

# Production Notes

Journals and notes from the production staff of E:60.



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TUESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2014

## Story of a Song



“Dream On’ was meant to be about alienation, wrote Steven Tyler, its composer and lead singer of Aerosmith, in his memoir.

“The song started with a melody in my right hand that rocked back and forth hypnotically, out of the ether,” Tyler wrote. “I began it in F-minor with a C, C-sharp dischord. That gave it a haunting, Edgar Allen Poe kind of feel...”

By the time the lyrics were completed, at a hotel near Logan Airport, it had become an anthem of hope.

“I’ve always said it’s about hunger, desire, ambition,” he wrote, “...a song to give to myself.”

“Dream On” continues to give more than 40 years after its release. In a recent incarnation, as the finale to the Boston Marathon special of E:60 Presents, Tyler and guitarist Joe Perry performed it with

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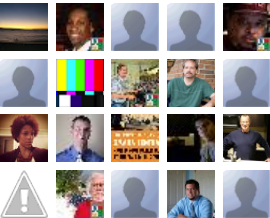
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a new wrinkle.

The E:60 version of “Dream On” is a collaboration with the Southern California Children’s Chorus, which paired 50 fresh-faced youth, ages 11 to 17, with the two well-traveled rockers. Tyler, Perry and the chorus paid tribute to the bombing victims of the 2013 race, and to runners everywhere.

Executive Producer Andy Tennant saw and heard it recorded at the Vibiana, a decommissioned cathedral in downtown Los Angeles.

“When Steven Tyler played those first notes on piano with Joe Perry’s iconic opening chord, I looked down at the goose bumps on my arms,” Tennant recalled.

The idea was hatched last fall when Tennant and feature producer Heather Lombardo planned a special to commemorate the one-year anniversary of the bombings. Tennant wanted a musical endnote to reflect the images and story lines, and thought of Aerosmith, with its Boston roots from the early 1970s.

ESPN music director Kevin Wilson took the idea to Aerosmith, with whom he had worked on a NASCAR show in the past. Wilson suggested that the band record a special “Dream On” for iTunes, with proceeds to go to charities for bombing victims. Aerosmith jumped at the idea.

“Steven and Joe were excited to do something for Boston, to give back,” Tennant recalled.



The initial idea was for an acoustic version, with just Tyler and Perry, absent bass or percussion, in a recording studio.

“They never had done the song like that, just the two of them,” Wilson recalled. “It really interested them.”

Then Tyler and director Casey Tebo had another idea, to bring in a children’s choir. E:60 reached out to John and Lori Loftus, a couple who founded the Southern California Children’s Chorus in 1996. They had overseen its growth to 340 members in seven choirs, and had performed to good reviews at the Oscars in 2012. They agreed.

The Loftus’ spent a Sunday afternoon with Tyler at his West Hollywood home where they wrote an arrangement.

“It was clickin’,” Lori, a keyboardist, recalled. “He said ‘this’. I said ‘Do you mean this?’ He said ‘Yeah’ and laughed. I had ideas. He had ideas.”

The challenge was to blend Tyler’s voice, “so big and rock and rollish”, as Loftus described it, with the classically trained voices of the choir.

“You keep your sound,” Loftus told Tyler. “The children will put the force of hope behind you.”

The arrangement tucked the choir in “from below and above” Tyler and Perry’s range, Loftus explained. She was determined that the choir support Tyler and Perry without “getting in their way”.

Tyler suggested the choir echo his signature “Dream On” phrase for an angelic effect.

The shoot took place over two days late in March. E:60 had Tennant, producer Martin Khodabakhshian, editor Tim Horgan, four cameras, and several photographers. Aerosmith had a crew of about 40, including legendary audio engineer Chris Lord-Alge.

Visuals were not a concern. Tyler and Perry were elegant, as was the choir. The old cathedral was atmospheric and well-lit.

“I approached it like a music video,” said Khodabakhshian.

“What’s the jib shot look like? How to hit certain points of the song to accentuate the lyrics? How to get the emotion on Tyler’s face and Perry’s focus on his guitar? A lot of it was hands and faces.”

Audio was a concern. The choir’s vocals could bleed into the mikes meant to capture Tyler’s vocals and piano, and Perry’s electric guitar.

“That’s where the Aerosmith crew stepped in and ensured that we

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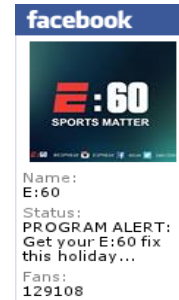
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captured all the audio channels separate and distinct for the best mix,” Tennant recalled.

Prior to the first rehearsal Tennant met with Tyler and Perry in their respective dressing rooms. He showed them the stories slated for the special - about victims Marc Fucarile, Aaron Hern, and Karen Rand; runner Kris Biagiotti and her special needs daughter, Kayla; and first responders Joe Andruzzi and Carlos Arredondo. Actor Ben Affleck voiced the piece about Fucarile, while Patriots quarterback Tom Brady voiced the others.

“I wanted them to have an idea of who they were performing for and to,” Tennant recalled. “Both were deeply moved by the stories that the victims told.”

Tyler, Perry and the choir rehearsed the song twice on the first day at the old church. This was “Dream On” as never before, stripped down and minimalist.

“Not a lot was going on, which is why it sounded so great,” said Wilson.

After the rehearsal, Tennant recalled, Tyler remarked, “in some ways this is how I envisioned the song would always be performed.”

Tennant was happy, too. “The choir brought a certain mood, a certain innocence and reflective, melodic tone that hit all the right notes for what we originally set out to accomplish.”

Said Wilson: “The choir added a touch of sophistication -- a more inspirational sound. It evokes emotionally in people.”



They sang it twice, for keeps, on the second day. After the second take Khodabakhshian asked the choir to do it again, without Tyler and Perry, to get tight shots of the faces.

The final edit included two specialty shoots. One was of items from a makeshift marathon memorial stored in a Boston warehouse. The other was of Team MR8, a group that runs in honor of 8-year-old Martin Richard, who died from the second bomb blast. Khodabakhshian shot Team MR8 at daybreak, early in March, on the quiet streets of Boston’s Back Bay. Those shots, in slow-mo, connected the studio/church in Los Angeles to the horror and redemption of Boston.

“The key to the edit was to balance the iconic rock stars with the somber and powerful imagery of the runners,” Lombardo said.

To her taste, it worked.

“The overall show came across as genuine, not forced or over the top,” said Lombardo. “We wanted the ending to fit with that sentiment. Steven Tyler and Joe Perry were very genuine about the reason they participated. The video is understated, all about the song, and the imagery of Team MR8. It fits the sentiment of just being genuine and raw.”

Aerosmith’s new version of “Dream On” was released on iTunes at the end of July. All funds received by Steven Tyler and Joe Perry in connection with this track will be donated to charities for those affected by the Boston Marathon bombing.

(Posted by Steve Marantz on August 5, 2014)

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