

What would you do if John Mellencamp invited you to go on a concert tour and produce a documentary? Kurt Markus got that opportunity and embraced the project. *It's About You*, which screened as the opening act for Mellencamp's "No Better Than This" 2010 fall tour. More than 40 million albums featuring Mellencamp's music have been sold, and 22 of his songs are on the all-time top 40 hit list.

A little ditty about John Mellencamp

Markus is a still photographer whose fashion, celebrity and advertising pictures have been featured in many different magazines. He and his wife Maria operate Wild Horse Island Press which publishes his books.

"John called me out of the blue and invited me to go on a six-week tour to 30 cities where he, Willie Nelson and Bob Dylan would be performing at minor league baseball parks during the summer of 2009," Markus says. "His call was motivated by one of my books that features pictures of boxers. He envisioned a documentary that looks like those images."

After consulting with Phil Vigeant, president of Pro8mm in Burbank, California, Markus decided to produce the film in Super 8 format using a Classic Pro/Max 8 Camera. He recorded images in natural light on KODAK VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 5219.

The camera was a Beaulieu 7008 modified for synch sound and a widened aspect ratio of 1.58, which uses more of the negative and is compatible with projection in 16:9 format. The camera was mounted with a Beaulieu 7-56mm T1.4 power zoom lens.

Markus and his son Ian, who is studying filmmaking at Montana State, made up the crew. There are no interviews. The story is told with images, music and narrated observations recorded by Markus during post-production.

In addition to filming performances and recording sessions, there are compelling images of their travels. There is a shot of a pensive-looking Mellencamp standing alone on a city street. The buildings behind him are in disrepair and windows are boarded up. His expression tells you that he remembers a happier place.

"In my dreams, I thought about dramatic lighting, but I knew from day one that we would have to be invisible," Markus says. "We didn't have any control over lighting. We were definitely not in charge. As a matter of fact, we were ignored."

They recorded synchronized sound during performances.

"I only had two-and-a-half minutes running time and songs were longer than that," Markus says. "Ian recorded sound, and we also occasionally took 35mm still pictures."

After the first day of shooting, Markus shipped the film to Pro8mm. The processed negative looked good to Vigeant, who transmitted samples via the internet for Markus to see.

"I think it would have been a very different experience if it had been one concert and everything happened in a two-hour time frame," Markus says. "We wound up going to around 25 of the 30 performances. We skipped a few to get to places where they were setting up for recording sessions in advance. I knew

going into this project that I would be flying by the seat of my pants."

They recorded around 15 hours of film. After the negative was processed it was transferred to digital video format with a custom-made Cintel Millennium II 4K scanner and a da Vinci 2K Color Enhancement System. Markus supervised editing and timing of the final cut.

"This 500-speed negative has enormous latitude," Vigeant observes. "That gave Kurt and our colorist opportunities to create images that were the right aesthetic for every shot."

Some still photographs were blended into the final cut of the documentary. The scanned images were displayed on a 55-inch television screen and recorded onto Super 8 film.

