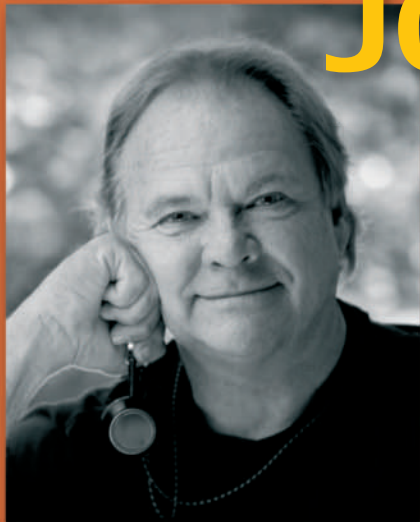


How Nick McLean renders Joey on film

New sit com starring Matt LeBlanc



Right: Matt LeBlanc in a scene from *Joey* shot by Cinematographer Nick McLean above.

The pilot episode of **Joey** begins with a shot of an airplane in flight. It cuts to a passenger in a taxi telling the driver why he has moved to Hollywood to pursue his acting career. The driver asks why he's in Dallas if his destination is

Hollywood? Whoops! Forgot about that layover in Dallas? That's how the television audience is re-introduced to Joey Tribbiani, who captured their hearts in the TV series **Friends**.

"Joey is beginning a new chapter in his life," says Nick McLean, Sr., who earned three consecutive Emmy nominations for photographing **Friends**. "He is leaving New York hoping to find a place in the Hollywood film industry. The writers and producers wanted to remind the audience that Joey is kind of a scatterbrained character."

The 30-minute situation comedy starring Matt LeBlanc airs weekly on the NBC Television network. The other characters are new, including Jennifer Coolidge as his agent and Drea de Matteo as his sister. The co-executive producer is Kevin Bright, whom McLean worked with on **Friends**.

"Kevin is a movie-oriented producer who gives us the freedom to create cinematic images, because he believes it helps the audience respond to the characters and story," McLean says. "We keyed some dramatic scenes on **Friends** with just four or five footcandles of front light and 15 footcandles in the background. Sometimes we used a couple of small, handheld lamps to put a little soft fill light on faces."

Joey is produced in front of a live audience on a soundstage at Warner Bros. studio in Hollywood. McLean generally works with four 35mm Panaflex Gold cameras on dollies. Lighting is pre-set with the lamps on dimmers and linked to an AC powered control console. The two middle cameras cover wide-angle master shots with Primo 20-120mm zoom lenses. The other cameras carry longer 25-250mm zoom lenses to record medium and close-ups shots of characters talking and responding to dialogue.

"I use a great 500-speed film (Kodak Vision 500T 5279) which pretty much sees images the way our eyes do," McLean says. "There is a mystique about film that is unique. The range of contrast and feeling of depth is a big part of how we create looks that give the audience a sense of time and place and how we communicate the mood of each scene."

McLean prefers tracking with the cameras on dollies rather than pedestals, because he believes that nuances in movement, focus and framing are vital components of the visual grammar. He notes that the dimmer control console enables him to choreograph lighting with camera movement and perspective.

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"We watch rehearsals, block scenes and pre-set our lighting for camera angles and positions," he says. "When you're shooting with multiple cameras, front light for one is backlight for another. I can make quick adjustments by telling the dimmer board operator to bring a lamp up or down 10 percent while we're shooting."

The Cinematographer adds dabs of fill light to faces with one or two handheld lamps. He sometimes handles one of the lamps himself, usually to soften the light on a character's face. The lamps are also used to simulate light from windows, TV screens and fireplaces reflecting on people or objects. A dimmer control on the handheld lamps enables McLean to control the density of the fill light.

"It's a situation comedy with all of the lights overhead, except for the few handheld lamps, but we try to make it look as edgy as possible," he says.

The opening taxi scene in the pilot episode was filmed on a stage in front of a green screen. The background establishing that the taxi was moving through traffic in Dallas was digitally composited with the foreground footage at Modern VideoFilm in Burbank, the same post-production facility where the film is timed for continuity.

Green screen shots are used in various episodes to put Joey and other characters in locations that don't have standing sets. McLean says the producers and writers prefer shooting those scenes on the stage, because they want the response of the audience. ■

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