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Backs To The Wall. Wham's Andrew Ridgely and George Michael are shown with video producer Martin Lewis on the Great Wall of China. The three were there for the filming of Wham's "Foreign Skies," which has recently been released by CBS Fox Video.

Video music

Wham! China Tour Documentary To Premiere At Farewell Concert

BY JIM BESSMAN

NEW YORK Producer Martin Lewis will premiere "Foreign Skies," his Lindsay Anderson-directed documentary of 1985's unprecedented Wham! tour of China, at the band's farewell concert at London's Wembley Stadium on Saturday (28).

Lewis says the hourlong film will then be released to the home video market in late July or early August by CBS/Fox. No price has been set.

Lewis hopes the "unusual nature" of "Foreign Skies" will make for wider appeal than the typical rockumentary video fare. While Wham! fans will be satisfied by the soundtrack and in-depth portraits of the duo's George Michael and Andrew Ridgely, Lewis says, viewers will also be given rare glimpses of Chinese life.

"China is constantly changing," says the producer. "The most recent TV series about it, the BBC's 'Heart of the Dragon,' was aired a couple of years ago and is already outdat-

ed. Now, there's been a backlash since the Wham! tour, and no foreign pop concerts have been allowed since. So the chance for this kind of documentary vision might not happen again for a while."

Lewis says one aspect of the Wham! tour played up in the video is the culture shock experienced by both sides. "It shows Wham!'s arrival in China, and their bewilderment at the modern hotel accommodations, which shattered their (mistaken) idea of Shantytown. Then, it shows the Chinese watching the group on TV and seeing a music video for the first time."

Other key scenes described by Lewis include Wham! at the Great Wall; the group dealing "diplomatically" with Chinese politicians and dignitaries; Michael and Ridgely writing speeches for delivery at nightly official banquets; the "inevitable" visit to the British Embassy; the first gig's load-in performed by "thousands of Chinese shunting equipment to and fro like worker ants"; an informal Wham! jam with

Chinese folk musicians; a soccer match with the Wham! entourage and its Chinese attendants; and revealing interviews with young Chinese.

The standout moment for fans, says Lewis, is Michael being massaged "in the buff" while giving his

'There's been a backlash since the Wham! tour'

views on communism.

Musically, 10 songs by Wham! are offered, both performance tracks culled from the Peking and Canton concerts, as well as studio cuts used on the soundtrack. These include "Everything She Wants," "Careless Whisper," "Bad Boys," "Young Guns," and a performance of James Brown's "Love Machine."

Lewis notes that the Chinese minister of culture instructed the audience to "watch but not learn" from

Michael's rendition of the Brown tune.

The filming of "Foreign Skies" occurred while Lewis was in the midst of producing and directing "Stand By Me: A Portrait of Julian Lennon," which was released last year by MCA Home Video. The idea came about, Lewis says, when he bumped into Wham! co-manager Jaz Summers at the group's Beacon Theater show here in early 1985.

Summers, an acquaintance from Lewis' prior work in the British record industry, told him of the possibility of the China tour, and the two discussed filming the event.

After receiving the go-ahead, Lewis had two weeks to prepare for the 10-day trip. He credits his assistant Lee Rolontz, as well as Lisa Bonnichon of the London office of Springtime! Productions with putting together the 35-member international crew, and working out "all the logistics," including transportation of a 48-channel sound desk and Super 16 camera gear.

As for working with the Chinese,

Lewis says they were "fairly straightforward with us, but also capable of the most skilled negotiation I've seen in 14 years in the music and film business. It took hours to negotiate for an extra translator or a three-ton truck, and we had to spend the nights negotiating for the next day's filming."

Lewis, who hired his idol, the late Sam Peckinpah, to direct the first two Julian Lennon clips, chose Lindsay Anderson to direct "Foreign Skies" because he "possessed the scope needed to embrace the two subject matters [Wham! and China]."

Anderson is best-known as director of two Malcolm MacDowell films, "if . . ." and "O Lucky Man!"

In addition to Anderson, Lewis credits Los Angeles filmmaker Strath Hamilton and Wham! video director Andy Morahan for further shaping the film in post-production, and Summers, who acted as co-producer. He adds that George Michael produced and arranged all the music in the film.

Wham! Concerts in China To Be Documented on Film

BY PAUL GREIN

LOS ANGELES Wham!'s concerts last week in Peking and Canton—the first performances by a Western group in the People's Republic of China—will be the subject of a documentary intended for theatrical release later this year.

The 60- to 75-minute documentary will be directed by Lindsay Anderson, who directed the films "If . . ." and "O Lucky Man," and produced by Martin Lewis, who produced the film "The Secret Policeman's Other Ball" as well as Julian Lennon's videos for "Valotte" and "Too Late For Goodbyes."

Lewis, in an interview prior to the concerts, explained that the documentary will entail more than just concert footage. "We'll be shooting both concerts," he said, "and also following Wham! as they explore China, and more interestingly I think, as the Chinese explore Wham!"

Lewis was asked to produce the documentary by Jaz Summers, who co-manages Wham! with Simon Napier-Bell. "The minute he said 'Wham! in China,'" remembered Lewis, "I thought this shouldn't be some ordinary pop music documentary where you just see the group milling backstage, a couple of travelog shots and that's it.

"It needed a filmmaker with vision who could actually make something out of what I think is a fascinating juxtaposition culturally. Wham! in China: It's like a new Cultural Revolution. So I thought of Lindsay Anderson, who's one of my favorite British directors."

Wham! was set to play only two dates in China: April 7 at the 15,000-seat People's Gymnasium in Peking, and April 10 at a hall in Canton.

"The Chinese must be uncertain what the audience reaction will be," Lewis said. "Certain cultural officials saw them perform in Tokyo and obviously enjoyed what they saw, but I don't think they were ready to commit to a full tour."

For one thing, Lewis suggested the Chinese might be intimidated by the size of Wham!'s entourage. "There are about 85 people in the party," he said, "between the band, crew, management and film crew. Since Chinese musicians don't normally have enormous amounts of amplification, the notion that two singers would have an entourage of 85 people must be a little unusual or disconcerting, to say the least."

The film crew consists of 25 cinematographers and technicians, who were to shoot the documentary in 35 millimeter. A 24-track mobile facility

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WHAM! CHINA TRIP

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ty was to be utilized to produce optimum sound quality.

Lewis first saw Wham! perform at the Beacon Theatre in New York before there was any discussion of the China trip. "I found them exhilarating in all the ways all great '60s pop music is fun and unpretentious," he said.

The Wham! piece is one of two pop documentaries that Lewis is currently working on. He's also directing a film about Julian Lennon, which was commissioned by Atlantic to showcase the young star.

"Sam Peckinpah [who directed the two Lennon videos which Lewis produced] was going to make the film," Lewis reported, "and then sadly died just after Christmas, so they've asked me to direct it. It will combine footage from his debut performances in San Antonio, as well as the rehearsals and all the preparations."

It's a busy time for Lewis, who also recently completed a sequel to "The Secret Policeman's Other Ball" entitled "Secret Policeman's Private Parts."

"I've never been more excited
