Eye-Catching Ektachrome Look For Volumen Cero Clip

Tootsie

John Babl recently found a look that was right for a high-end music video for the band Volumen Cero by experimenting with a 16mm color positive film. Babl has a special passion for music videos, in part because he has worked as a professional bass player. "I have always felt that music and film are closely related," he says.

The Volumen Cero clip, titled **Tootsie**, will air on MTV-Spanish and other music video outlets. Babl, who directed and photographed the project, says that the initial idea was to emulate the style of old Beatles and Monkees footage of the bands playing in urban environments with saturated colors.

Babl chose Eastman Ektachrome 100D 7285 film, a color reversal stock that was previously only available in 35mm gauge.

"The colors are saturated, blacks are rich, and the contrast is striking and unusual," says the Miami-based filmmaker. "The sky is very blue and the greens are prominent as well. Today's modern reversal stocks are more forgiving. You just have to be careful to avoid overexposure."

Babl shot the video with his personal Aaton Super 16 camera using Zeiss prime lenses and no filtration. Some shots were done driving with single frame/time-lapse technique. He shot with producer friend and filmmaker Dawson Peden. They shot in available light.

"The sun was my key light," says Babl. "Instead of placing light on the actors, I placed my actors in the light, carefully choosing the time of day to shoot. Even though the latitude of the stock is limited compared to negative film, I was blown away by what it could handle in harsh Miami afternoon sunlight, with deep dark shadows."

Many of the shots circle the band as it plays in the middle of an empty intersection. Peden drove a Volkswagen microbus while Babl shot from a tripod out the open side door. Babl used a 9.5mm or a 50mm lens on the camera.

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"It was fun," says Babl. "We had to be creative with limited resources. I created some interesting effects by panning and fishing in the opposite direction that the bus was moving."

Some shots were handheld. "With tighter shots on the 50mm lens, depth of field is shallower and you can approximate the look of 35mm format."

Bono Labs processed the film, and John Palmisano of Manhattan Transfer in Miami oversaw the film-to-digital conversion, done with a daVinci 2K/Rascal telecine. Babl and Peden edited on a computer using Final Cut Pro.

"I've worked with Palmisano in many different projects, and he has also helped me fine-tune my light meter readings" he says. "You can lift the shadows and control overexposure to an extent with Power Windows, but for the most part the images came up very close to what we'd envisioned when we exposed the film."

Babl finds the mechanical, photochemical aspects of filmmaking fascinating. While working at CineVideoTech in Miami, he fashioned a handcrank/gearbox for a Mitchell R35 camera. It has a variable shutter, from 0-170 degrees. The "retro" camera offers a more modern approach to the original concept, with see-through-the lens and dual pin registration. "Nestor Garcia at Continental labs helped me test intermediate and print films with the R35 to emulate the look of early cinematography. The results were amazing! I've always been mechanical, and I find film's long and continuing history of innovation very interesting. I'm a fanatic about film," says Babl. ■