

Short Takes

Panic! at the Disco frontman Brendon Urie emulates Frank Sinatra's 1960s-era swagger in the black-and-white music video for the song "Death of a Bachelor," which reunited cinematographer Eric Bader with co-directors Mel Soria and Brendan Walter.



Vintage Cool

By Matt Mulcahey

Based on the markers of post-millennium pop stardom, none of the individual elements of 1960s-era Frank Sinatra qualify as contemporarily cool: not the tux nor bowtie; not the corded microphone nor middle age. Yet there's a timeless swagger to Ol' Blue Eyes as he croons standards with those golden pipes. It's that bravado that Panic! at the Disco's new video "Death of a Bachelor" emulates, only with an added touch of what co-director Mel Soria calls "Brendon Urie flair."

Urie is Panic! at the Disco's frontman, and the Las Vegas-raised singer spends "Bachelor" belting out the new tune to an elegant yet empty ballroom captured in gorgeous black-and-white. The challenge for cinematographer Eric Bader was achieving Sinatra swagger on a less-than-Rat-Pack-level budget.

Though there are more avenues than ever before for musicians to share their work, the current economics of the music industry don't allow for the extravagant production outlays commonplace in the 1990s and 2000s. "I love the format of music videos because you have so much freedom, but the half-million dollar video is definitely going the way of the dodo," says Bader. Making music videos these days means working with limitations — like a single six-hour shooting day and lo-fi tools such as a DIY speed-rail jib, a doorway dolly and a \$100 plastic camera for inserts.

Bader and company had only three weeks to prep, shoot, edit and color the video before Panic! at the Disco's record label debuted "Death of a Bachelor" online on Christmas Eve. Meeting that tight deadline was made easier by the familiarity of the creative team.

Bader met Soria and colorist Sherwin Lau through mutual friends at their shared alma mater, Florida State University; Soria and co-director Brendan Walter are frequent collaborators, having previously joined forces on the MTV Video Music Award-winning "Uma Thurman" by Fall Out Boy; and Bader had teamed with both directors on the video for Panic! at the Disco's "This is Gospel (Piano Version)."

With Bader and the pair of co-directors based on opposite coasts, much of the prep work occurred via email and conference calls. That communication included the sharing of YouTube clips of 1960s-era Sinatra performing "Fly Me to the Moon" and "I've Got You Under My Skin."

"Those clips all kind of live and die in a medium shot, but they're captivating because Sinatra is such a charismatic performer," says Bader. "We'd all worked with Brendon Urie before and we knew the video could exist as just a showcase for his performance and still be something that was interesting to watch."

While the black-and-white photography — and Urie's corded microphone — pay homage to the "Sinatra at the Sands" vibe, Bader sought more than mimicry. "Those live Sinatra performances were our jumping-off point," he says. "We wanted to take that old crooner style and mix it with a more modern style, which is where the idea of heavy lens flares and dynamic camera moves came from."

After initially considering shooting the video at a venue that coincided with one of Panic! at the Disco's tour cities, the team instead selected the Monte Cristo Banquet Hall in Los Angeles. Typically rented out for weddings and corporate events, the hall already featured practical RGB LED lighting that could be adjusted via a small control panel integrated into the space. "The lighting was built more

Photos by Dan Zacharias and Zechariah Hall, courtesy of the filmmakers.



Top: Urie channels Ol' Blue Eyes in this frame grab. Middle, from left: Set lighting technician Drew VanderMale (on ladder), tour manager Zechariah Hall (under ladder), key grip Jeb Alderson (pushing dolly) and Bader capture the singer's performance. Bottom: Bader lines up a shot with the production's Red Epic MX camera.



for events than motion pictures," the cinematographer recalls. "There was a bit of flicker at every shutter angle. I ultimately settled on 144 degrees for the entire video, but there is still a small pulse visible in the lighting."

"I wanted to see which colors responded best to black-and-white, and I found a magenta hue that had a great silvery effect," Bader continues. "If you look at the behind-the-scenes photos in color, it's pretty hilarious because it's all tungsten lighting and then you have this pink looping the entire space. In color, the video is pretty hideous."

Recalls Soria, "We showed the location to somebody from the record label and they were worried. I had to tell them, 'You have to see it in black-and-white. It's not going to have these pink pastels.'"

Bader opted for his own Red Epic Mysterium-X as his main camera, recording in 5K anamorphic mode with 5:1 RedCode compression. He paired the Epic with a set of Kowa Prominar anamorphic lenses supplied by L.A.'s Radiant Images. Keeping his T-stop around a 5.6/8 to create the deep focus favored in the Rat Pack era, he worked almost exclusively with the 40mm and 100mm, with a handful of shots done on the 50mm.

The Kowas' only limitation came when trying to achieve tight close-ups — as the 100mm, for example, requires a minimum focus distance of approximately 5'. To compensate, Bader used Tiffen +1 and +2 diopters for those close-ups, during which gaffer Eric Clark pinged the lens with an LED



Top: The frontman sings in close-up. Middle: Bader frames a shot with a Digital Harinezumi 3 taped beneath the lens of the Epic, and with a turntable rigged in front of the cameras. Bottom: Bader operates the camera as best-boy grip Ray Chatman holds a bead board and gaffer Eric Clark (far right) adds a subtle pulse effect by waving his hand in front of a bounced Leko.



flashlight to add moving flares.

To light the banquet hall, Bader relied on the location's practical LEDs and chandeliers, two Skypans and "a whole lot of Lekos," the cinematographer explains. A Leko keyed the main-stage portion of Urie's performance, with set lighting technician Drew VanderMale pivoting the light from atop a ladder to simulate a roving spotlight. Five additional Lekos were placed on the floor of the stage behind Urie with matching fan-pattern gobos that kicked in during the video's chorus. Two more Lekos were situated high above the stage — one on each side — and blasted through the output of a pair of DF-50 Diffusion Hazers to create shafts of light.

"The space was 90-percent lit using Lekos," recalls Bader. "Our Skypans on the stage were modified so I could use the lights on house power and have them both on a single 2K Variac; the bulbs were removed and replaced with 1K Mole-Richardson Molettes that were actually Cardellini-clamped inside of the Skypans. If you're really savvy, you can definitely spot those Cardellinis in the video."

Creative rigging was also employed for a boom down from a shimmering chandelier as Urie approaches the stage at the video's outset. Without the budget for a proper jib, a Sony a7S with a Canon L-series 16-35mm (f2.8) zoom was placed on a Ronin gimbal and suspended from a "goalpost" pulley system made from speed rail and Mombo stands. Bader set the camera's ISO to 3,200 and aperture to f16 to ensure the desired focus. ➤



Top: Bader shoots as Urie sits with a drink. Bottom: Soria (back to camera) observes as 1st AC Matt Ryan (far left), Bader and Alderson (pushing dolly) get a shot of Urie performing on an elevated platform.

In addition to the “faux jib,” camera moves were accomplished with a Dana Dolly and a Matthews Doorway Dolly — either on track with skateboard wheels or directly on the venue’s floor. “We had a few takes where key grip Jeb Alderson pushed me just freewheeling on the smooth floors,” says Bader. “He has some real finesse with that thing, because we pulled off some great precision moves, and a doorway dolly isn’t the easiest thing to control.”

As an insert camera, Bader broke out his Digital Harinezumi 3, a low-resolution, bargain-priced Japanese camera he discovered while reading about *Spring Breakers* in

American Cinematographer (June '13). “It has a really strange look that is degraded, grainy and blown out, and that would be very hard to duplicate with a better camera,” says Bader, who used the Harinezumi’s “dirtiest” monochrome preset. “Since we had such a limited amount of time, I just taped it to the rails on the front of the [Epic] and let it roll during all of the takes.”

One short clip from the Harinezumi that made its way into the video actually reveals another of Bader’s lo-fi rigs — a record turntable with shards of jagged Plexiglas that were taped to an LP of Carl

Douglas’ “Kung Fu Fighting.” The turntable was placed in front of the camera for some close-ups, with the Plexi refracting light as it spun in front of the camera’s lens. “You can actually see the arm of the turntable in one of those Harinezumi shots,” Bader says with a laugh. “It’s a little peek behind the curtain.”

Trying to squeeze the most out of their six-hour window, Bader and his crew rolled until the final seconds of their allotted time. “Our location fee essentially tripled if we went beyond six hours,” Bader says. “We did one rehearsal with Brendon Urie, and then we never stopped shooting until our six hours were up. We were still shooting the last close-up with one single light when we were getting ushered out — just my gaffer Eric Clark waving a Leko over Brendon’s face.”

The music video’s digital grade was performed on a similarly tight schedule. Working out of his home studio in Las Cruces, N.M., colorist Sherwin Lau received a hard drive of footage on a Sunday and worked into the small hours of Monday morning to finish his grade. On the drive were the R3D camera originals; using editor Pete Martich’s locked cut in the Adobe Premiere project file, Lau exported an XML directly into Blackmagic Design’s DaVinci Resolve 12. His final deliverables were both a 1080p ProRes 4:2:2 HQ QuickTime and a more compressed H.264 file, per record-company request. Three days after his completion, the video debuted on YouTube.

“What they got on set and what you see as the [end product] are pretty close,” Lau says. “I did increase the contrast and bring out some of the [mid-tones], and then I had to match the Epic and a7S, which had a little bit of a green shift.” Lau’s final touch involved adding a 35mm “Ultra Fine” grain plate from Rgrain. “The overall look we were going for was classic, elegant and jazzy, and once I saw what that location looked like in black-and-white, it gave me a good idea of what I needed to do,” he says.

Adds Bader, “I’ve always loved black-and-white. You get to play so much more with contrast, and there’s a lot of forgiveness in hard lighting. It was actually so freeing on this shoot to not have a scrap of diffusion on set.”

To watch “Death of a Bachelor,” visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=R03cqGg40GU.