



Yves Bélanger csc
Gets Classic in Brooklyn

Maya Bankovic: *The Rainbow Kid*
Daniel Villeneuve csc: *Incendo* TV Movie

Maya Bankovic
Chases Gold in *The Rainbow Kid*



Bankovic with writer-director Kire Paputis

By FANEN CHIAHEMEN
Photos by JORDAN MASCHINGOLO

In *The Rainbow Kid*, Eugene, a Toronto teenager with Down syndrome, struggles with everyday life – bullying at school, unrequited love, and his inept, shut-in mother are just some of his problems. It seems his only comfort is his obsession with rainbows. He reads his favourite picture book, “Meatball Loves Raindrops,” over and over again, he has dozens of crayon drawings of rainbows adorning his bedroom walls, and he pontificates over the symbolism and suspension of the optical phenomena to anyone who will listen. When things at home get too much to bear, Eugene sets off on a journey across rural Ontario, ostensibly to find his own pot of gold that he hopes will be the solution to his problems, but instead he encounters a string of colourful characters that teach him that the world can be as beautiful as it is cruel.

A rainbow motif runs throughout the film, and colour was the obvious jumping-off point for the visual approach to *The Rainbow Kid*, which premiered at the 2015 Toronto International Film Festival. Cinematographer Maya Bankovic and writer-director Kire Paputis were inspired aesthetically by works like the 1987 comedy horror *Street Trash*, a cult classic with bold visuals (“It has a muted colour palette and then pops of really bold vibrant colours like neon green,” Bankovic observes), as well as Wim Wenders’ *Paris, Texas* for its vivid use of colours and landscapes. The decision to assign each character in *The Rainbow Kid* with their own colour scheme was a device that would inform much of Bankovic’s choices. The budget was tight, so Bankovic turned to PS Toronto’s Terence Nagra who helped customize a lighting package, operating out of a small truck. “He helped us come up with lighting plans for some of the night exteriors that would have otherwise been really hard to do on this budget,”



Shooting a scene in the school stairwell with Dylan Harmon and Patrick Tong. Below: Cinematographer Maya Bankovic



Bankovic says. “He gave me good suggestions for HMI units from ARRI such as the M series and things like that, which he knew would give me more punch for the dollar.” Bankovic’s lighting package consisted primarily of a few 1.2k HMI Pars, the ARRI M8, some small 1x1 Litepanels, and a 20” Chimera lantern, with practical lights often acting as key lights in interiors. Bankovic shot the entire film in 4K on a RED EPIC Mysterium-X (acquired from SIM) because it could handle some of the simpler

lighting, as well as natural or available light. She could also rate the camera between its native 800 and 1600 ISO. Her two lens kits included Zeiss Super Speeds from SIM and a set of the RED PRO PRIMES from Vitar. Borison, a fellow cinematographer and a founding partner at REDLAB Digital, where post on the film was also performed by colourist Walt Biljan. Bankovic selected the latter lenses after discovering that they produce a flare that played directly into the film’s central theme. “The flares on these lenses actually read as tiny rainbows. They sort of just catch the light on the edge of a frame on a pan or a tilt, and the rainbow will just sort and discreetly sneak into the corner of the shot. And that seemed serendipitous to me,” Bankovic says. “So Kire and I had this idea that we would really subtly use them on scenes where things were working in Eugene’s favour, like where he’s found another version of his proverbial pot of gold but he maybe doesn’t know it yet.” To contrast Eugene’s desolate home life with the complicated outside world he eventually gets to know, Bankovic gave both worlds different visual treatments. “His mother is a shut-in, so the curtains are always drawn in their home,” the cinematographer points out. “It had to look very dingy, very much as though the environment was lit by one or two practicals in the house.” Shooting in the cramped apartment above a store in Toronto’s East end that was serving as

Eugene’s home “was challenging of course, but I think the texture of the space really adds to that atmosphere,” Bankovic notes. “We gave the mother’s room some red accents with tungsten lights – 650s, 300 Fresnels, gelled red. We tried to bounce practicals of red items like table cloths just to motivate the colour of our light. Also I was bouncing tungsten lights a lot for close-ups off of soft foam core and things like that just to give a warmer wrapping key light to the close-ups. We had the Fresnels on dimmers and then we would bring in the bounce as close or as far away as we needed for some eye light and things like that.” In Eugene’s home, Bankovic says she chose to shoot through doorways “to help emphasize the claustrophobic nature of the apartment. So we would just throw a little bit of our own light into the interior of the room in which the camera was so that you could see some of the clutter and the mess that we were shooting through in order to bring the scene in the next room.” When the film becomes a road movie, Bankovic borrowed from cinematographer Robby Müller’s technique in *Paris, Texas* of using very wide lenses on close-ups. “There is a really interesting use of close-ups in that film where the emphasis is still on the skies and the environment,” Bankovic notes. In the case of *The Rainbow Kid*, wide lenses would help depict Eugene’s isolation and loneliness while out on the road on his own by emphasizing the space and emptiness around him. “There is an element of magical realism in this film that I think needed to be visually acknowledged in order to really elevate that surreal quality of this journey,” Bankovic says. “So we had to really ramp up the visuals from the moment he leaves home onwards because it felt like we would be doing that quest a disservice to shoot it in a really normal, broad way. But it also had to be subtle; we didn’t want it to be too fantastical either.” One of the characters Eugene encounters on his journey is Bill, a dowsing who spends his days looking for buried objects with a divining rod. A hoser, Bill lives in a Winnebago, and the crew shot in a real trailer overlooking the Scarborough Bluffs, and Bankovic says production designer Chris Crane was “amazingly talented at filling a frame and making it look really lived in.” “The idea was that the character would have a sort of amber accent light, so in the Winnebago we were able to install an LED above his stove and get it with amber so that when they were

seated at a side table he would always have this little amber accent, sort of a hair light,” Bankovic explains. “And then there is this practical light beside him throwing another warm light on both of them, and that was the key. We didn’t want the space to feel too comforting or welcoming or anything like that because Bill’s a bit of a dubious character. It’s Eugene’s first encounter out on the road and he’s still very trusting and pretty naive, and I think it’s important for the audience to know that things aren’t always what they seem to be. It’s almost like an amber alert, or a warning sign, not quite a red flag just yet, but it’s something to be suspicious of.”



Shooting a scene in the classroom

By contrast, Eugene later stumbles upon a house in the woods owned by a woman who becomes a maternal figure to him, providing for a brief moment the warmth and guidance he’s been lacking at home. That character’s colour scheme was emerald green, and to represent the purity of the relationship between the two, Bankovic decided that the light in the house should be clean daylight. She kept any light coming through windows soft and balanced to the camera, with the floral patterns in the furniture and décor providing the green accents. “That one is very subtle because we didn’t make the choice to push the green in the lighting,” Bankovic says. “I think the choice to make that one a clean white light was the better choice because it’s an environment where Eugene’s the most himself. There’s no insidious nature to it at all, it’s where he’s feeling most naturally at ease and with the person he’s been waiting for all his life to guide him. So it needed to have a pure, innocent feel to it.”

In all cases, it was important for Bankovic that the colour be motivated by a real source visible within any given frame, rather than applying a colour cast in post, and that’s where she relied most on Crane. For example, in the bedroom of a character whose colour scheme is magenta, Crane furnished the room with a pink canopy over the bed and pink details on the wall. “Those things are good, they are in the frame and they’re the right colour but they’re not going to inform the colour of the light, so Chris and I came up with the idea to put a sheer magenta shawl over her desk lamp so that would provide that kind of warmer pink glow,” Bankovic says. “It had to come from the source, otherwise it would be completely unmotivated and feel kind of campy. So you see that there is a shawl on a lamp. And so even though we were supplementing that with our own light, in this case a bounced Fresnel with minus green on it and a 20” chimera lantern lined with the same, we’ve seen the colour magenta within the shot, and so that motivates the palette.” Bankovic says Crane also found “an amazing quilt that had all these different rainbow colours in each of the squares. It’s a subtle cue but it’s kind of like another way to work a rainbow in without relying too heavily on the rainbows in the sky that were CG, or otherwise explicitly referenced in the dialogue.” The Rouge Valley, where most of the exterior scenes were shot, afforded the crew an ideal canvas to shoot against. “There is such a variety of landscapes in that part of the (Greater Toronto Area), everything from rushing rivers, cliffs, forests and fields. There was a goldmine of locations there once we got the permits,” Bankovic says, adding that they shot exteriors with available light, using a meticulously planned schedule. Working with a small lighting and grip package on wide exteriors is always a challenge, Bankovic says, especially given the production’s tight schedule, but she says they persevered because of the stamina of the crew and cast, including those with special needs. “I think for a lot of us it was the first time we’ve worked with a lead actor with special needs,” Bankovic says, referring to actor Dylan Harman, who plays Eugene. “But Dylan is quite a seasoned actor and incredibly professional and generous, and his range is absolutely amazing. He’s just an incredible actor and he has so much energy.”



Stills from *The Rainbow Kid*