



A&M's Martin Kirkup

“The marriage between visuals and music is a natural progression that’s developing every day . . .”

A&M sets record straight on video

by Iain Blair

Currently riding high in the charts with hit albums by the likes of The Police, Bryan Adams, The Human League, Jeffrey Osborne and Sergio Mendes, A&M Records has long been considered one of the most innovative artist-oriented labels. The company is also responsible for some of the most compelling videos currently on screen. Since it completely revamped the famous Chaplin Soundstage a couple of years back, the site has been host to such classic A&M shoots as Kim Carnes' "Betty Davis Eyes," Billy Joel's "Allentown" and "Every Breath You Take," the current worldwide number one by The Police.

The video operation is run by Martin Kirkup, an affable Englishman who first joined A&M in 1975, and who is now vice president of Artist Development with responsibilities for all video production as well as touring, personal appearances and marketing concepts. "For the last three years I've been involved in distribution and production of live concert specials," he explains. "I executive-produced The Squeeze special shot live at The Country Club in L.A. for MTV, as well as The Split Enz special shot in Toronto last year. Now, since taking over the whole department in May, I also coordinate and act as a liaison between the artist and manager and the video production team. This entails helping select the right director, working on the initial concept—and nearly all videos are conceptual now—and establishing a realis-

tic budget. It's also very important to maintain deadlines."

Kirkup aims at keeping a budget somewhere between "\$20,000 and \$40,000. I'm really into fresh talent: creative people who can keep the budget down and make \$25,000 look like \$50,000 — and it can be done, believe me! For instance, I recently hired two ex-USC film graduates, whose company is called High Five Productions, after seeing some of their work. They'd had a \$15,000 budget and made it look like \$75,000. I was so impressed with their style, etc., that I took them to meet Jeffrey Osborne. They hit it off; we worked on the concept, came up with an agreed idea and budget, and then shot it in downtown L.A. to get an 'urban' look. It should be out on MTV in late August.

"We also just finished shooting a new video of Oingo Boingo's latest single called "Nothing Bad Ever Happens To Me." Because of the song's subject matter, it demanded a fairly humorous treatment, along with an unsettling feeling as well, so it needed the right sort of director to capture all that. I think the pairing of video director and artist is an extremely important part of the overall process." In the end, Kirkup and the band chose Frank Delia, the director responsible for the highly acclaimed videos of "Mexican Radio" by Wall of Voodoo and "Psychotherapy" by The Ramones.

According to Kirkup, A&M is also gearing up to shoot their first heavy metal video for Y&T. "We start shooting some time around the end of August,



and the clip will be directed by Michael Miner," he adds. "I saw the work he'd done with Nightranger, another heavy metal outfit, and I really like his approach and style. In fact, shooting heavy metal acts is difficult because it's fairly limiting and you usually need a lot of special effects. I particularly liked Miner's combination of live performance shots and special effects, so we had several storyboard meetings, hammered out the ideas, and came up with a concept everyone liked. Other upcoming projects include a video with The Payolas to be shot by F.F. Productions, and a shoot with D-Day which is about to be confirmed."

Kirkup stresses there's no such thing as a "typical budget" on any of these projects. "It all depends on the artist and the requirements. Obviously, shooting The Police is a slightly different deal from shooting a brand new act." On a budget of around \$35,000, Kirkup broke down a recent project as follows: \$2,000 for production staff, including director, producers, writer, cinematographer and production designer; \$2,500 for operating staff, including production manager, production coordinator, gaffer, key grip, electrician, sound man and special effects if necessary; \$2,000 for talent such as extras and dancers; \$4,000 for sets and costumes; \$5,000 for equipment; \$5,000 for location and rentals; \$5,000 for stock and lab costs; \$7,000 for post production and editing; \$1,000 for insurance and transportation.

At A&M, all the video budgets come out of a special video allocation which is administered by the Artist Development department. "We then decide what projects we will shoot, and how much to spend on each one," explains Kirkup. "For instance, we just released eight records at the beginning of August, and every one of them has a video to go with it. But only three have tours, whereas in the past there were far more tours and a fewer number of videos. This change of emphasis in the tools an artist uses to gain exposure is also reflected increasingly in contracts today, so that many now specify an allotment for a video project to accompany a record rather than tour support."

Kirkup goes on to stress, "Not every artist gets a video, though. Some of the major considerations in making that decision are: what sort of video can we make? Is there a real need for it? Will it be strong enough? We also look at the overall use for the video, including the international market as well as the domestic market, because A&M is an international label [distributed by CBS abroad and by RCA in the U.S.].

So, not every artist automatically gets a video just because there's a new record out."

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A&M's Chaplin Soundstage is run separately as a very successful business and is the premier state-of-the-art facility in Hollywood. "I use it whenever I can," says Kirkup, "but it's so popular that we often find it hard to even get time for our own acts there!

"This year alone, acts like The Tubes, Barry Manilow, The Police, Eddy Jobson, Kansas and Joni Mitchell have used it, because they love the stage," agrees Wayne Isham, stage manager. "And there are projects they can do here that just can't be done any-

where else. For instance, we have a direct patch to Studio D, one of our four main 48 track studios here on the lot. It has a 48 track customized Trident board with computer assist, so artists can shoot their video and record live simultaneously. Joni Mitchell recorded her live video of "Chinese Cafe" and three other tracks here using that setup, and we also did the Spirit reunion album, recording it live digitally and shooting the video." Amongst many other projects, the Soundstage has also been responsible for two live broadcasts to Japan featuring The Brothers Johnson and Ray Parker, and a marathon live recording and taping session of 56 bands over a six day period for a show called "Rocky Road."

Kirkup says that the future is "obviously extremely exciting for video, if somewhat unclear. The marriage between visuals and music is a natural progression that's developing every day, and the video clip is most definitely here to stay, although it's something of a hybrid art form right now. I think that MTV and all the new music programming is the most interesting and exciting outlet the music business has had in five years, and the potential is enormous." ■

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