



Rivera delves into Border Town

**Rafael Rivera directed the music video
Border Town, a performance by Lisa Montes
from her debut album 'Wildfire.'**

**He collaborated with cinematographer Eric
Willis to create moving images that do justice
to her heartfelt song.**

"I listened to the song many times without any distractions," says Rivera. "I'd allow myself to imagine the situation presented without preconceived ideas and let it become a guideline for the visual design. For the mood of the video, I remember observing the unfolding events from a 'floating' perspective. This point of view was incorporated into the script and it's reflected on the dynamic camera perspective we used in the video."

The video was Rivera's first time at the helm. He says the local environment also played a role in determining the look of the video, which was shot in and around San Jose and Gilroy in Northern California. Finding a ranch and a substitute for a Mexican landscape were not hard to find in this part of the state. Rivera manipulated digital still images of these locations in Photoshop until the look was close to what he had in mind. He used the pictures to communicate his ideas to Willis.

The video focuses on two clear time points described in the song: the past and present. "For the past, I wanted worn-out colors and a reduced dimensionality—the characteristics that reflected the last moments of a failed relationship mentioned in the lyrics," says Rivera. "The present is very different, and I wanted it to visually reflect the rush of emotions felt by our character."

Rivera had a very limited budget and a small crew, which made his selection of equipment and the workflow very important. Early on, he decided to use a Steadicam Flyer for the scene in a cantina, and incorporate the use of Apple's Shake to achieve the lively look that he envisioned. He and Willis also decided that shooting Super 16mm film would allow them to fully capture the extreme lighting conditions that were called for by the script. Additionally, the format's affordability was within their budget.

"Rafael's vision was for two drastically different looks," says Willis. "The present day scenes were bright with a high level of color saturation and significant contrast. Flashbacks had low color saturation with low contrast. KODAK VISION2 50D 7201 film produces a warm rich color, great skin tones, and a wide contrast range, which totally fit the requirement for the present day look. For the past, we planned to reduce the color saturation and diminish the contrast in post."

"For the cantina scene we needed a fast stock with a lot of latitude. The scene began with a night exterior where only the existing lighting was available and transitioned into a location that was lit with tungsten lighting. We selected KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 film because it has extremely wide latitude in low light conditions. Testing showed that color could still be distinguished at five stops underexposed at T4."

Willis captured the images with an Aaton A-Minima and Canon Super16 11-165mm T2.5 zoom lens. He used only NDs and polarizing filters with no abnormal exposure or special processing applied to the negative. The negative was overexposed half a stop to increase the density during the telecine process.

The audience first sees Montes sing in a scene that takes place in the past at a ranch. Rivera and Willis placed the A-Minima on a jib arm mounted on a spider dolly that orbited around the singer, ending with the sun behind her and creating flaring in the lens, which made her hair glow.

"When we did the film transfer of this scene, we used Power Windows on the da Vinci to get the widest contrast range possible," explains Rivera. "The selected take was moved into Shake for camera stabilization and rotoscoping, and the image resized around 10 percent. The scene was finally color graded in Final Cut Studio to flatten the perceived depth by reducing the contrast range, the colors muted by desaturation, and the luminosity reduced for an older look. It's here that the characteristics of VISION2 really shine. Even after all these manipulations in post, the film's grain structure and sharpness delivered outstanding results."

Rivera believes the most important element to creating an artful video remains the storyline. "A good story allows for a high degree of creativity, imagination and vision," says Rivera. "It's my belief that audiences are very sophisticated, and I find it very exciting to venture into new methods of telling a story."

1 (L-R) Director Rafael Rivera and DP Eric Willis set up a scene on location in Northern California for the music video *Border Town*.

2 (L-R) Director Rafael Rivera and Steadicam operator Glen David Miller prepare to shoot a cantina scene inside a restaurant in Northern California. (All photos courtesy of Don Fito Productions)