

PLACEBO

PRODUCTION: Bikini Films; director/screenwriter: Philippe André; producer: Dominic Wilcox; 1st AD: Bryan Altham; DP: Alex Lamarque; gaffer: Todd Heater;

grip: John Stabile; production designer: Jan Houllé; wardrobe: Keith Wager; casting director: Francine Selkirk; cast: Field Cate, Michael Joseph Carr. POST: editor:

Nicholas Wayman Harris at Union; online: MPC, VTR. COMMISSIONER: Carole Burton-Fairbrother at Virgin.

Placebo

André brings cinematic vision to Placebo

Song To Say Goodbye (Virgin/Astralwerks)**Director: Philippe André**

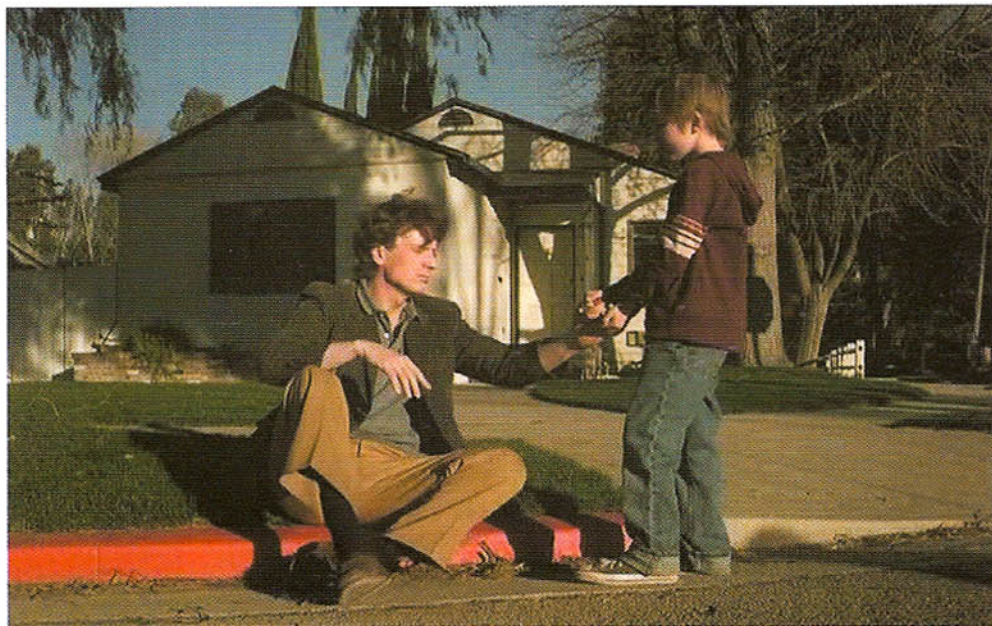
Typically, Philippe André chose to begin his Placebo video with a striking opening shot: a small boy peering over the steering wheel as he drives down an Los Angeles freeway. But in many ways his clip for *Song To Say Goodbye* is a departure for a director renowned for his visually inventive style in both promos and commercials.

This is a piece more akin to a short film, and in this respect a follow-up to André's first real short film, the impressive and thought-provoking *The Rope*, now currently on the international film festival circuit, and featured on PROMO DVD 11 last issue.

A long-time Placebo fan, André was moved by *Song To Say Goodbye's* message, in which a parent reaches out to a once-loved child being lost to drug addiction. Trying to create a visually strong piece yet stay close to the lyrics - which articulate the speaker's attempt "to wake you up/to pull you from the liquid sky" - the director turned the scenario on its head. He imagined a young boy who looks after a middle-aged man - presumably his father - in a compelling case of age- and role-reversal that sways between realism and surrealism.

It begins with the concerned-looking boy driving along the freeway, the man his passenger, but subsequent scenes suggest a child who is struggling to deal with a parent with serious mental health problems. There is an eerie resonance between Placebo frontman Brian Molko's powerful lyrics about responsibility and fate, and the images of a nine-year-old boy picking up his 'father' as he falls over on crowded city pavements, or lies down in the centre of highways.

The resolution barely offers any solace either, as the boy drops the hapless adult at a care home at the end of his car journey, and leaves without a parting look. But for André, this largely character-based piece was satisfying for several reasons. "Brian said it



Helping hand: the boy leads the father figure out of the gutter

stood out among all the treatments they had received," the French director says, "Which was a real coup for me, as a non-native English speaker."

André agreed with the band that the video would create contrasts of pace and feel with the track. The clip moves relatively slowly - although the road movie elements have a strong impact - and the director shot it in bright sunlight to create a counterpoint with the ominous mood of the lyrics.

Molko suggested a shoot in Sydney, but André settled on Los Angeles since he was making a Volvo car commercial there and would be able to get higher production values from booking the crew for two shoots. "Brian also had the films of Jim Jarmusch and Gus Van Sant in mind," he says. "But I didn't want too many close-ups on the actors' faces. I wanted to take a more humble approach and let the emotion appear in the frame."

In this respect he was fortunate to find a natural actor for the demanding role of the put-upon child. Nine-year-old Field Cate stood out from 30-odd other kids who auditioned for the part, and André, who himself has children, found directing the youngster an interesting process. "The way that

he received information and played with it to improvise was amazing," he says.

André believes that shooting a dramatic interpretation can create a "third level" to a video, beyond the music and the meaning of the lyrics. "Performance videos can be very strong, but they aren't at the same level: the real power should come from a bit further back," he says. "It's important not to build it up too much - you can't write a 20-page script. It's more about the mood, which here includes a bit of surrealism. You need to leave a lot of room for the lyrics and the audience."

Placebo liked his video so much that they have agreed to put together an extended version of the track, so that André can make a eight- to 10-minute short film, and the results may appear on a special edition DVD. Overall, it's a very successful outing for a director largely occupied by commercials and with feature-making ambitions, but who also wants to stay close to his roots.

"I love music videos: it's my background and I always want to do them, but I'm careful about which ones I do," he says. "As the money gets less you have to work harder to get the production values you want." **James Rose**