# Short Takes

## Shooting "Into Your Arms" at Ontario Airport

**by Douglas Bankston**

Traveling to the Ontario International Airport in California, *AC* recently watched director/cinematographer Aaron Platt's rapid-fire shooting of the music video for "Into Your Arms" by The Maine. Inside a new terminal, Platt was a blur of activity, moving around numerous extras to check on lighting, camera, talent and the assembly of a motion-control rig. Platt has shot videos for artists such as Coldplay, Asher Roth, Cassie and Jet, and as a director, he has conceptualized videos for Meg/Dia and Melody Gardot. When he directs, he does his own shooting. "Hiring a cinematographer on my directing projects is tricky, not because I don't want to stand down from the photographic throne, but rather because the speed at which I'm moving is insanely fast," he explains. "Shooting my own projects enables me to make everything look as gorgeous as possible as fast as possible."

Platt also was doing all he could to squeeze a complex high concept out of a low budget. The storyline is basic: a girl leaves a guy behind and rushes through the terminal to make her flight, while band members positioned here and there perform the song. But the video actually presents the travelers and airport personnel moving *backwards*. The trick up Platt's sleeve was to reverse the footage in post, meaning that in the final video, the girl runs backward through a crowd that's moving forward. "It's a simple concept that I tried to complicate by reversing the cliché a little," he says. "We discover her meeting someone by chance at the end.

"Airports are unique because so many people there are moving in and out of their lives, on their own personal journeys," Platt continues. "[Producer] Justin Cronkite and I initially thought we'd have to shoot in a studio instead of a real airport, but I aggressively pushed for a real location. I wanted the freedom to shoot in all directions, and I didn't want to be limited to close-ups or cheated reverses."

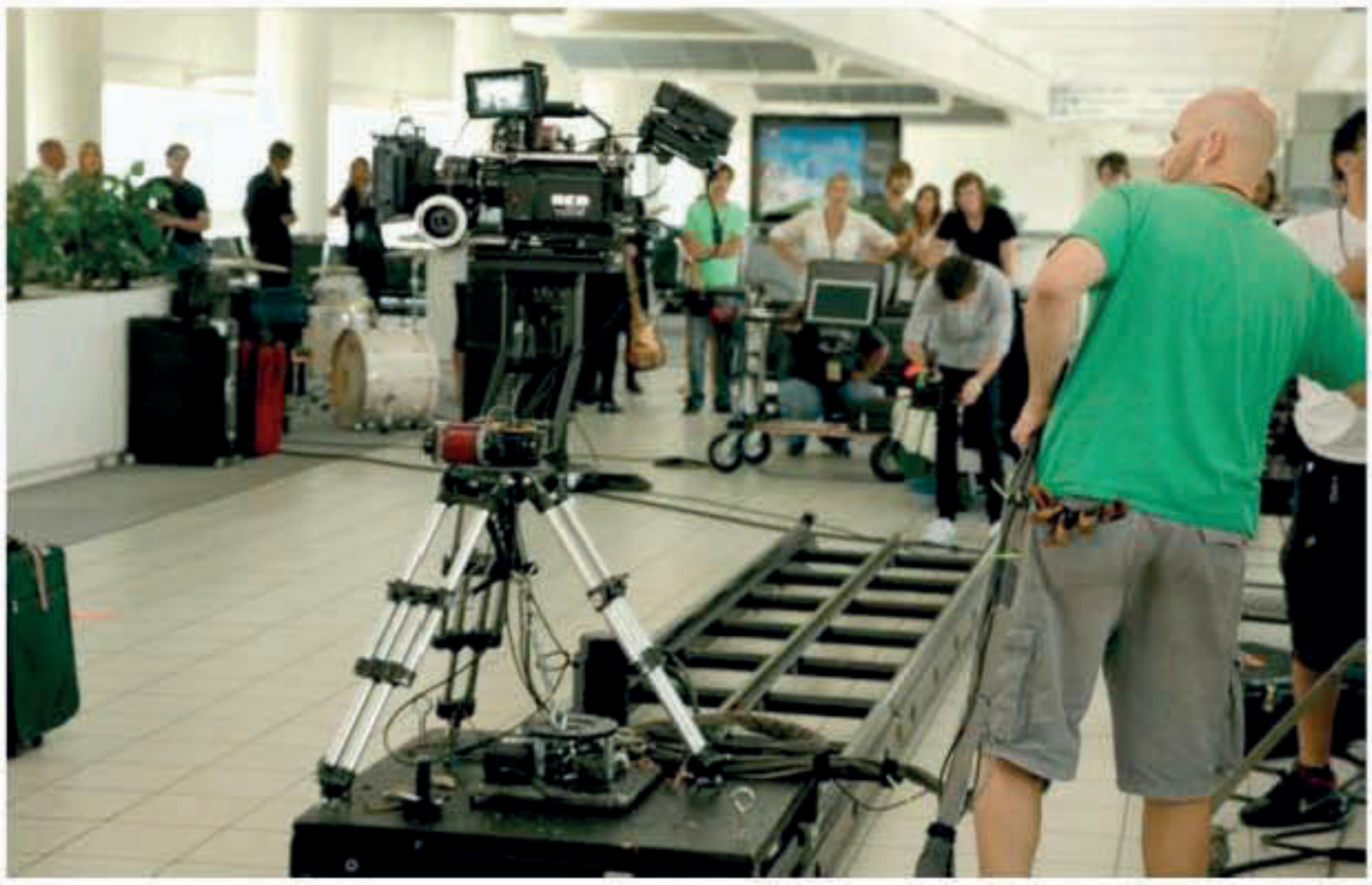
Securing the new Ontario terminal was a real coup. Sheira Reese Davies, the video's executive producer at Hello & Co., had connections with the airport authorities that stemmed from a previous project. "Justin was put through the wringer for location permitting," notes Platt. "We had to deal with the highest levels of national security and had to get special insurance. We really lucked out; we were approved only days before we shot."

With a Red One (from Alternative Rentals) mounted on a dolly, Platt also served as operator. "If you're shooting digital and you're on a tight budget, it's just the way to go," he says. "Because of its latitude, Super 16mm was a close contender for this shoot. Film might have held our highlights a little better."

The terminal offered its share of challenges: floor-to-ceiling windows looking out toward the runway on one side, all-white walls on

**The "Into Your Arms" music video features a girl running backwards through a crowded airport terminal. Selling the effect required three motion-control shots, each of which comprised four passes: one of the girl moving forward at 50 fps, one of background talent moving backward at 50 fps, one of the band members performing at 36 fps sync sound, and a final pass for window exposure.**

Photos by Benjamin Gallardo. Photos and frame grabs courtesy of Kelsey Street Entertainment.



**Above: The crew prepares for one of the motion-control shots inside a newly constructed terminal at California's Ontario Airport. The mo-co rig was supplied by Pacific Motion Control. Below: When not on the mo-co rig, director/cinematographer Aaron Platt (at camera) kept the Red One camera on a J.L. Fisher dolly.**

the other, a white ceiling with skylights, a reflective floor, and chrome fixtures and decorations throughout. "I don't know if any camera could quite catch the full detail and latitude of the location!" says Platt. "Unfortunately, we couldn't spend a whole day ND-ing 300 feet of windows. Instead of fighting it, I just let it go. The Red is incredible at holding detail, but this was the chip's worst nightmare: darker interior with hot midday sun outside. More bounced lights inside would have helped, but we were also shooting a lot of reflective surfaces. It was kind of a gaffer's nightmare, too: we had long takes across an open space of reflective surfaces, with no capability of rigging." (Randy Newman was the gaffer.)

Lights, predominantly HMIs and a fluorescent blanket light, were bounced off Griffolyn or the ceiling or were diffused heavily with frost and double scrims. "I typically push for extreme contrast and love to press the image in radical directions, but this was a strongly character-driven story, so I wanted to tone down the stylization," says Platt. He did, however, embrace the shiny surfaces in the terminal. "Any highlight or sheen allowed me to grab that ceiling of the [filmic] curve, along with the windows, to make a rich exposure out of a very simple backdrop."

Except for motion-control shots, the camera stayed on a J.L. Fisher dolly. "The goal was a cinematic piece of smooth moves and poetic moments in front of the camera," says Platt. "I didn't want any handheld because I didn't want to come out of 'the dream' and have it ever feel real. Staying on the dolly also meant I could roam around the space fast.

"We shot with Cooke S4 primes, my lenses of choice for digital shoots," he adds. "We were usually no wider than a 27mm, and I think my longest lens was a 75mm. I put a coral filter on the lens to bake a little 'love' into the scene. I always try to make [the captured image] look extremely close to the final."

The project was recorded at a variety of resolutions to onboard drives, including 3K for the motion-control material. "With the Red, you have to be aware of the focal-length changes that occur when you increase the frame rate," he notes. "Each time you up your slow motion, you have to lose resolution to be able to compensate for the extreme increase in material being gathered." Platt shot a lot of cutaways in 2K at 120 fps. All non-mo-co sync material was shot at 24 fps in 4K.

Crammed into one 12-hour day of production were three complex motion-control setups that used different frame rates for each pass. For example, at the controls of the remote head, Platt shot an 80'-long mo-co tracking shot at 50 fps of the girl hurrying through the terminal. "I did speed tests at the camera-rental house and locked in 50 fps as the highest I could go before having to drop to 2K resolution," he recalls. The actress was lit with an Arri 40/25 ArriSun through a 4'x4' frame of frost diffusion, a half double net, and half of a second frost diffusion. Another 40/25 ArriSun

**Platt checks his frame inside the terminal, which presented him with floor-to-ceiling windows, white walls and ceilings, a reflective floor and chrome adornments. "The Red is incredible at holding detail," he notes, "but this was the chip's worst nightmare."**

through double diffusion served as backlight. 12K ArriSuns were positioned along the track and bounced into the white ceiling. An overhead bounce deflected light from a skylight to illuminate a dark alcove in the ceiling at the end of the track.

With the camera moves recorded from the first pass, the second pass captured only background actors who were moving backwards, but the mo-co rig tracked in reverse. When these two shots were reversed in post, the girl ended up going backward while the background talent went forward. "Then we came to the part that made it essential to shoot this with mo-co: a third pass of the band sync-sound performing all around the terminal." The band pass was shot at 36 fps, and the only change in the lighting setup was the addition of a 4-bank Kino (with only three tubes lit) near the lead singer. A fourth, empty-set pass exposed just for the windows. (The mo-co rig, from Pacific Motion Control, was operated by Adam Francis, Garritt Hampton and Joshua Cushner.)

Postproduction was carried out in Los Angeles at Sunset Edit, which has a built-in Red One workflow. Howard Shur worked painstakingly on the mo-co compositing, and color-correction was done by Marc Steinberg. "We wanted to keep the post under one roof to ensure that all quality control would be consistent through the pipeline," says Platt. "We were trying to go natural with the coloring process and were mostly concerned with skin tone; we didn't want to do anything that would detract from the story. The material we colored the most was the opening shots in front of the sunset sky and the girl running down the runway. Those dramatic moments allowed us to go to more extremes." ■