



Editing under fire with Scots Guards in Iraq

Taking the prize for album of the year at the 2009 Classical Brit Awards were the pipes and drums of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards. *Spirit of the Glen: Journey* is a remarkable album in many ways - but perhaps most remarkable because a large part of it was recorded in the middle of a war zone, with sessions constantly threatened by rocket attacks.

This situation is reflected in the promotional video which accompanies the album. It, too, was shot on site in Iraq, which is how Paul Bates of Whitewater Media, a veteran of the London post production scene and now an independent movie-maker specialising in music, found himself in the middle of the desert, in mid-summer, shooting and editing in a sandstorm.

Making music history

"I have a lot of contacts in the music business, so when Tom Lewis, the A & R manager at Universal Classics and Jazz, called me, it was not a surprise - I have known him a long time," he recalled. The conversation, though, was to take an unexpected turn. The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards have an important place in musical history: it was their recording of *Amazing Grace* in 1972 which topped the charts around the world and created a new audience for the highland bagpipes. More recently, they had a surprise hit with their 2007 album *Spirit of the Glen*, which mixed traditional pipe airs with popular

music in inventive modern arrangements. As well as being pipers, of course, they have a real job in the army: driving tanks. The band was halfway through recording a follow-up album when the regiment was posted to Basra. "When Tom called me, it was to explain that they had decided to complete the recording in Iraq," Paul Bates continued. "He called to ask if I wanted to go to Basra to make the accompanying video. I thought about it for a moment or two, and knew that if anyone was going to go, I wanted it to be me."

En route to Basra

Very soon afterwards, he found himself, in the company of Pipe Major Ross Munro, flying from RAF Brize Norton to Qatar on the Gulf. "From there we flew on to Basra in a Hercules, in flak jackets and helmets. It was a bit scary." He was shooting with the Sony EX1 solid state camera, a relatively new model and format. "It was not that tried and tested in 50° temperatures," he recalled. "It worked flawlessly, although I had to put it in a freezer occasionally: it became too hot to touch at times."

Full highland dress

Although the music was recorded in a tent (nicknamed "studio 2" for the duration, where the air conditioning failed to cope and the musicians struggled to keep their instruments in tune) Paul needed to get external shots for his video. Some of these featured the musicians - including a stunning sequence of Pipe Major Munro, in full highland dress, on the runway of Basra airport at dusk - but much of it featuring the men doing their day job. For this he was out and about, in the full heat of an Iraqi mid-summer, ever aware of the constant risk of attack. At the time he was using Sony's proprietary SxS cards in the EX1 camera (Bates has now extensively tested off-the-shelf SDHD cards with the camera, which he finds perfectly robust and very cost-effective). On location he had ready access to the content to start cutting, working directly into the EDIUS editor from Grass Valley. "I have EDIUS on my laptop so, with an SxS adaptor, I could just drag and drop from the cards to see if what I shot was going to work," he said. "EDIUS edits right off the SxS card: there is no need to transfer

the content to another drive, which is terrific. Using plug-ins and filters in EDIUS on the laptop, I could show Tom what we had got and where I thought we were going.”

Painless HD edit

With the music recording and the shoot complete, Paul was ferried back to the UK by the RAF. But before he could return to his home in the Mediterranean, Universal asked him to stop off in London to finish a rough cut for them. “From my laptop and an external drive I could set up EDIUS and cut perfectly happily,” he said. “I did a quick DVD of the piece in a couple of days. When I got home, I reopened the whole thing on my main machine and just carried on working.” Paying tribute to the power of EDIUS, Paul Bates said “I am pretty amazed that I am able to do a painless, multi-stream, HD edit on a laptop, without worrying about video formats. “And I love being able to output to Windows Media right from the timeline, or burn DVDs straight from the timeline – that is great for clients,” he continued. “With the latest release I can burn Blu-ray straight from the timeline which is even better. Everyone is shooting in HD now, so delivering in SD, even for viewing copies, is not ideal. Being able to give clients a Blu-ray disc is really powerful.”



Power and stability

In his career Paul Bates has used most editing platforms, looking for the solution with the right combination of power, flexibility and stability. His first encounter with EDIUS technology came with the codecs built into Adobe Premiere 6.5. As the EDIUS editor came to maturity, it became a natural choice for him. “It has always been able to handle more codecs and formats than anything else,” he noted. “It does not matter what it is, you just put it on the timeline. And Grass Valley gives it good support, so when a new camera or format comes out they are quick to get it

on EDIUS. “It is far faster than anything else, especially when working in multiple formats,” he added. “You tend to forget all the good things about EDIUS – it just works.” The regiment’s commanding officer, Lt Col Felix Gedney, described the pipes and drums as “a very emotional form of music – it rouses a deep passion.” The new album, *Spirit of the Glen: Journey* – perhaps the first to be recorded in a theatre of war – was released at the end of 2008 and clearly captured the imagination of the public as the Brit album of the year award is the result of a public vote. 