

by David Heuring

# Video Killed the Radio Star

Best Cinematography nominees for the 2002 MTV Video Music Awards

**M**usic videos have made an incalculable impact on the art of rendering moving images onto film since the birth of the genre during the early 1980s. It all began with the so-called "MTV look," which has been constantly evolving. Some 20 years later, music videos still provide fertile ground for experimentation by cinematographers who are charged with the challenging task of augmenting the artistic intentions of the composers, musicians and performers. The 2002 MTV Video Music Award for Best Cinematography went to cinematographer Brad Rushing for his work on the Moby clip "We Are All Made of Stars." The other nominees were Karsten "Crash" Gopinath, Pascal Lebegue, and John Perez.

The nominees were feted at a luncheon where Martin Coppen was the recipient of the 2002 Kodak Vision Lifetime Achievement Award in Cinematography from the Music Video Production Association (MVPA). The award is presented annually to a cinematographer who has made important and enduring contributions to advancing the art form. Kodak has been the sponsor since 1997.

"Cinematographers make huge artistic contributions to this art form," says Kathy Mazza, Kodak's Hollywood region manager of Commercials and Music Videos. "They have to interpret the music and render it as images that grab and hold the audiences every time the video airs. Our sponsorship of these activities is part of a commitment we have made to see that cinematographers are properly recognized as artists."

## Martin Coppen Kodak Vision Lifetime Achievement Award

**M**artin Coppen was born and raised in England. When he was 16, he set off for London to study graphic design and art. He subsequently worked at the Rainbow Theatre, where he learned to light live rock shows. Some of the cast and crew organized a group called Rainbow Productions, which went on the road with rock shows featuring such legendary performers as David Bowie and Paul McCartney. Coppen was initially a gaffer for videos directed by Russell Mulcahey, Bryan Grant, Steve Barron, who are all icons of the MTV revolution. He played a role in producing the first video aired on MTV—The Buggles performing "Video Killed the Radio Star."

Coppen migrated to the United States to work on a Genesis concert tour. Director Wayne Isham gave him an opportunity to shoot Metallica's *Enter Sandman*. Coppen

earned his first MTV Video Music Award nomination for that project. He subsequently compiled more than 500 cinematography music video credits and has earned five additional MTV Video Music Award nominations. Coppen took top honors for Marilyn Manson's *The Dope Show* in 1999. He is currently following a parallel career path in shooting cutting-edge music videos and commercials.

## Moby • "We are All Made of Stars" Cinematographer: Brad Rushing

**"W**e Are All Made of Stars" sets the musician Moby against a range of real Hollywood locations, including Grauman's Chinese Theater, Pink's Hot Dog Stand and Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame. The gritty locations are often recognizably reflected on the visor of a spacesuit worn by Moby. Cameo appearances are made in the clip by actors Thora Birch, Verne Troyer and

Corey Feldman, as well as rock musicians Dave Navarro and Tommy Lee. The video won the 2002 MTV Award for Best Cinematography.

Rushing is a native of Houston, Texas who brings a background in fine art to his work as a cinematographer. He began his career shooting independent features before



Brad Rushing



moving into commercials and music videos. His other recent video credits include "Without Me" by Eminem, "Motivation" by Sum 41, "Freeek!" by George Michael and "Cherry Lips (Go Baby Go)" by Garbage.

"My background in independent features taught me to work quickly," says Rushing. "The ability to improvise and adapt to any situation is invaluable in music video photography, where the emphasis is placed on fresh visuals. I often get my inspiration from sources other than videos or films. Some of my best ideas have come from observing nature, watching people, listening to music or simply letting my imagination wander. I believe you have to avoid getting bogged down in the logistics, because that's when you start limiting yourself."

The clip was shot in the Super 35 format. Many of the shots include medium speed camera moves that pan past and push into a scene. Rushing calls this technique "making a postcard or a portrait" of a scene. For night shots and interiors shots done on location, Rushing used Kodak Vision 500T film 5279 rated at 320 ASA, which he feels yields a more versatile negative. For day interiors and on sets, Rushing used Kodak Vision 200T film 5274. "It's good at capturing details in the shadows without being too low in contrast," he says.

One thing Rushing learned studying fine art, which remains a vital part of his philosophy, is the importance of making the first mark on the page. "It may not even matter what the mark is, especially if you are stuck for ideas," he says. "Once you're done, that mark is either going to work or not. If it doesn't work, you'll have an idea why not. Either way you've started, and given yourself the first rung on a ladder."

Rushing is also a musician and a science buff. "It's very satisfying how elements of music, like tempo, rhythm and crescendo, and sciences like math, chemistry and physics, all converge in the science and art of cinematography. That nexus is a place where I am very comfortable and extremely engaged, both creatively and intellectually," he says.

## Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott with Ludacris & Trina • "One Minute Man"

Cinematographer: Karsten "Crash" Gopinath

**K**arsten "Crash" Gopinath was raised in the New York area and started out in the motion picture business at age 19 as a grip. After working his way up to gaffer, he attended the American Film Institute and graduated in 1993. He has photographed dozens of commercials for national clients, including Target, Fanta and Fox Sports, in addition to hundreds of videos, many with director Dave Meyers.

"One Minute Man" features Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott in a variety of unusual and often surreal situations. In one portion of the clip, she is seen in a Salvador Dali-inspired room complete with melting clocks. In another, gravity seems to pull towards the camera, while Elliott floats in the foreground. In a third room, she takes off her own head while continuing to perform the song.

"We worked very closely with Billy B, who is an incredible makeup artist," says Gopinath. "He used a lot of shading and sculpting with different color tones on Missy's face. The art direction included lots of saturated colors, so in telecine we went a little further in that direction. We used a wide variety of effects including green screen composites to convey Missy's crazy persona."

Gopinath recorded the clip on Kodak Vision 200T film 5274. "It is my favorite stock," he says. "It has very tight grain, a fast speed, and I like the color rendition and contrast. I can use it to get a nice thick negative."

Gopinath says that many of the shots required layer after layer of elements that would be composited later. For the scene where Elliott removes her own head, the photographic elements included locked-off shots of Elliott with a green stocking over her head while she held a mannequin head built to emulate her own. In the final composite the head she is holding appears to be



Moby • "We are All Made of Stars"  
D.P.: Brad Rushing



For Moby's "We Are All Made of Stars," cinematographer Brad Rushing set the musician against a range of real Hollywood locations, including Grauman's Chinese Theater, Pink's Hot Dog Stand and Hollywood Boulevard's Walk of Fame. Many of the shots include medium camera moves that pan past and push into a scene, which Rushing calls "making a postcard or a portrait" of a scene.