



HD PRODUCTION ON BRAVO'S FASHION SHOW

For Bravo TV's *The Fashion Show*, 15 clothing designers compete against one another in a series of challenges for the chance to have their designs sold in the retail market and to win \$125,000 in prize money. On the series, host, designer and TV personality Isaac Mizrahi and performer Kelly Rowland (formerly of Destiny's Child) join Senior VP of IMG Fashion Fern Mallis in judging the clothing designs of the eager creatives looking for that breakthrough.

In each of the 10 episodes shot earlier this year, designers were put through two tests per episode: The *Harper's Bazaar* Mini Challenge, judged by Laura Brown, the magazine's special projects director, and then the climactic Elimination Challenge, in which professional models present contestants' work on the catwalk, for audience reactions and judging.

Produced and posted by 3Ball Productions (NBC's *The Biggest Loser*), *The Fashion Show* is shot on location in

Manhattan, primarily in the Chelsea fashion show set created for the series, in the midtown Parker Meridian hotel where contestants stayed, and in the large workroom where the designers complete their challenges.

Director of Photography Guido Frenzel (*Confessions of a Teen Idol*, *The Simple Life*) made use of Panasonic DVCPRO HDX900 cameras with native 720 imagers set up to output an upresed 1080 24p image to DVCPRO tape. "Right now there are really only two cameras I'd consider for this type of multi-camera show," Frenzel says, noting that the switch to HD videography is still fairly new in the reality TV realm. "If we didn't use these Panasonic 900s, the only other choice at the moment would be the 2/3" Sony XDCAM PDW700."

Frenzel is comfortable with these Panasonic cameras and likes to use varying degrees of the 900's Filmlike gamma. "Depending on the project, I'll use differ-

ent degrees of the Filmlike gamma. I used the two setting for this show quite a bit. It gives you a nice protection against highlights blowing out too hard. We don't have engineering in the field, but for every show I do, I first sit down with an engineer and we set all the matrix, color, contrast and detail adjustments for what I expect to encounter, and put those adjustments on an SD card so they can then be loaded into each camera."

ENG-style crews with operators, assistants, sound people and producers would capture contestants meeting at breakfast at the hotel and then capture their efforts in the workroom. "It wasn't *Big Brother*-style coverage where the cameras are on them 24/7," the DP explains. "I think people who watch these shows, as much as they like the human drama, are very interested in the contestants' design tasks."

Crews were able to do some mild pre-lighting to the Parker Meridian—85 gels on relevant windows, some fluorescent

DP Guido Frenzel, who has worked on quite a few reality shows, notes, "The ears of a good reality operator are one of their biggest assets. Like a documentarian, you have to know where to point the camera to tell the story and a lot of times, that's driven by what someone just said. They talk to producers about the storylines as well, but some decisions about what to focus on or how to frame a shot have to be made on the fly."

tubes disguised as practical lighting—but that was fairly limited. ("It's a very nice hotel," Frenzel observes. "We couldn't make any holes in it.")

The most challenging lighting task was the fashion show location itself, where the models parade across the catwalk for the judges and a studio audience as the designers are positioned backstage with plasma monitors on which to observe the models and gauge reactions. "That part was really fun because it had elements of a real fashion show," Frenzel notes. "There's all the backstage craziness and everyone's trying to get the models out the door on time."



Frenzel worked with his electrical crew in advance to pre-light the actual fashion shows. While lighting for such events in other situations can get showy and self-conscious, it was important in this case to be somewhat conservative. "The first directive for the fashion shows," Frenzel explains, "was to make sure we could see the clothes. That's really what the show's about. It was a non-piloted show and for the first week we were on the cautious side and we really couldn't go as far as you might with a more rock 'n' roll-type show. But in subsequent episodes we were able to go a little bit further with the lighting

and do a little bit more in terms of moving lighting effects and having people coming out of silhouettes."

The fashion shows were treated with more "event" lighting and camerawork. First, there was the kind of camera support you wouldn't see on most reality shows: "We had a Jimmy Jib camera and a Fisher 10 Dolly," Frenzel recalls, "which you certainly wouldn't have on a lot of reality shoots. We were lucky to get it. It was a 15-foot Jib Triangle on Skate 32 track wheels gliding on about 40 feet of standard track. Unlike typical jib moves, the track gave us the ability to move the

camera straight in and out, maintaining framed shots while keeping a dynamic feel for the runway and elimination portions of each show."

Each model would cross the catwalk twice so that Frenzel's camera and the other five cameras trained on the stage (two more were backstage on the anxious contestants) could cover the action from different positions and in varied sizes with a minimum amount of catching one another in shots. While the cameras' iris settings were not in the hands of a control room, as they would be in more of a live (or live-to-tape) kind of production,

Frenzel *did* light the entire area such that each camera needed to be at the identical T4/5.6 split so that every camera would respond equally to the pre-planned lighting scheme. "We had to remind the operators not to go with their instincts and to leave the exposure alone," Frenzel laughs.

Frenzel also took the cameras out in the city to capture some interesting B-roll. "We did some time-lapse shots of the sun going up and down and we got some nice reflections," he elaborates. "And I used a Lensbaby, which was really great. It can help you 'rediscover' places you've seen a million times." The almost toy-like Lensbaby specialty lens allows the user to alter the angle of the lens to the sensor and defocus all but a tiny portion of the frame. "It lets you redirect attention to exactly what you want the audience to see. We shot a lot of shop windows and we couldn't show logos we just wanted to say, 'Hey, here's a beautiful dress' or 'Look at these people walking by out of focus.'" (The Lensbaby also offered the production a very practical solution to what can normally be quite a frustrating aspect of street photography: "We couldn't ask every person in the street to sign a release," the DP notes, "so this was a way to make them unrecognizable.")

Frenzel has worked on many different kinds of reality TV shows but says his favorites are always the ones like *Fashion Show* that are essentially about contestants showing off real skills and doing what they love. "It's all about the talent," he concludes. "If you can't cook, you're not going to win on *Top Chef* and it's the same with this show. That's really the most fun reality format. I think it's why shows like this are often so popular. You get to watch real talent, and that's not always a given with reality television." ●