
Waitin' All Day For Sunday Night

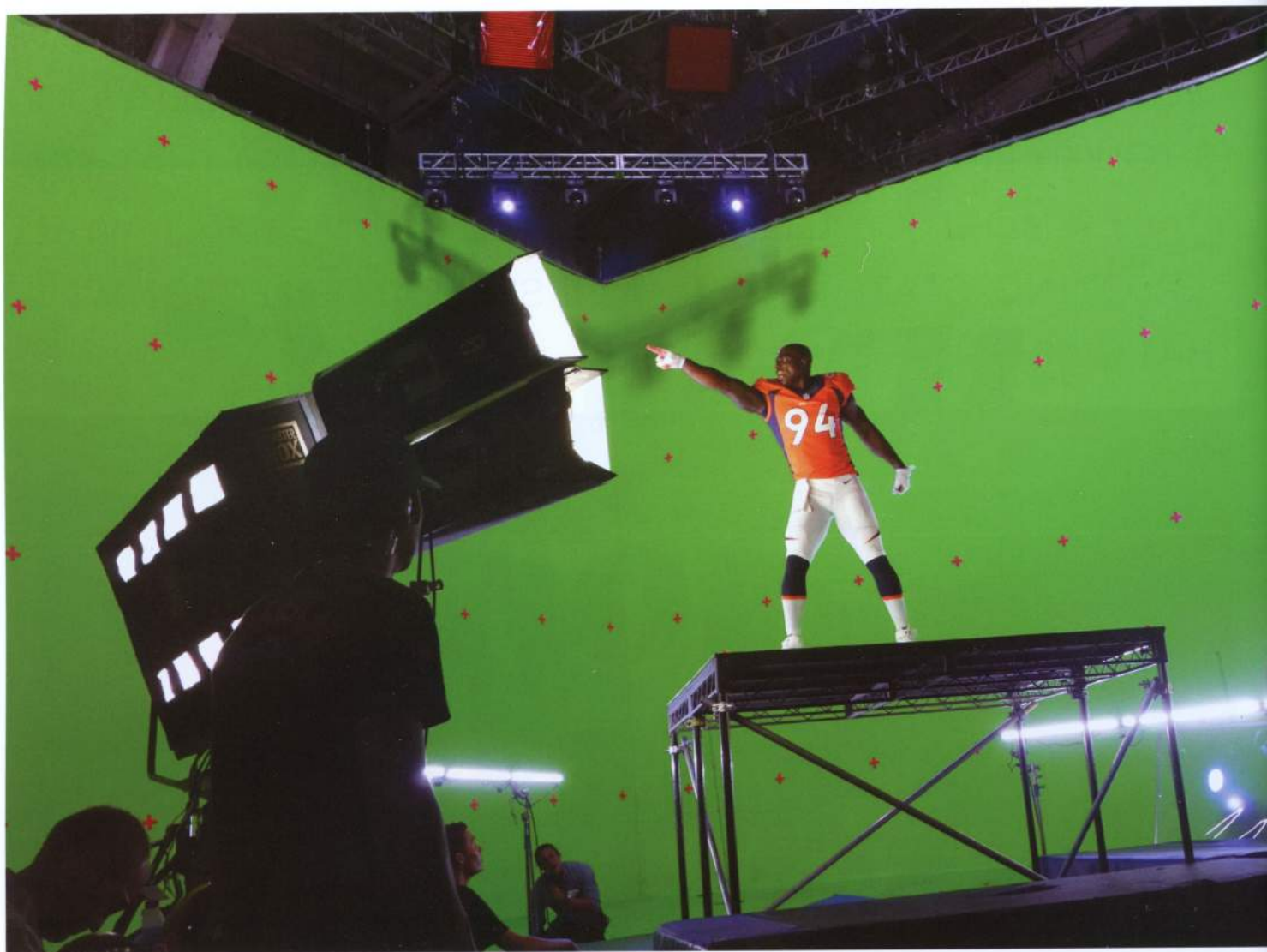
TWO SEQUENCES, THREE DAYS, AND ONE SOLID WORKFLOW PUSH DP CHUCK
OZEAS AND HIS GUILD CAMERA TEAM OVER THE GOAL LINE FOR THE NEW
OPENING SEGMENT OF NBC'S MONSTER HIT *SUNDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL*

by MARGOT CARMICHAEL LESTER / Photos courtesy of PAUL DRINKWATER/NBC



SHOOTING ONE SPOT IN THREE DAYS WITH A VARIETY OF NFL STARS AND SINGING SENSATION CARRIE UNDERWOOD IS TOUGH ENOUGH. PRODUCING TWO SPOTS IN THAT TIME FRAME? MORE CHALLENGING STILL. DOING THAT WHILE DEPLOYING STATE-OF-THE-ART SPECIAL EFFECTS? WELL, THAT'S A MIGHTY TALL ORDER.





But Guild shooter Chuck Ozeas took the assignment in stride. The commercial DP veteran (BMW, Nike, Victoria's Secret), says he "grew up" shooting hundreds of music videos, including staged concerts like *Avril Lavigne: The Best Damn Tour*, *Good Charlotte in Japan*, and *Dave Matthews: The Gorge*.

Ozeas teamed with director Tripp Dixon to create a new opening sequence for NBC's *Sunday Night Football* broadcast and the opening for its much-anticipated Super Bowl 49 broadcast, in February 2015. The pair had previously shot the 2013-14 SNF opening that also featured Underwood in a performance environment. And as Dixon notes: "Beyond the high level of commitment and preparation Chuck brings to a project, I value the level of trust and visual shorthand we've developed over the years."

That's a good thing, because Ozeas and Dixon were playing in the "Super Bowl" of live content. For four consecutive fall TV seasons, SNF has been the number-one show in primetime, and for six seasons in a row it has won the coveted 18-49 male and female demographics. It's been the top-ranked show for the last two years in the entire September to May ratings period! And last year's Super Bowl? It drew 111.5 million viewers. Hall of Fame numbers by any yardstick.

"Tripp and I wanted the open to feel like a real con-

cert in a real environment," Ozeas shares. "Normally I would want to shoot the concert elements like a live event, with 10 cameras or more. But because nearly every concert shot involved comping with green screen elements, our framings and timings had to be precise."

Underwood was shot on a live stage, while NFL stars like Colin Kaepernick, Brandon Marshall, Clay Matthews and Russell Wilson were shot against a green screen. Ozeas says that presented numerous challenges, since there are many times in the final cut when they are all on stage "together."

"It was incredibly important to organize the many aspects of visual effects, production design, lighting design and the crew so we could shoot everything within the tight time frame," he adds.

Pre-Game

So, how'd they do it?

Before the shoot, Dixon and Ozeas held several conference calls with Andre Montambeault from Rodeo FX in Montreal and Haley Geffen and the creative team at content creation house Bodega to talk through every shot, determine the elements required and how best to execute them.

“Nearly every concert shot involved comping with green screen elements, so our framings and timings had to be precise.”

{ DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY CHUCK OZEAS }



L to R: DP Chuck Ozeas, Key Grip Sean Crowl, and Gaffer Chris Conway in front of ARRI ALEXA on Super Technocrane, with 19-inch Cinema Series Litepanels Ringlite.



“Instead of just covering the stage like you would during a music video – with wides, mediums and tights – we had to be very specific with what framings we needed for each line,” Dixon explains. “Elements like multiple players in a single scene, the large LED ‘coils’ for them to stand in, an LED upstage louvered curtain and BG cityscapes would not exist in camera.”

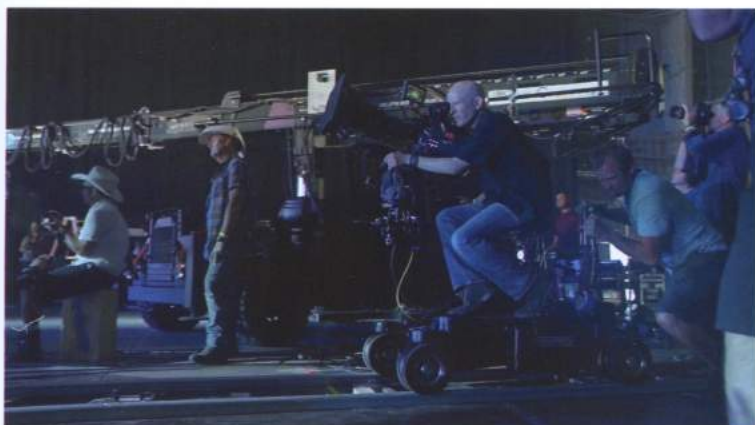
So, Ozeas and Dixon worked closely with Geffen to create a full animatic of the 1:40 open (with exact timings for every element), which they used as shooting boards. “We stuck very closely to it in the cut, as each shot was serving a particular purpose and had a specific timing,” Ozeas says.

Rodeo FX then generated a detailed previz. Lighting Director Benoit Richard contributed his program files to the previz, and Montambeault designed the LUTs to meet NBC’s strict color policies. The scrupulous previz was critical to streamlining workflow, from renting gear to getting approvals from the network. “It was key to fulfilling our coverage strategy on an ambitious shoot schedule,” Dixon adds. “It was great working with Bodega on production and Rodeo for VFX, two very talented and collaborative teams who helped us blur the lines between live action and visual effects.”



“We attacked it surgically, only shooting lyrics we needed from the positions dictated by the [pre-vis] animatic.” {CHUCK OZEAS}





Chuck Ozeas left with director Tripp Dixon



Chuck Ozeas left with Dolly Grip John Mang

Game Day

The three-day production period required fast and reliable gear sourcing. “Camtec in Burbank has been my house for nearly 15 years,” Ozeas offers. “We’ve established a working relationship so that we both know what to expect. It’s important to me to know that the equipment will be in perfect working order and updated with current software; otherwise, problems can arise during shooting or transcoding. With Camtec, it always is.”

Richard was also able to negotiate the acquisition of three brand-new Robe moving light fixtures. “They literally came straight from the factory in Czechoslovakia,” Ozeas laughs. “They cleared customs the day before being installed on set.”

Dixon credits AD Philip Tuck with translating a linear narrative into a manageable coverage strategy. The team created a shooting order for each day, leap-frogging three ALEXA XTs to be ready for the next angle up. “We attacked it surgically, only shooting lyrics we needed from the positions dictated by the animatic,” Ozeas continues. “Shooting it this way kept Carrie fresh. She is amazing, and she was able to turn on her performance energy each time we rolled camera.”

But even the best-designed workflow won’t flow without clear communication. So, Ozeas used the animatic to show each department what was needed for every shot. First AC Dennis Lynch handled most of the crew communication.

“When working on a project of this complexity, the most important components are information and organization,” Lynch describes. “I try to shadow Chuck and pass information to the rest of the department via walkie. I also try, as much as possible, to field camera-related questions so Chuck doesn’t have 10 people asking him questions at the same time. No matter how much planning ahead you do, there are always last-minute changes. As long as the flow of information continues, adjustments are easily made.”

Richard and Ozeas collaborated on set, too. Stage lights were programmed, motion-controlled and triggered by playback of the pre-recorded song. And there were several times the DP and LD had to make changes to the lighting design to allow for the placement of objects created in VFX. “Benoit is incredibly fast on the board, so we could come up with creative solutions on the fly,” Ozeas notes.

He gives the example of adding “realistic touches” to an element that might feel too produced or effects-heavy — like lighting Underwood. “I know from shooting Carrie many times in the past that she can handle a bit of hard light from a follow-spot, and that this approach would make the performance footage feel all the more like a live event,” Ozeas adds. “For close-ups, I added two Monster Boxes — each one is an eight-by-four-foot soft box, created by my gaffer Chris Conway — over camera, and built in a circle of four-foot Mac Tech tubes into the stage for fill.”

If Ozeas lensed up a shot that looked more dramatic with a different lens or angle than previously discussed, “Andre was incredibly flexible since he knew he had the ability in VFX to change the animations to match.”



Post-Game

The compressed time frame of the SNF shoot demanded plenty of on-set collaboration with Digital Imaging Technician Zakaree Sandberg, as well as with post personnel.

"With multiple cameras rolling nonstop, creating massive amounts of raw data, it's important to establish a working routine for the ACs and DITs to work together to assure that everything goes smoothly and that all footage is accounted for," Ozeas describes.

Sandberg says his biggest challenge was the amount of data captured using ARRIRAW. "The two main cameras switched between 24 frames per second and high-speed work; the third camera shot 90 frames per second on the green screen stage. And there was no on-set transcoding," he explains. "It came down to backing up the Arriraw files and sending off to post at the end of the job. For this I use my own cart running Pomfort Silverstack, and drop

the files to the production master drive, the editorial drive, and my own 24-TB Raid. I also had a Codex Vault system working for the third camera."

Montambeault was also on set to address color management issues and VFX. "A broadcaster like NBC has very strict color policies and signal specifications," he reveals. "So we had to make sure the color pipeline was in sync with those demands. We kept the 16-bit EXR signal as untouched as possible throughout pipeline. That way, we were able to have all the info on the image to play with."

The VFX supervisor pulled down each take and worked hand in hand with the editor. "That ended up making the plate-ingesting stage flow a little bit smoother," says Jordan Soles, Rodeo's Chief Technology Officer and the sequence's Executive Producer. "Andre was able to get to near-perfect color grade a lot quicker than when working

disparately across different shots and sequences and managing the look.”

In fact, Soles describes the VFX workflow as similar to that of a feature, albeit in a much more compressed time-frame. “We did all our animation and spaced it out with the color baked into it, rendered it and handed off to Flame with more flexibility to manage colors and tweak even more,” Soles adds. “These are efficiencies we’ve used often in feature work that ended up being useful for the commercial team. Baking it out as Alembic data made it render a lot more efficiently and kept render time and files as low as possible without affecting the overall picture.”

As noted, a second version of the sequence was produced for the Super Bowl, where the concert stage will be “placed” into Phoenix Stadium and play during the broadcast as if it were happening live.

Ozeas says he wanted to “differentiate the camera style” for the Super Bowl version.

“Using an ultra-wide radius track built by Key Grip Sean Crowell, I created shots that circled around Carrie, first in front of the stage and then from behind,” he explains. “As the camera moves behind Carrie, Phoenix Stadium should turn into an interesting background as it rotates around her. I’m really looking forward to seeing what post does with these shots.”

Producing two high-tech spots to a network’s exact-

ing standards was not unlike an NFL franchise having to prepare and execute their Sunday game plan – the shoot required teamwork and collaboration from end to end. “As essential as managing workflow is, I think the most gratifying aspect of this project was less about a specific technique or visual effect,” Dixon concludes. “The best part of the open for me was how each key member of the team, from DP to VFX, elevated the idea during the process.”

Like any good sideline leader, Ozeas credits his peers and colleagues on the field. “Just like a good coach, the job of a DP is to put together the best team possible,” he states. “You want to create a winning game plan and bring out the best in each of the players. I like to encourage everyone to contribute their creative ideas on set, and I think everyone brought their ‘A’ games for this one.”

CREW LIST > *NFL Sunday Night Football*

Dir. of Photography: Chuck Ozeas

Assistants: Dennis Lynch, Chris Slany, Penny Sprague, Jay Hardie, Ben Perry

Steadicam Operator: Andrew Mitchell

Digital Imaging Tech: Zak Sandberg

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