

Moby • “We are All Made of Stars”

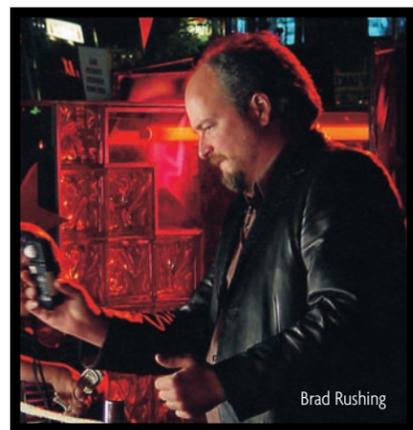
Brad Rushing

by Elina Shatkin

“People they come together, People they fall apart, No one can stop us now, Because we are all made of stars.”

When cinematographer and self-professed science buff Brad Rushing first heard this chorus from “We are All Made of Stars,” the new song from genre-bending artist Moby, it led him on a train of thought that stretched back to the periodic table of elements. “All the heavier elements in the universe are created in supernovas and I thought a pop song couldn’t be referring to something so far into the realm of theoretical science. But when I asked Moby what the lyrics were about, he said, ‘Quantum physics—among other things.’”

The corresponding music video features the slight, wide-eyed Moby dressed as an astronaut while trekking to some of Los Angeles’ more recognizable landmarks such as Pink’s hot dog stand, Ripley’s Believe It Or Not Museum and, of course, Hollywood Boulevard. On his journey he encounters a cast of characters in odd places: OJ Simpson crony Kato Kaelin in a bar, 1980s teen heartthrob Corey Feldman in a motel room, *Diff’rent Strokes* stars Todd Bridges and Gary Coleman in a fast



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food restaurant. The video also features producer Robert Evans, musician Dave Navarro, actress Thora Birch and the phenomenon that is Angelyne, a non-actress, non-model, non-singer whose primary talent is being herself.

“We are All Made of Stars” was shot on Super 35, a format that Kahn has been shooting since before Rushing began working with him. The camera crew relied on two Arri 435s and a set of Arri Ultra Primes with a standard Zeiss Super Speed set for additional lens choices. The bulk of the video, which included 27 locations, was shot over four-days and aside from some of the interiors, which were done on a soundstage, absolutely everything was shot on location. “That was us, blocking traffic and obstructing people on the road,” Rushing said. Three additional pick-up days were spent shooting various celebrities who couldn’t be filmed during the principal production schedule.

To keep up with the numerous locations and hectic schedule, Rushing relied on two flatbeds with duplicate packages, an idea suggested by his gaffer, Mark Lindsay and key grip, Mike Dronge. Each truck contained several LTM lights—one 18K Fresnel, one 12K PAR and two 6K PARs. In addition, each truck had a Kino package for interiors and eyelights that included one Kino Flo Wall of Light, one Image 80, two 4 x 4 foot banks and two 2 x 2 foot banks. There was also a small tungsten package with a 5K Senior and a 2K Baby Junior a modest grip package that included several mirror boards.

The beginning of the video features a shot of traffic moving along Hollywood Blvd. reflected in the gold visor of the astronaut’s helmet. To achieve this shot, the crew stood a double in the astronaut suit directly across from Mann’s Chinese Theater. Attached to the helmet was a golden, solar protector visor that was pulled down over the clear faceplate. Rushing then had to find the most dynamic angle while making sure the crew and camera were not reflected in the visor. To do this,

they stood the double on apple boxes, put the camera on baby legs at about chest level and used a 16mm lens. “We had to strip all the things off the top of the camera because we needed every inch to make that work,” said Rushing.

The shot was done at about 4 PM with the astronaut standing on the shaded south side of the street facing the theater that was on the north side and lit in full sun. The soft, toplight on the astronaut helped create an image where the focus is on the main compositional elements while the bright, direct light on the theater really makes it pop out in the visor reflection. “This was one of Joseph’s spur-of-the-moment strokes of genius,” said Rushing. “The shot was about the geometry and depth of the composition: the abstract, converging lines of the building, the stark up-angle on the astronaut and the reflection in the faceplate. We left the image to speak for itself.”

One of the trickiest aspects of the video was avoiding the reflection from the astronaut’s faceplate, which has an angle of reflection greater than 90 degrees from the center axis. Rushing always had to be aware of Moby’s face light not just in terms of reflection of the lights, but also reflections of crew people, equipment, etc. Rushing strove to make the lights look like an element of the composition, which meant positioning them so that they either weren’t reflected or looked like they belonged in the environment. “It was certainly not a glamorous job,” said Rushing, “but it was one of the very important jobs, keeping an eye on what was and wasn’t seen in that faceplate.”

One of Rushing’s tricks, honed from years working in independent feature films where gels are scarce, is combining unorthodox party gels and color correction gels to create composite colors that aren’t quite what they appear to be. Many of the interior scenes, contain red accents that show up on walls, in practicals or as a backlight. For these scenes, Rushing combined Fire gel—for the richness of its red—with Chocolate gel. “It warms it up, but it

warms it up with a brown. I think that’s one of the things that gives the color a particular depth.”

In a different scene with rocker Dave Navarro looking into a refrigerator, Rushing placed a 3/4 Full Plus Green over several Kinos to give the scene a green tint and added a bit of 1/2 CT Straw to warm it up. In the motel room scene that features Corey Feldman, Rushing relied on another gel combo. “One of the things I’ll sometimes do to warm things up is to take half each of CTO and CT Straw to make a whole. It’s just a little bit off and a little bit unique.”

For the lighting, Rushing relied on big, powerful lights—20Ks on the soundstage and 18K HMIs outside. He described his approach to the interiors, “We didn’t light the subjects with them so much as the environments. The way that we lit a lot of the stuff was to first light the environment and then light the subject. For the hotel room with Corey Feldman, we lit it as a powerful, dramatic room and then we put the people in and shaped the light to make them look good as well. For the exteriors, we focused more on lighting the subject first.”

With that particular scene, Rushing began by punching two 20Ks through the window at different angles so they were raking the back of the bed and playing on the side of Corey’s face. A 5K was placed on the opposite side to give him a rim light. The crew had some practicals that they played with but ultimately discarded. They did rig one 2 x 4 foot Kino bank over Corey’s head, “which worked great, especially when Corey looked up into it,” said Rushing. No additional light was bounced or reflected on the scene and the camera, equipped with a 50mm lens was placed about 12 feet away from Corey and dollied in until it was about 3 feet away.

Many of the shots feature controlled, medium speed camera moves that go from side to side or that push in from a wide shot of an entire scene to a close-up of a character—a technique that Rushing describes as making portraits or postcards of the scene. In these scenes, Rushing avoided extreme wide lenses, generally sticking to a 32mm or 50mm so that the close-up didn’t reveal an odd, unflattering angle.

For the scene with Thora Birch and a group of people in a motel room, Rushing wanted to give her a bright, but soft side light. Since the shot starts wide and pushes in on her face, he put a lamp on the table in front of her and craftily used it to both

motivate and hide the source: a couple of Mini Flos. “I had to be able to sneak something in that would be on a favorable angle for her face,” Rushing says.

For all the day exteriors and on all the sets, Rushing used Kodak 5274 (Vision 200T), which he shot at 200 outside (120 with an 85 filter) and 160 inside—adding a bit of density to the contrasty sets. Rushing chose 5274 in part, because of the way it telecinés. He also chose it for its grain structure and because “It’s good at capturing details in the shadows without being too low contrast.”

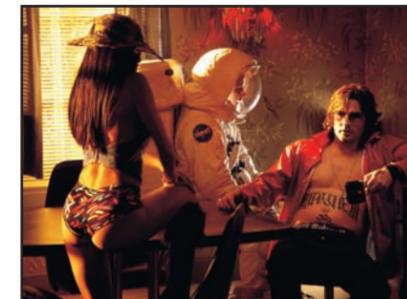
For all the night locations and location interiors, Rushing used Kodak 5279 (Vision 500T), which he generally rated at 320 because he believes that 5279 “yields a more versatile negative when it’s rated at 320. It is very complimentary to the way I work: lighting and shooting very fast and frequently with low light levels.” Rushing pushed the stock only once, when shooting inside the Frolic Room; he wanted to get good exposure on the exotic ceiling lights without having to replace the globes. “We were shooting so fast that we had very little time in each location and we had to use it wisely.” Trying to avoid a dead wall, Rushing did suggest that they add “something neon” to the rear wall of the Frolic Room so Greb and her team created several neon stars.

For one of the most interesting shots in the video—what appears to be a freeze-framed twirl around Moby as he’s suspended in mid-air—Rushing remains tight-lipped. Although it resembles the multicam technique that involves an array of still cameras fired at once or in sequence to capture a subject from multiple points of view, he didn’t use that technique. “The blatant truth is that I’m having so much fun hearing people speculate, I don’t want to give the game up just yet. Even crew people are wondering when we shot the elements and how we put that together,” said Rushing.

But Rushing isn’t shy about his collaboration with Kahn, whom he has known since his days in Texas in the late 1980s. Recalling that when he first heard Kahn describe the concept for “We Are All Made of Stars”—Moby is an astronaut in dirty Hollywood—a plethora of images popped up in his mind. “Joseph says a lot with a little and he does it very eloquently,” said Rushing. “A talented and informed director is so fundamentally important to me as a DP.” We each bring the best of our experience together, which makes for a powerful visual team.” ●



Moby • “We are All Made of Stars”
Director: Joseph Kahn



The video features Moby dressed as an astronaut while trekking to various Los Angeles’ landmarks and includes cameos from various stars such as actor Verne Troyer, actress Thora Birch, rockers Dave Navarro and Tommy Lee, and actor Corey Feldman.