



lights out

Matt Mills

Lighting Designer and Programmer
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Nearly half way through a massive 18-month world tour with heavy metal icons Mötley Crüe, Lighting Director and Programmer Matt Mills is holding up exceptionally well. And so is the Flex LED Tape he uses on Tommy Lee's custom-made "Crüecifly" drum coaster. We caught up with Matt between shows in Japan.

Where do you hail from?

I grew up in Jacksonville Florida, but I have been in Orlando so long it is home now.

How did you get into lighting and what do you see as your first big break in the industry?

I got into lighting in nightclubs when I lived in Jacksonville. I was actually an auto mechanic at the time for a Cadillac dealership. Never thought lighting could be a career, just thought I would have fun with it and get some free drinks and see some shows. For some reason it stuck and I kept progressing along and it eventually led to a job at Disney. I would say my big break came when I was working at Christie Lites. Account Rep Larry Thomas approached me in the shop to talk to me about a client he had just landed that needed an LD, 3 Doors Down. He gave me a shot at it and it worked out great. I was with them for 8 years and it definitely helped me develop as an LD.

You've been out on the road with Mötley Crüe's 'The Final Tour' since last June.

How did the association with the band come about?

The gig got passed to me by their last LD, Mike Cooper, who decided to take a break from touring and explore other endeavors. Me, Mike and the designer (Sooner Routhier) go back several years and have been collaborating together with several artists. When this opportunity came up it was an easy choice to make.

Is there a show (or city) on the tour that really sticks out in your mind? Why?

Oddly enough, Minneapolis. Garth Brooks was in town at the Target Center and was in the middle of 12 sold out shows there. We were across town at the other arena and did not think it would be a good crowd. It ended up sold out and the crowd was completely insane from start to finish.

What do you like best about life on the road?

The traveling; making new friends in other countries.

What's the worst?

The obvious answer is being away from my family but I'll give you one more. Being out of my usual element at home. Little things like not being able to get the shower temperature the way I usually have it at home, or waking up in the hotel room and forgetting where I am. Little things like that. Sounds kind of petty but it gets to you after a while.

What do you see as the biggest change in entertainment lighting in your time in the industry?

For me it has been media servers. Being able to have control of the video playback from my console has been huge for me.

You're using Elation Flex Tape on Tommy Lee's "Crüecifly" drum coaster. How has that worked out?

The [Flex Tape](#) has worked out well for how horribly we treat it. It is actually just taped on with electrical tape and we make connections at each truss. We just added an additional 400' of it to the Japan and Australia set. On the US run I was controlling it via DMX. This time around I am using Klingnet from an Arkaos Media Master that I purchased before these runs. There was a little bit of a learning curve to get things configured but it has worked out well and knocked down the parameter count on the console big time. I was able to drop 3 NPUs by making the switch.

Have you used Elation gear in the past?

I do a lot of work with Christie Lites and they stock a lot of [Platinum Beam 5Rs](#). I use those in place of a Sharpy quite often because of the price point and it is very similar.

Is there an Elation fixture you'd like to get your hands on?

The [Sniper](#). I'm hunting for a place I can use it on the Motley Crue show to justify me getting 20-30 of them.

What do you see as the advantage of using Elation products?

Elation has certainly stepped things up the last few years in reliability and have been able to keep the price point down. No matter what show you're doing there's budget concerns and you want to have the bang for the buck. Elation is very helpful with those circumstances.

Vince, Tommy and the boys are known for their crazy on-the-road antics. Any good story you can pass along from this tour?

NO COMMENT!!!!!! (maybe ask me again later)

How involved are they in the lighting looks on the show?

Tommy and Nikki are really into it, mainly at pre-production. Once we get things rolling down the road they are busy with other things. Tommy has a mic that he uses to communicate with us during the show and every so often he will point something out to me like "hey Matt, it'd look cool if these lights were strobing during this part", or "hey Matt, give me some more fog". It's impressive how crazy he drums but still notices little things.

What will you be doing next January 1st when the Crue tour is finally finished?

I really haven't thought about it much. I have 10 months to figure it out.

What do you like to do when you're not doing lighting?

Home stuff, family stuff. When I'm home I am totally in Dad mode.

What's something about Matt Mills that people don't necessarily know or might find surprising?

I can do a 540 McTwist on a skateboard.

What advice would you give to a young Matt just starting out?

When the writing is on the wall it's time to get out. I rode out way too many sinking ships and got burned too many times. But, that all comes from experience and lessons learned.



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