

The Rolling Stones Mashed Potato Moment

Sometime in the eighties, there was another important mashed potato moment.

I have an annoying work habit: I really like **loud** rock and roll playing when I work. I also find work to be a great way to procrastinate and avoid boring stuff.

The owner of Audio Excellence had acquired a data grade NEC video projector and brought it to the store. No manual, just this giant CRT beast of a machine. It fired up fine, but the picture was completely crazy misaligned and unwatchable. Someone had to figure this out. Procrastination time!

As the store closed, I took the thing into our “big sound room.” (The one I could play the loudest!) Needing a video source, I grabbed a laserdisc player (very obscure then) and my new copy of “Lets Spend the Night Together” a recent Rolling Stones release of a live concert-1981.

More background: I prefer and have usually preferred the music on live recordings to studio releases as they are closer to the real music. I love the studio recordings for quality, but they are musically very different experiences. The problem is the sound quality of live shows is historically poor. That makes it a terrible way to introduce anyone to the music. The better the sound, the more willing people are to listen. Full stop.

Back in the sound room, working one color at a time and learning the huge mass of convergence pots, I was rockin happily into the evening. After a few hours, I decided to try putting all three colors up on the wall at once again. Boom, there was a whole wall with Mick Jagger singing “Beast of Burden.” The sound and picture matched in impact and scale. Though still miles from being done, I knew “This means something.”

And did it ever. I started to learn as much as I could from whoever I could. I took queues from TV cameramen and movie people. I asked a guy named Joe Kane and anyone who would talk to me. I wanted to get this stuff. Why? So I could play concerts for people.

That started the hunt I’ve never stopped. Finding music that had been filmed during recording. Customers were thrilled and excited to have this new and powerful connection to their music. Over and over, I would put up an image and people would say: “listen to that.” “Llsten” to that.

That just won’t happen if you stick a TV between your speakers. The reflected image matching the scale and character of the sound is where the secret lies. And, the content has to have meaning and substance.

That mashed potato moment lead to being the top Runco dealer in the country for five years running. I continue to share music this way with a broader and broader audience to this day. A projector is the essential component for a complete music system.