

2004 MTV Video Music Award Best Cinematography Nominees

MTV recognized the best music videos of the past year at their annual Video Music Awards. Joaquin Baca-Asay won the Best Cinematography category for his work on Jay-Z's **99 Problems**. Baca-Asay's fellow nominees in the category were Jeff Cronenweth, ASC, for both No Doubt's **It's My Life** and Christina Aguilera's **The Voice Within**; James Hawkinson for Beyonce's **Naughty Girl**; and Shawn Kim for the Yeah Yeah Yeah's **Maps**.

Jay-Z's video **99**

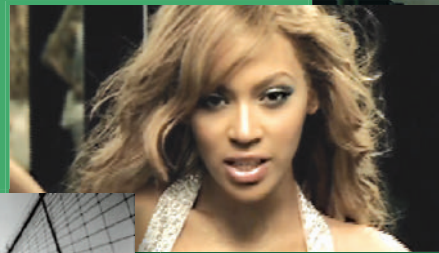
Problems was directed by Mark Romanek. The controversial video features everything from naked men in prison to pit bulls fighting, and ends with the popular rapper staging his own death. Baca-Asay had previously collaborated with Romanek on ESPN and Saturn spots.

"Mark knew he wanted to shoot **99 Problems** in black-and-white," says Baca-Asay. "We looked at a lot of black-and-white still photography featuring black culture. I played with filters during a test to see what I could do to enhance black skin tones before we settled on the look. Mark also wanted a lot of energy in the camerawork."

Baca-Asay shot the entire video with a handheld camera and an 18mm lens in Brooklyn where Jay-Z grew up.



JAY-Z: PHOTO COURTESY OF ANONYMOUS CONTINENTAL-HELA RECORDS



BEYONCE: PHOTO COURTESY OF FM ROCKS/MUSIC WORLD MUSIC/COLUMBIA RECORDS

Voice Within. It was shot in an abandoned theater and out onto the street in downtown Los Angeles.

"It was supposed to be a soft, simple approach to a ballad, with the idea being not to take away from the sheer beauty and grace of the song," explains Cronenweth. "So, we decided on a single, uninterrupted take. I have always been a fan of the single take, although it severely complicates my job, since the singer and song must hold up to the task. Christina carried it off beautifully, and perhaps better than anyone prior to her."

Hawkinson was nominated for a VMA in 2001 for Missy Elliot's **Get Ur Freak On**. He had previously collaborated with director Jake Nava before teaming up for this year's nominated video **Naughty Girl**. The premise for the video is that Beyonce is a nightclub performer, which is visually articulated with a variety of looks in shots representing various performances.

Hawkinson chose Kodak Vision 500T 5279 film for the shoot, which was filmed at the American Legion Hall in Los Angeles.

"The Director really wanted a 1930s musical feel—very art deco," says Hawkinson. "The art direction, choreography, makeup, costume were all inspired by that era. I had to do a lot of lighting cues to facilitate the different environments. Everything had to be well planned. It was theatrical, very much like a Broadway show."

Kodak held a lunch in Los Angeles to honor the four cinematographers nominated for VMAs, presenting each with a kaleidoscope.

"Cinematographers who create images for music videos are a cipher to most people," says Kodak's Kathy Mazza. "They are responsible for interpreting the meaning of music, and for interpreting performances with moving images that evoke emotional responses. It is a daunting task, which requires a collaborative spirit, unflagging determination, innate talent and the ability to master a constantly evolving language." ■

"I was always moving, running in and out while Jay-Z was performing," he says. "We wanted it to feel like a documentary where everything you see is real. We did only minimal lighting. We used practicals whenever we could. We didn't want to manufacture art. We wanted to keep it as it was, with the neighborhood realities and textures."

Cronenweth is no stranger to the VMAs having earned the MTV Video Music Award in 2000 for Macy Gray's **Do Something**. He was also previously nominated in 1997 for Eels' **Novocaine for the Soul** and Nine Inch Nails' video **The Perfect Drug**.

David LaChapelle, with whom Cronenweth has collaborated on four earlier projects, directed the No Doubt video. It was filmed at The Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

"The concept was slightly morbid," says Cronenweth, who shot two videos with No Doubt for an earlier album. "Since (vocalist) Gwen (Stefani) plays a sort of femme fatale/black widow, we arrived at a contemporary film noir style. We used saturated sets and wardrobe, and I took a traditional 1950s style thriller approach. I used hard light, a longer lens, and in-camera diffusion, which was offset with handheld techniques and other camera movement that you would not have seen in most noir movies. That gave the video a more contemporary feeling."

LaChapelle also directed Christina Aguilera's video for **The**

Far Right: Scene from No Doubt's *It's My Life* music video shot by 2004 MTV Video Music Awards for Cinematography nominee Jeff Cronenweth, ASC.

Middle: Scene from Beyonce's *Naughty Girl* music video shot by 2004 MTV Video Music Awards for Cinematography nominee James Hawkinson.

Right: Scene from Jay-Z's *99 Problems* music video shot by the 2004 MTV Video Music Awards for Cinematography winner Joaquin Baca-Asay.

Below: (L to R) Kodak's Curt Cressman, Cinematographer James Hawkinson (*Naughty Girl* by Beyonce), and Kodak's Kathy Mazza at a Kodak-hosted lunch in honor of the cinematography nominees for this year's MTV Video Music Awards in Beverly Hills on August 23.



NO DOUBT: PHOTO COURTESY OF HSI PRODUCTIONS/INTERSCOPE RECORDS

PHOTO BY: NADA GRAHAM, 2004