camera directly into a spotlight—a technique that is used unsparingly here—is most disconcerting. To its credit, Rush did attempt to customize the show for home video by adding some animated sequences. But the brightly colored highway that careers in and out of *Red Barchetta* and the slow-motion effects during *YYZ* neither illustrate nor illuminate the rather pedestrian proceedings.

—IRA MAYER