

Live Aid concert turns world into global village

Some 2 billion around world see 17-hour concert from two continents; broadcast goes off with nary a hitch

It was a marriage of altruism and technology. Heralded in the media as a historical musical event, a 17-hour "global jukebox" to raise money (and consciousness) for famine-stricken Africa, the Live Aid concert on July 13 was also a technological wonder. Satellite feeds and production provided the means by which the program reached an estimated 2 billion people around the world. Adding to the accomplishment, according to its producers, was that it went off almost without a glitch.

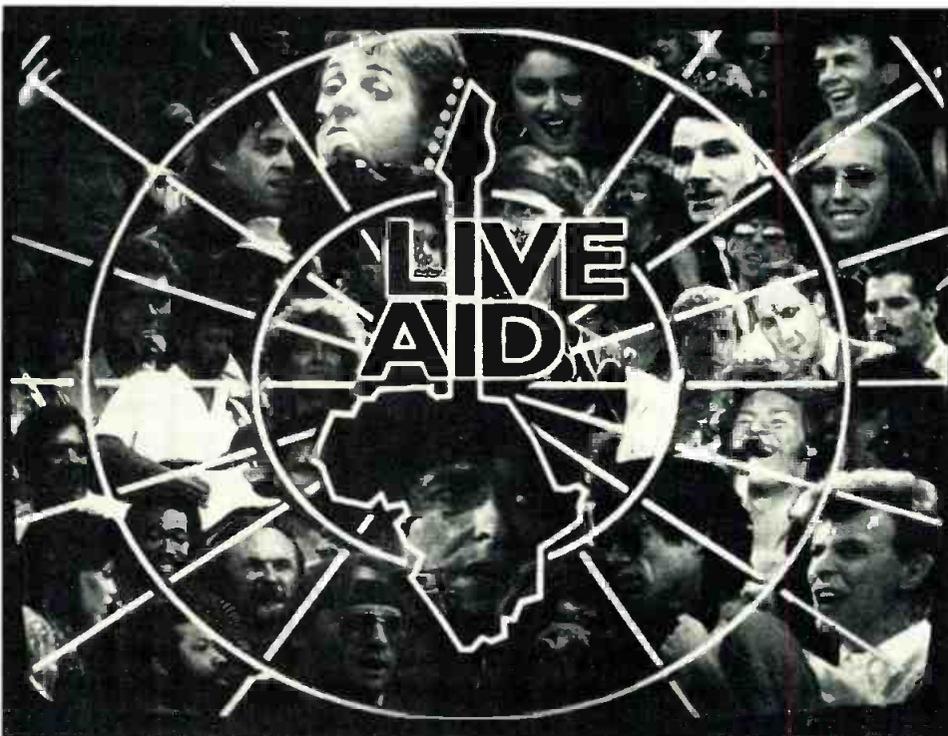
The concert, which featured about 60 acts, was split between John F. Kennedy Stadium in Philadelphia and Wembley Stadium in London, with incoming feeds from, among other places, Australia, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway and the Soviet Union. It was produced by Worldwide Sports & Entertainment and was carried in whole or in part by, among others, ABC Television, ABC Radio, MTV, the BBC and more than 100 independent stations.

Bob Geldof, an Irishman with the British band, the Boomtown Rats (there have been calls for his nomination for a Nobel Peace Prize since the concert), organized the event. Geldof also founded Band Aid, the organization of European artists who began the musical artists' support for Africa when they recorded the song, "Do They Know It's Christmas?" American musicians then followed suit and formed USA for Africa and recorded their own song, "We Are the World."

According to Howard Zuckerman, an independent program packager who was executive in charge of the production, the entire program was put together in only 10 weeks. It was beamed live via 13 satellites to more than 110 countries, and on a tape-delayed basis to about 40 other countries, including China and the Soviet Union. Twenty cameras were used in the U.S. (including Skycam and ones in the Goodyear blimp); 19 videotape machines, and about 400 production and engineering people. Three Diamondvision screens gave more detailed views of the JFK performers, as well as pictures from London and around the world. The total cost of the entire production was about \$4 million, Zuckerman said, adding that "it could have easily have been a \$20-million production."

Eleven channels on five Intelsat satellites, were among the six satellites used for the international transmission of the event, which was fed to nine locations—including the U.S., England, Japan, Australia, Korea, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Ghana.

The BBC, Voice of America and ABC



A paint box panoply of Live Aid stars

Radio were among those carrying the radio feed. The last had the exclusive U.S. radio rights, carrying the event live on 180 radio stations, and using tapes when acts were playing in both stadiums simultaneously. "By and large" the radio production went well, said Bob Benson, vice president and senior executive for ABC Radio. A crew of more than 100 was used to broadcast from 6 a.m. Saturday to 12:15 a.m. Sunday morning (18¼ hours), beginning with the Live Aid concert feed from Australia.

Benson said the network had guaranteed Worldwide that \$500,000 would be raised through stations in rights fees and from listener donations. Station feedback indicated the program was a success, he said. "From everything," he said, "we think it will be the most-listened-to program of all time," based on call-ins, donations and informal surveys by some station managers of what people seemed to be listening to in their cars, on the street and in shopping malls, he said. To the radio industry, Benson said, "it was probably the most important event they could have been involved in—in terms of number of listeners and in terms of the charity involved."

For the magnitude of the event—with its remotes, two-way feeds, the amount of time being on the air, the "tremendous amount of people on top of us," Zuckerman said, it "went off so smoothly." There were only a couple of noticeable technical problems. At one point, for example, Zuckerman said, the

Federal Aviation Administration had to be summoned to clear the sky above JFK stadium of as many as 21 helicopters, which were interfering with the satellite reception. Also, just prior to the British finale at Wembley, Paul McCartney's voice mike didn't work for part of "Let It Be."

Things may have been rougher for concertgoers. About 100,000 paid \$35 to \$50 each to attend the event in Philadelphia, spending the day in sweltering heat, with three-hour waits for restrooms and long lines for food. About 72,000 were at Wembley and 12,000 at the concert in Sydney, Australia.

But those who were there saw some of the biggest names in popular music perform, including rock luminaries Mick Jagger, Tina Turner, Paul McCartney, the Who and Bob Dylan, as well as new stars Madonna, Duran Duran and Phil Collins. (The last performed at Wembley Stadium in the morning and flew via the Concorde to perform at JFK Stadium the same day.) At the end of the Philadelphia concert, singer Lionel Richie announced that \$40 million in pledges had been made.

(By last week's end, press reports put that figure as high as \$70 million, although the program's producers estimated it to be between \$50 million and \$60 million. Toll-free pledge phone numbers were closed after the concert, but a mailing address [Live Aid, P.O. Box 7800, San Francisco, 94120] was still accepting contributions.)

The artists kept to the tight program