

# Olympic Highlig

Last summer's historic record-breaking Games of the XXVIII Olympiad marked the first return to their ancient Athens birthplace since the Olympic revival of 1896. The high-profile events attracted 11,099 athletes from 202 countries and the spectacular opening ceremonies were watched by 72,000 people in the Olympic Stadium and 4 billion across the globe.

Texas-based Greek-born Director, Athina Tsangari, was invited by Dimitris Papaioannou, Artistic Director and Concept Creator of the Olympic Opening and Closing Ceremonies, to join the creative team in developing the visual, narrative content of the ceremonies, as well as being the producer/director of the show's multi-media elements (film, video, animation, lasers). "Athina interviewed nearly 20 cinematographers and, after two months, called to say she would like to work with me" says Greek Director of Photography Angelos Viskadourakis, who, according to Tsangari, was chosen for his artistic sensitivity, enthusiasm for bold, technical experimentation and vast experience in working with Greek light.

"Collaborating with a director like Athina was the ultimate highlight for me; she's a pure artist with an alternative filmmaking background. She wanted to work in a different style to commercials and we explored our techniques even further than we would have done for a feature. She pushed me to develop a simpler approach, guiding me to photograph the soul of a subject and not its external form. She questions

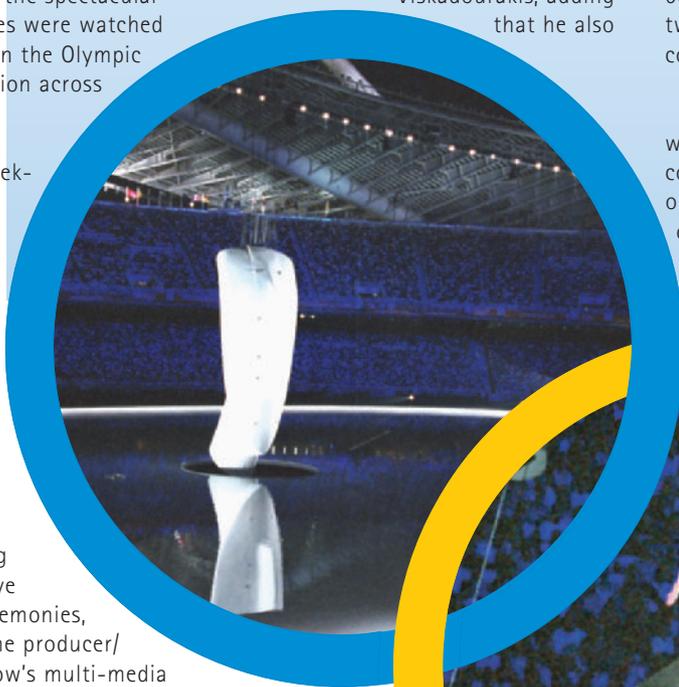
technical aspects and demands technical perfection, but at the same time she searches for the truth and the power of the images themselves within a dramatic context. It's a Cinematographer's dream to work with such a Director!" exclaims

Viskadourakis, adding that he also

tall, rock-like surfaces suspended high in the air, the result of the memorable "explosion" of a giant, 3rd millennium BC Cycladic idol.

After extensive tests, the two-week shoot of **Countdown** and **Allegory** began in March 2004, followed by two months of editing and considerable telecine work.

Viskadourakis wanted to conceive an older, more organic, kinetic look for



enjoyed working with such a complex organization as the Athens 2004 Organising Committee, and Jack Morton Public Events, the production company commissioned to produce the ceremonies.

Two of the opening ceremony audiovisual segments originated on film: The 40 second **Countdown** sequence which opened the ceremony on the stadium 16:9 LED matrix screens, following a symbolic relay race between two young, male runners; and, concluding the epic segment **Allegory**, a multiple projection sequence, consisted of eight simultaneous, diverse projections on eight 9-meters



## Countdown.

Searching for the oldest lenses in Greece, he managed to locate stained and colour-worn Cooke S1 and S2 telephotos and a Cooke S3 lens for the ARRI 16-SR111.

Shooting two athletes with Kodak VISION2 100T 7212 against the clear blue Attic skies, while tracking across the abandoned runways of Athens' old airport, Viskadourakis used only the sun for light, playing with contrast and shadows, and taking advantage of the early morning light soft beams against the flat walls.

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"We focused on the athletes and, with the large abstract expanse of concrete out of focus, accentuated their human effort as we followed their shadows and their legs and joints as they ran, capturing their motion as if they were perfectly tuned machines. The shadows were sharp, the athletes' bodies were formed with such great elasticity, and the bright light, clear skies and flat exposed areas created a very



contrasty environment and formalistic rigor. 7212 proved an extremely versatile tool. When you work with high definition Kodak stock, you start with something you can diminish, which is a very important factor for a Cinematographer."

For the **Allegory** projection sequence Viskadourakis was tasked with shooting about a hundred portraits of multi-ethnic people in moments of intimacy and sensuality, without clothing or ethnic elements

to detract from Tsangari's intention to represent and celebrate a unified humanity. Viskadourakis used Ultra Prime lenses on the ARRI and "my favourite 16mm Kodak Vision 200T 7274 film". Placing two 500w bulbs inside a single China ball, and building a rig (operated manually by a stirring wheel) which rotated the light with precision around the actors in a 200° circle to replicate the sun's movement, he used no fill light. "I measured the shadows and highlights and did a split exposure," he says. "7274 gave the feel of a 100 ASA film but with much wider latitude and provided an extremely smooth transition



between darker shadows, mid tones and highlights, even though I push-processed it by two thirds of a stop. It provided a quality comparable to 35mm, without any grain and particularly fine detail and natural contrast on the skin tones, helping me to achieve a balance between a simple approach and one that registers in the human soul and brain," he states.

Although all other lighting styles had been thoroughly tested prior to the respective shoots, no time had been available for testing underwater lighting, so Viskadourakis and his crew arrived at an Athens swimming pool, its walls dressed in black cloth,

with Kodak 35mm VISION2 500T 5218, and an ARRI IIC camera. It was equipped with two older Zeiss lenses and a lighting package comprising two 4kW Cinepar underwater lights, a 5kW HMI Mo Beam and six simple key lights. "We spent three or four hours experimenting, before rejecting backlighting or anything aesthetically cliché. Our shots needed to achieve a visual impact, yet be rather tender, like an outer space ballet, without impressionistic lighting, or anything theatrical in the images. Interestingly, we ended up shooting almost everything with my Underwater Cameraman's six 100w underwater lights, with very good results. 5218 was sharp and, even compensating for the loss of visibility in the water, gave very fine detail with the feeling of a positive print, with little effort on my part and excellent results in telecine."

Viskadourakis rigged the Mo Beam on the diving board for contrasty underwater choreography. "I knew I had to overexpose to maintain the feeling of the beam in the water, so I read the highlights on f22 and shot for safety at f8, but it didn't turn out well. Then I tried f4 and still had details in the highlights and the dancers' bodies, as well as a very nice key light wrapped around them from the molecules in the water. It's not every day you overexpose a key light by six stops, but it came out perfectly!"

Viskadourakis admits he'll never forget the experience of working with Tsangari on the intensive Olympic undertaking. "Athina has incredible stamina. She was involved for a full year of 18 hour days and seven day weeks and had to deal with hundreds of technical issues, as well as many hours of meetings and rehearsals. Her artistic approach brought something very original to the project and she forced me to rediscover the power of simplicity." ■