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The Zen of
Focusing

Shooting "Kids on the Run"

Result Directing

J.C. Chandor Plays Out "Margin Call"

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Setting up "evening picnic" scene, shot from across the river. *To Live and Die in Dixie,* film shot by Jack Anderson.

Publisher's Desk

This exciting, new edition of *StudentFilmmakers* Magazine highlights educational articles in the categories of Cinematography, Directing, and Production. Filmmakers and writers in this issue discuss working with various cameras including the digital cinema cameras, DSLRs, professional camcorders, and more.

In the article, "The Zen of Focusing," Jack Anderson writes about the most critical aspect of the first camera assistant's job: keeping the picture in focus. "Shooting Kids on the Run," highlights a key scene where several DSLRs were used to capture various perspectives. In "Never Stop Shooting," Scott Spears discusses an important rule in filmmaking. David Lent shares his "Five Keys to Mastery," Check out the vintage photo of Dave with an early Panasonic camera. Close Up interviews in this edition feature J.C. Chandor, Rashaad Ernesto Green,and Sam Levinson. Check out the filmmakers in the Networking Department who created and produced contest-winning films. Enjoy all the great articles and departments in this issue!

Never stop learning. Never stop networking.

Truly,
Kim E. Welch
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

The Zen of Focusing

by Jack Anderson

On the surface focusing seems simple enough.

During a blocking rehearsal, marks are laid (that's the job of the second) to indicate the places on the set where the actors will be stopping and standing during a scene. The first assistant measures the distance from the focal plane (on the camera) to each actor's position using a cloth or fiberglass tape. The first makes notes or memorizes the distances that will need to be set when the scene is shot. The director calls "Action," and the first, using the geared knob attached to the barrel of the lens, adjusts the focus to whatever distance the actor is from the camera as the scene proceeds. Voila!

Well, not so fast, my friend. The first thing that can go wrong is that actors often don't hit their marks; or they lean; or they move suddenly. You need to have a really good mental measuring tape in your head. You have to react to errors by actors and to erratic moves and to moves that were never rehearsed. You have to know which of several actors in the scene is most important and make sure you keep the focus on

them. You have to try to keep several actors in a shot in acceptable focus all the time—even though this is impossible, according to the laws of physics.

All this time, you are standing next to the camera, eyes at the film plane (the precise place where the film is when it's exposed). One eye is on the actor, one eye is on the lens. This leaves no eyes to look at the video monitor, so forget it. It's just a distraction anyway. It's also tough to see the scene and the lens unless you're walleyed. We all develop

routines to deal with it. (I look at the corner of the matte box, so the actor is in my left peripheral vision and the lens markings are in my right. It's tricky.)

You may have gotten the idea by now that the job of focusing is a hard job that takes a long time to learn. Yes. The first time on a set, I couldn't believe regular human beings did this job: *without looking through the viewfinder*! And that's just as well because if you tried to focus through the viewfinder or by using a monitor you'd always be lagging

"An evening picnic by a river." *To Live and Die in Dixie*, film shot by Jack Anderson.

A shot from the green beds (scaffolding) showing a four-camera setup on the TV sitcom, *Mad About You*.

The most critical aspect of the first camera assistant's job is keeping the picture in focus.

behind the movement of the actor. If you "follow" focus you're late, out of focus, and fired. So you must be *with* the actor. And after some time focusing—a year or so—there is a point when you will have entered the zone, a zone in which you, the assistant, react reflexively to the

situation; you learn the actors' "tells" so you know when to anticipate their moves. As I progressed in the job, I began to think that I didn't do focus; I *was* focus. It's like a Zen practice. Read *Zen and the Art of Archery* to expose yourself to the method and philosophy. Yes, we're

shooting movies, not arrows, but the same concepts are applicable. They both deal with very narrow limits of error, being on target, being focused. No pun intended.

Baby steps and incessant practice will make you a good focus puller. Wherever you are try to guess distances to people or objects that you see. Carry a tape measure with you (for this, use a steel one), and see how close you can come to actual distances. Let's say you feel a little weird doing that in public. Instead, go in your back yard with a friend, toss some rocks, then guess the distance from you to the rocks. Use your tape to measure the actual distances and compare them to what you guessed. After a lot of wrong guesses you'll start to get a feel for what these distances will look like to you, and you'll develop an instinctive accuracy. When you get really good at it you can amuse your friends and win some bets by showing off your ability to accurately guess distances just by looking.

Back on the set. There are some strategies you can use to help you with focus. Measure out ten feet, and memorize where that is on the set. This is an indispensable benchmark. It's good to know what five feet looks like, too.

Always focus on the actor's eyes. Even if nothing else is in focus, this will look good.

Always focus on #1. That's the first person listed on the call sheet, who will always be the star.

When you're shooting in a place with any regular divisions (tile, sidewalk spaces), measure the length

of one division and use it to calculate the rough distance between you and the subject.

When shooting in a room, measure the distances to furniture. Even when the actors miss their marks, you'll have a pretty good idea of where they are.

Remember that your arm span equals your height. If you're 5'10" to 6'2", you can figure your span is six feet. So nose to fingertips is one yard.

When you measure to actors, use a cloth tape. (A metal tape can get out of control and hurt people. You use a metal tape only when you can't leave the camera; for example, when you're on a crane twelve feet in the air.) Write the measurement down on a piece of camera tape or a sticky note you've put on your tape measure. When you get back to the camera,

put the note on your matte box as a reference.

Beware of getting more than three reference points for a shot. Too many measurements will confuse you. And you won't be looking at these notes during shooting; they're for reference. Writing them down tends to make them stick in your memory.

Remember, if you're shooting from the air, distances look different from the way they look on the ground. Measure more often and more carefully. On a crane or a platform (we call it a parallel), you can use a metal tape or, better, give your assistant the dumb end of the tape and have him take it out to the point to be measured. If you're flying, you're so high that pretty much everything is at infinity. Or ask your operator for eye focuses.

When you're on a long lens, it's tough; have your second go out with a slate and stand next to landmarks. Get a visual focus through the lens at each point. Number them. During the shot, have your assistant call off to you when the subject passes the landmarks you have measured.

To get an eye focus, have your second stand next to the actor or on the actor's mark. Have him hold up the slate at exactly the plane of the eyes. Focus on the printed lines on the slate (they're sharp and contrasty and easy to read). Backlight the slate, if you can, so you can see the lines more clearly.

You'll figure out more tricks as you work. But the most important thing is to do a lot—either focus on the set or practice judging distance. As unlikely as it may seem, you too will eventually "be focus."

Jack Anderson is a thirty-year Hollywood veteran. He was DP for "Always Say Goodbye," first-prize winner at the First Hollywood Film Festival. He did second-unit DP on "Hook," "Noises Off," and "Mad About You." Short films he shot won prizes at the Los Angeles Short Film Festival, Waterfront Film Festival (Muskegon), and Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival. His new book, "Shooting Movies Without Shooting Yourself in the Foot," is published by Focal Press.

Jack Anderson and Debbie Reynolds on a Titan crane for the Disney TV movie, *Halloweentown.*

Shooting *Kids on the Run*

Filmed predominately with a RED One, and, for one scene, several Canon DSLRs.

by Nolan Wilson Goff with Nathan Ingalls

After I finished early drafts of the screenplay, *Kids on the Run* began pre-production over Summer 2011. *Kids on the Run* is the story of everyman Banks, a disillusioned young person looking for a way out of the town that holds him there. Late one night, he is drawn to the open road, and a destination unknown. He hurtles off into the desert hoping to find some sort of solace.

A fantastic crew of students was assembled to produce this screenplay, under the mentorship of professors Dean Yamada and John Schmidt, and production meetings commenced in August. The entire team would play a crucial role in the production of this short film, therefore a tone of professionalism and solid leadership was established early on. If we were to complete a short film in four months, in time for a December 9th premiere, everyone was going to have to be focused.

The Collaborations

As director and cinematographer, our relationship was crucial to the production as a whole. The foundation of this collaboration was preparation. During the summer months, we exchanged many emails and phone conversations, discussing how we should visually represent Banks' journey for purpose in the unknown. We both wanted to capture feelings of isolation and yearning, while still evoking the beauty of the desert and

Behind the scenes. *Kids on the Run*. Photos by Jamie Krumland.

portraying the solace found in human connection. We each gathered photographs, paintings, commercials, and film clips that provoked us emotionally and exchanged them. From this, Nathan put together a catalog of reference images that we could use during shot listing and production. After meeting regularly to shot list, we brought in production designer Julia Rothenbuhler as an additional collaborator, making sure that all of the visual elements would be united. Nathan met weekly with the gaffer, Cody Maher, and created bird's eye lighting diagrams. He also had camera operator Tim Richardson experiment by shooting things that inspired him, and 1st AC Jacob Watts also shot footage at various apertures and focal lengths in order to prepare for the

shoot. Although we both have different backgrounds and styles, we were able to unite around this story and use this as our bearing for all decisions regarding the visuals.

The Camera

We shot *Kids on the Run* predominately with a first generation RED One, and, for one scene, several canon DSLRs. As it was the earliest generation RED, we were more limited with our dynamic range and native ISO. However, this did afford us the option of better integrating the DSLR footage with the RED footage. Almost the entire film was shot at an ISO of 320, the original RED's native ISO, with the exception of two scenes, which we felt comfortable pushing to 500. For our lenses, we shot the first act of the film with Nikon photography primes, and then transitioned to Zeiss Super Speeds. The T1.3 and sharp image that the Super Speeds afford offered us the ability to shoot in some

lower light situations using mostly natural light, such as a bonfire at night in the desert. We also made use of several filters for our daylight photography, including a polarizer and several ND filters. The polarizer enhanced the contrast and colors of both the ground and sky, bringing out the desert's natural beauty. These filters allowed us to keep the image properly exposed generally between a T8 and T11. This allowed for depth of field great enough for the desert to be clearly visible, while maintaining the focus on the two main actors.

In the first act, it was important to create a sensation of isolation. As there is no dialogue in the opening act, we leaned entirely on the visuals to provoke such a feeling. We used older Nikon lenses to roughen the image and as we transitioned to the desert, we chose the clean and fast Zeiss Super Speeds. Along with the lens change, this transition was accompanied by moving from a 1/60 shutter in the beginning to a standard 1/48 (180-degree) shutter. We also decided to stick exclusively with longer

lenses (nothing wider than a 50mm) in the opening scenes. Then we transitioned to generally wider lenses throughout the rest of the film (nothing longer than a 50mm).

The Lighting

From the beginning we decided that natural light would be the backbone of the film visually. As we established a threshold crossing with the camera between the first act and second act, we approached the lighting in a similar fashion. We chose for the opening scenes to be artificially lit and filled with light pollution. Our gaffer used the ARRI 1.2K HMI along with several ARRI 1Ks and a three-point ARRI kit. We established a sharp orange and blue color palette, which would later on be reflected in the earth and the sky of the desert. Outside street lights and an interior television motivated our lighting.

The driving scenes were nearly entirely naturally lit, using the sun as a side light and small LED panels for a subtle fill. By doing this, we were able to keep both the actors and the exterior within a decent exposure. To create a subtle contrast between daylight building interiors and the car, we overexposed the windows so that almost all information was completely gone

from them. Julia, the production designer, also hung white sheets over windows in some scenes, and these essentially became large silks through which our gaffer would punch as much light as possible wherever we weren't getting sunlight. All of this was to create the feeling of isolation. The audience isn't given the opportunity to see the outside world from the inside of buildings; it's only once the characters are on the road that we see the world around them.

The final act of the film takes place at a dried up lake bed. Our protagonists come upon a large bonfire. Our major source was the bonfire itself, accompanied by strategically placed car head lights and the ARRI 1.2K HMI for fill. The following morning, they discover the cold remains of the party. This scene was lit entirely with available light and we made a change to handheld photography.

The Bonfire

At the bonfire scene, we watch the two main characters grow distant, and while it is a lively scene, there is a melancholic tone to it. We knew that this was a key scene in the film, and we wanted to film it in a unique way from the rest of the movie. We decided the best way to achieve this would be through multiple cameras and

Behind the scenes. *Kids on the Run*.
Photos by Jamie Krumland.

Behind the scenes. *Kids on the Run*.
Photos by Jamie Krumland.

different people's perspectives. Essentially, we chose to document an actual party using Canon DSLRs. After filming shots of our characters with the RED One, Nathan handed out Canon T2is and Canon 7Ds - some to people who knew how to use them and others to people who had no previous experience. They were challenged to film the things that evoked feeling inside of them. Some focused on people, while others focused on feet. Some captured wides, and others were more concerned with inanimate objects. Afterwards we had a diverse array of footage. And you can feel it. Each operator held the camera a different way and had a slightly different style. None of them knew what the scene should look like as a whole. However, all of the footage meant something to each individual. We took this, and paired it with the coverage of the main actors' performances, allowing these performances to be the framework.

Post and Premiere

After six difficult and wonderful days in the desert and on the road, we returned home with a film in the can. With only one month before the scheduled premiere, post production began immediately. Editors Katie Agarth and Stephen Diaz, along with Assistant Editor Jamie Krumland, worked diligently at my side, spending many late nights, to complete the film on schedule. The picture lock was handed off to colorist Lee Hultman, who further accentuated the visuals we crafted in pre-production and then captured in the desert. The success of this film is purely a reflection of the talented crew involved and the collaboration that occurred. The film successfully

premiered to a raucous group of 400 plus college students on December 9th. We are incredibly grateful for the tools we were equipped with to tell this story, and are thrilled to see where digital cinema takes us in the future.

A native of Denton, Texas, Nolan has always dreamed of being a storyteller. He has discovered that life is a story and everyday people are the characters. A senior at Biola University, Nolan is drawn to character driven stories with distinct locations and has an affinity for naturalism in lighting, tone, and locale. In his free time, he enjoys laying on the beach reading American literature, playing every intramural sport, and staring death in the face. Nolan has completed two feature length screenplays. He is also writing a television pilot set in the world of independent music.

Nathan Ingalls was born and raised in Santa Rosa, California. With a passion for cinematography and emotions, he has a love for images and the impact of earnest moments captured on film. Nathan currently studies film at Biola University, where he has had the opportunity to shoot several short films. He is also a big fan of skiing and uncommissioned art.

Result Directing

Working with Your Actors

by Gleb Osatinski

I always thought thinking about the final result in directing with actors is the most important thing on the set. How it works – I know exactly what I want the actors to look like and how they should sound like, and I do have a clear picture inside of my head when I go to the set. Once actors become close to the final image I have, I consider my job done. I call this image that appears in my head when I read the script my directorial vision; and until recently, I was thinking this is my main driver I should have as a director and that I should have while working with actors on the set.

Recently, however, I started to ask myself, *is this the right way to go,* and *could this impose a problem?* Quite frankly, I didn't see it coming until one of my actors asked me, *"What do you mean, 'upset'?",* or *"What do you mean, 'scared'?"*

Suddenly, I realized my image is formed solely by my own interpretation of the script; and what the character should be like is really only a projection of the actor into that flat, four-cornered TV screen that I see inside of my head with my invisible eye. What it can be compared with, is perhaps, if I were to imagine a script as a flat earth surface and a character as a traveler who disappears from the face of earth once it reaches the edge of the horizon. Is the earth flat? Is the script flat? While working more and more with actors, this is what I started to realize while analyzing some techniques suggested by the Stanislavsky system and Meisner technique.

How does it all translate into a real situation on the set? The characters which a director often asks actors to perform are human beings, and human beings are much more complex than what we imagine while visualizing and explaining roles to actors. This means that while reading the script, to prepare for it is not just to go over it and imagine various emotions or feelings certain sentences or situations in the script may trigger inside of our heads, but rather, my preparation as a director should be much deeper than that.

I should ask myself, *what can I do to make this character sound more dramatic?* Or, *how can this acting be funnier?* As opposed to, what clues does this give me to what the movie is about and what the characters are doing to solve their predicaments. These types of questions really drive my artistic choices based on what I may know about other movies rather than on what I know about life. And these questions actually corner my characters to those four corners of the screen that the script triggers inside in my head. That's what limits actors to perform only what appears to be a result inside of my head as the director.

Alas, it is called, Result Directing. It shapes actors to be the result of what the director wants the actors to be after, for example, how the acting should be looking at the end.

Here is an example of Result Directing.

I say to my actor, "This scene should be more funny," or "I'd like you to be more dangerous."

This direction is really vague. Why? What is funny or dangerous for the actor? When the actor tries something, is it really *it*? What if he was funny already, in his terms? Or what is he was as dangerous as possible already, from his perspective. So, it is quite possible that the actor starts watching himself to be funny or dangerous, and while doing so, the real acting and his real performance may slip away. Naturally, the performance is dead when the actor is to put his concentration on the effect he has on the audience.

So, what can I try instead? I can try the "as if" adjustment. I can come up with a parallel experience that may have similar tone and trigger similar behavior to that what it should be reflected in the scene.

Here is an example. Say a character receives a letter, and I want him to show a great deal of curiosity or impatience about the letter's context. Instead of saying, "More curiosity, please," I would tell him, "imagine you have a lottery ticket to win $175,000,000 dollars," and *"as if* you are waiting for another 15 seconds for the lottery contest and chances of winning are quite high." Another example. Say I want to create a chilly atmosphere during a party. I would ask an actor to imagine that if he makes a mistake while picking up his drink at the counter, he will be taken to the prison.

As a director, I should try to work on the script not just simply imagining it in my head as a projected movie that is seen by my imaginary eye, but rather try to create **playable** layers that potentially bring the actor to real situations which he can play on the set that approach the actor to a real person as close as possible.

Hence, an alternative to Result Directing is Specific Playable Direction that actors should appreciate on the set.

Alas, there is no "cookbook" on directing, and every technique that directors might use while working with actors on the set might still work. The main thing to realize is that it is important to do decent homework with the script before you go on the set and try to create playable situations with "as if" scenarios that actors may use for themselves while playing live characters.

Lastly, here is a bottom line. Do your homework, go over and over the script and see what "as if" situations can be found and brought to life. Add these to your arsenal. The best acting performance is not necessarily the one that is already predefined inside of your head, but rather, the ones that are yet to be discovered in a new form and shape via your directorial research. Think about it as a scientific project and you are a scientist. It is like finding a new organism while looking through the magnifying glass of your directing, and something down there inside of the script's body is waiting to be discovered by your directorial eye.

Gleb Osatinski is New York-based director and producer originally from Ukraine. In 2010, he left Wall Street to write his first script, "Pisces of an Unconscious Mind," which he directed and produced in 2011.

Behind the scenes. *Margin Call*.
Zachary Quinto and J.C. Chandor.

J.C. Chandor
Margin Call

by Nash Choudhury

J.C. Chandor, writer and director of financial crisis thriller, *Margin Call*, has spent the past fifteen years honing his craft in commercial and documentary work. Besides directing commercials for some of the biggest brands in the world and a directing and producing a six part concert film series for AOL/Warner Bros. that featured Sting, Elton John, and The

Red Hot Chili Peppers, Chandor has sharpened his craft on various short films including *Despacito* (2004) starring Will Arnett. *Margin Call* follows one particular investment firm over the course of twenty four hours just as we are on the verge of financial collapse. Timely as it is riveting, Chandor has assembled an all star cast that includes Kevin

Spacey, Zachary Quinto, Jeremy Irons, Paul Bettany, Demi Moore, and Stanley Tucci to tell the personal and riveting story of the country's financial downfall.

Nash Choudhury: This project could not be timelier with the Occupy Wall Street protest going on. Especially since the

Stanley Tucci. Scene from *Margin Call*.

Zachary Quinto and Penn Badgley. Scene from *Margin Call*.

people they are enraged at are your protagonists in the movie. That's what I really liked about it because it's very easy to vilify the bankers and financial guys who got us to the state we're in now. Where do you find the humanity there? Was it through the research and talking with these guys or did you always plan to put a human face to the whole crisis?

J.C. Chandor: I wrote the script over three years ago so any connection between the two events is pure coincidence. But we fought very hard when raising the money for our film to maintain the integrity of the script. Finding the humanity in these characters was fairly simple for me because when you really looked at this world closely it is made up of people just doing their jobs and trying to protect what they feel is rightfully theirs. I'm not sure I totally agree with that point of view

but the characters in the film while very upset about their predicament strongly believe they are acting within their rights.

NC: The film deals with a lot of complex financial ideas that probably the majority of audiences will have a hard time following. How do you get across these big difficult ideas without putting the whole movie at risk of being too esoteric for a wide audience?

Jeremy Irons. Scene from *Margin Call*.

Simon Baker. Scene from *Margin Call*.

J.C. Chandor: This was a very fine line I walked while writing, shooting, and editing the film. I wanted the film to be authentic enough for people within the industry while also being basic enough for the common audience to understand. The main way I accomplished this was by trying to make the film mainly about the characters reactions to their predicament instead of what the details of the predicament actually were. All you really need to know as an audience member is that this problem could bankrupt the company. It's really that simple, once you know that you realize that they are fighting for their lives and the rest of the action plays out under the cloud of that fact.

NC: This is a very dialogue heavy movie with a lot of scenes of guys in suits sitting around conference tables. How do you make that interesting and exciting cinematically? Is it in the script, actor's performances, the editing, directing the scene on set? Where does that energy in those scenes come from do you think?

J.C. Chandor: Hopefully this answer doesn't seem like a cop-out but it comes from all of those factors coming together all at once. That is

Kevin Spacey. Scene from *Margin Call*.

Paul Bettany. Scene from *Margin Call*.

Penn Badgley. Scene from *Margin Call*.

the amazing and very challenging thing about a feature film, you have to keep the audience's attention for over 90 minutes and if all those facets don't come together in a meaningful way you start losing people. You can have the most action packed movie ever made but if there isn't a real story there no one cares. Throughout our movie I was always trying to keep moving forward and onward even though the characters are essentially trapped on this one floor of a building.

NC: Obviously, the film deals with very difficult and hard to understand financial ideas that did contribute to the fall of the economy and most regular people I would say still don't quite understand all of it. As a filmmaker tackling such issues, how much research did you do and how? Would you say you're kind of an expert or at least significantly more knowledgeable on what happened to the economy?

J.C. Chandor: I am by no means an expert on this topic but I did research many facets of the industry. I visited many different trading floors and had been following this business closely in the press for many years. My father also worked for an investment bank [not as a trader] for his whole career so many of the people I grew up around and was friends with later in my adult life worked in this industry so I was very aware of who these characters were. To put it simply, I understood each of these individuals voice and that is the hardest part when writing a script.

NC: There's a beat in the film that I found quite striking, both in the idea of it and also because there was a similar beat in Curtis Hanson's Too Big to Fail, where Zachary Quinto's character laments how the people around them have no idea what's about to happen. Billy Crudup's Timothy Geithner makes the same exact statement in Hanson's film. Why do you think that is a sentiment shared by two separate financial crisis based films? How important would you say that line is to the central ideas in the film?

J.C. Chandor: Interestingly I think it is far more significant that in my film he is the only character in the whole movie who actually does make that observation. Meaning, I would have hoped that many of the people in that world at that time might have had that observation. But in my film most of the characters are by their nature very inward looking self centered people so they are more concerned with their own plight than the potential effect this event may have on anyone else.

Nash Choudhury is a 25 year old graduate from Binghamton University with a BA in Creative Writing. He is currently a freelance writer with a passion for movies.

Esai Morals and cast. Scene from *Gun Hill Road*. Photo by Mykwain Gainey.

Rashaad Ernesto Green
Gun Hill Road

by Scott Essman

For his film, "Gun Hill Road," concerning a recently paroled father returning to a family undergoing a transformation with regards to his teenaged son, director Rashaad Ernesto Green decided to revisit his roots in the New York City borough of the Bronx. In this exclusive interview, he describes the reasons behind his choices to shoot this non-traditional film in an environment widely known for its limited latitude for accepting alternative lifestyles. Starring Esai Morales, the film was shot in 20 days in the Bronx with an additional day in Manhattan and one on Long Island.

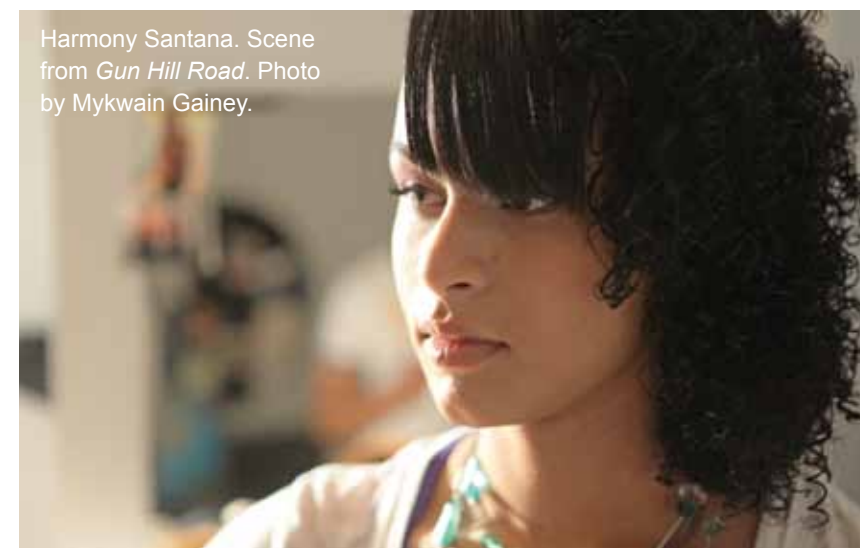**Scott Essman: Why shoot this film in the Bronx?**

Rashaad Ernesto Green: I was born in the Bronx and have roots there. I thought it was a very important aspect of the story to understand the environment and how it shapes the mentality of the characters in it. It's also the part of New York that is not represented as well as it could be on film. The Bronx that I've seen portrayed in many films travels from one stereotype to the next with drug dealers and gangsters. We don't often see into the depths of our families. The Bronx that I'm used to is steeped in family and community. The father

and child in the film are inspired by a family I know very well. It is always hard to accept change, and here is a guy who is a Bronx Latino male who has also been in and out of prison, making that acceptance even more difficult.

SE: Did you want to put the audience in Esai Morales' [who plays Enrique] shoes? He's a very specific type of character with time spent in prison and a very traditional attitude towards family.

Rashaad Ernesto Green: I am presenting in the film a question: *What if it were you?* Of course it's hard for all types of people. I understand that. During the course of these two hours, I try to show a man who has learned something. He has gone on a journey towards acceptance. That doesn't mean he's going to be escorting his [newly transformed] daughter to her prom. But he understands that love is more important than his hang-ups about how she chooses to live her life. Many parents are going through the same thing. When you put love

and family first, we can make it past our own boxes and limitations and embrace one another because that's what life calls for.

SE: Do you think many straight fathers like Esai's character can relate to this story?

Rashaad Ernesto Green: I think that many teenagers and their fathers are going to have differences and issues. Rarely is there a time when their adolescents are going to make it through their teen years without disagreements. This father's struggle is made that

Harmony Santana. Scene from *Gun Hill Road*. Photo by Mykwain Gainey.

much harder. Someone watching this film might empathize with the teenager because she's just being herself, but to understand the father is more challenging for the viewer — but I'm asking them not to vilify him. He has been given an extreme challenge. He should be applauded for the effort. He hasn't been provided with the proper tools to cope. But he is attempting to connect with his challenge.

SE: How important was getting Esai Morales in the role – and having him aboard as a producer?

Rashaad Ernesto Green: I wrote the film with Esai in mind. I've been a fan of his since I was a child and saw *La Bamba*. I've been waiting to see him in another film where he got to chew on a role. I didn't think that he had been given his due. Here he gets to play a Puerto Rican man from the Bronx. I've always believed that he was one of the most overlooked performers of his generation. We need more stories for these actors to work. It's my duty as an artist to provide those opportunities to actors. Esai really

Esai Morales. Scene from *Gun Hill Road*. Photo by Mykwain Gainey.

responded to the script and wanted to attach himself so that people could see that he supported the vision of the project.

SE: How did you and Esai develop the character together?

Rashaad Ernesto Green: Esai was very excited and willing to jump back into Bronx roots. But he has spent half of his life away from New York. He's been in LA for a couple of decades now. Getting him back into that swagger, walk and talk was sometimes a bit of a balancing act. I encouraged him to just be himself and we'd believe him. It took some convincing that what he brought the table as himself was enough – that his roots would show through. It was all in his muscle memory. It was fantastic to work with Esai. He is a real craftsman – the man is dedicated like you wouldn't believe. He puts every aspect of himself into his performance. We didn't have the most ideal circumstances – we sometimes found out where we would be shooting the day we shot it. But he had me in tears at the monitor with some of his takes. He was a joy to watch, and to have Harmony Santana [as Enrique's son] balance Esai and Judy Reyes [as the mother] out – she was so raw and opened herself in a way that kept them honest.

SE: What would you like the audience to take from your film?

Rashaad Ernesto Green: In an ideal world, I want people to have

their minds open, their hearts open, and to empathize with characters that they didn't empathize with before. We are one family. If you put love and family first, no matter what your differences are, you can get over them. Love is more important than anything. The hope is that we have this slow burn with the film and continue to expand city by city. We hope it will travel and that people will respond to the film.

SE: Would you like to continue to tell these types of stories in the future?

Rashaad Ernesto Green: I will respond as an artist to injustice and to stories that we need to shed light on in aspects of society that we are afraid to look at. I feel like the Bronx is always going to be a strong part of my storytelling – [it's] a big part of who I am. I know a lot of New York stories. But that doesn't mean that

I don't want to do other stories. It's what my heart responds to right now. I will continue to explore the things that I feel most passionate about. Right now, it's New York, but that doesn't mean that I don't want to branch out.

Since the mid-1980s, Scott Essman has been writing and producing projects about motion picture craftsmanship. He has published over 350 articles as a freelancer and has produced over twenty publicity projects for Universal Studios Home Entertainment where he made video documentaries and wrote publicity materials. He published his first book, "Freelance Writing for Hollywood," for Michael Wiese in 2000, and has a new book about Tim Burton.

Harmony Santana, Esai Morales, and Judy Reyes. Scene from *Gun Hill Road.* Photo by Mykwain Gainey.

Never Stop Shooting

The #1 Rule

by Scott Spears

Surprisingly, this is a rule that took me time to learn because when you're starting out, you tend to think in a linear fashion when on set of your feature. What I mean by that is, you make your plans for the day of the shoot and get your elements lined up to shoot, which is what everybody does, but in the world of micro-budget filmmaking, not everything goes as planned. People don't show up on time or at all, props don't work or get lost, some piece of gear breaks down or is missing, a location falls through at the last minute, etc… I remember sitting on a set waiting to shoot a scene while we waited for some element that we had planned on having and wasting valuable time, but this is something you cannot afford to do, so you need to have a plan "B", "C," and "D," and when those fail, you need to be able to think on your feet.

Here's a common problem that can kill hours in your day: actors showing up late. There are various common excuses like car problems, alarm didn't go off, I got lost, etc… But because you're most likely not paying these folks anything, you have to eat these sometimes lame excuses. Anyway, you have your crew and the other two actors in the scene standing around while you wait for the tardy actor and eat Rolaids while you see the minutes of your shoot day being eaten away. Well, you could block out the scene with a stand in (usually a production assistant or friend) while you wait. This way you have a plan, so when the actor shows, you're ready to go. Also, you can light the scene now because you know where people will be standing and moving in the scene.

So you've done all of these things and still no actor. What can you do? Start shooting! What, not everybody is there yet? You can start shooting close-ups of the actors who are on set now and then shoot the wide shot when the late actor finally appears. This can be painful sometimes, but you have to get things shot. Also if there are any close-ups of props like somebody shows an important document, holds a gun, presses a button on some device or manipulates something on the set,

Bill Pivetta (L) and Scott Spears (R).

then you can shoot a close-up of that action. Again, the key is never stop shooting.

Another thing to do is look at your schedule and see if there are any other scenes with the actors who are present that you can shoot. This may mean you'll have to do a little pre-planning in that you have the actors bring costumes for other scenes and have props for other scenes. I tend to have all the props for the entire movie handy unless there are tons of them, but on micro-budget movies you rarely have more props than what would fit in a large box. Regarding the costumes, I tend to have the actors bring all or most of the costumes with them everyday anyway, just in case.

Here's an example from a micro-budget set which we had to overcome. We had two actors in the scene and one had to present a ceremonial dagger to the other. Well guess what, the dagger was not present. The prop person forgot it. The scene revolved around this prop. Being quick thinking people we looked around the set and saw a nice hunk of cloth so we decided that the dagger would have cloth draped over it before the scene started. We grabbed a thin piece of wood to stand in for the dagger, threw the cloth over it and put in the scene. In the scene, the actor presents the cloth covered dagger and hands it to the other actor. Later, when we had the dagger, we shot an insert shot of the cloth being pulled back to reveal the dagger. The day was saved by being flexible, which is the key to micro-budget filmmaking.

Now sometimes, there are things that will shut down your shoot no matter what. If you're shooting all exteriors that day and it rains, then you're usually dead in the water, but if you have a plan "B" which could be shooting some interiors on what we call a "cover set" until the rain stops, then you could salvage the day. Also, ask yourself if any of the scenes you had planned for the day can be moved from an exterior to an interior without affecting the story.

Here's another example. Usually a camera going down will stop a shoot dead in its tracks, but you could use the time to rehearse, or if you movie has some voice over and you have access to some kind of audio recording device, you could get that voice over recorded. Again, you always have to be thinking on your feet.

Finally, sometimes you will be stuck with nothing to do and if that comes up, you need to pull the plug quickly so that you don't waste too much of people's day, but before everybody leaves set up a way to get the footage you missed shot another day, so at least you have a plan. Also, remember this rule: *do not lose your cool.* You are the captain of the ship, and if you lose it, then people will lose faith in you. Now this does not mean you don't get angry, but don't go off the handle. You apologize to the people who showed up and tell them you will make sure that when you meet for the next shoot all will run smoothly.

Photos courtesy of the author.

Scott Spears is an Emmy Award winning Director of Photography with 30 features under his belt. He's also written several feature screenplays, some of which have been made into movies. You can learn more about him at: www.scottspears.net

Just Do Them

The Five Keys to Mastery

by David Lent

Celebrated author George Leonard, an architect of the Human Potential Movement and an Aikido instructor for thirty–four years, observed that those among his students who consistently excelled shared common traits. He called these traits "the five keys to mastery."

In the November, 1989 issue of *Esquire Magazine*, Leonard published his discovery, using examples of top professional athletes who applied the five keys to their sport. The article triggered an electrifying insight. As a cameraman – a professional listener – for eighteen years, I had heard success formulas from hundreds of accomplished people in as many variations. But Leonard's formula was revolutionary. By reducing a mountain of information about success into a simple pattern of five essential elements, he made mastery – even greatness – accessible to everyone.

With my partner Susan Burgess-Lent, I embarked on a cross-country mission to test Leonard's theory. We shot interviews with sixteen extraordinary people, including BB King, Carlos Santana, Nobel Prize winners, Olympic gold medalists, entrepreneurs, an actor, a software architect and a fashion model. We asked each of them, "How did you become so successful?"

Dave shooting George Leonard teaching Aikido. Photo credit: Jamie Kooser.

KEY #1

Surrender to Your Passion

AKA: Answer your calling, follow your bliss, follow your heart, go for it, be yourself, do you, jump in, play your position.

I felt as if the California sun was shining just for me one summer afternoon at Stinson Beach in 1971. That was the day I was introduced, by Fron Jacob, a local 'video freak', to a Sony Portapac—the first portable video camera. He lent it to me for a week; It was love at first sight. This miracle-child of electronic technology became my constant companion, my meal ticket, my drug. After a thousand or so hours of intimacy and practice, I had acquired a working fluency with the camera and, more importantly, I had discovered My Voice.

Discovering your passion.
Imagine there is a piece of metal somewhere in your body. Outside your body is a large magnet. Think of the metal as a built-in *proclivity*— something in your genetic or environmental architecture that makes you uniquely receptive to certain activities, or pulls you in a specific direction. Perhaps you were born with a resonant voice, a million dollar smile or the grace of an athlete. Maybe you were raised in an environment that nurtured a critical eye, a love for working with your hands or a gift for problem-solving.

Each of us comes into the world loaded with gifts and the potential for great achievement. Like our one-of-a-kind faces and personalities, these gifts are ways to express ourselves to the world – our voice. Throughout our lives, this voice calls to us; sometimes in a whisper, other times as a roar. Recognizing it—or not, answering it—or not, determines the path we will take and the life we will live.

"When you follow your bliss, that thing that truly electrifies you, four things automatically happen: 1. You put yourself in the path of good luck; 2. You meet the people you want to know; 3. Doors open where there weren't doors before; and 5. Doors open for you that wouldn't open for anybody else."—Joseph Campbell

Hearing these words, during a 1986 PBS interview with Bill Moyers, took my breath away. I knew from experience he was right, but I

A shot of Dave and his two partners, John Antonelli and Marino Colmano at Warner Brothers, after signing a contract to produce a featurette about the film Straight Time. Photo credit: Marino Colmano.

had never heard anyone articulate the concept. From that moment on, I never again doubted the wisdom of my decision to follow my passion for the camera.

Like most people, I've indulged countless passions: acting, inventing, underwater photography, football, pizza–making, blackjack, photography and video. Looking back, I see how these passions were part of a larger mosaic, a deeper, lifelong passion. Each expressed the connection and elation I feel when I *turn people on.* Turning people on is what I am designed to do.

If you haven't yet discovered your passion, here are a couple of questions that will help point you in the right direction. Play along with me here.

Imagine that money is no longer an issue for you. You have all the money you'll ever need to support yourself and everyone you love for the rest of your life. You've traveled everywhere you want to go. Now, how are you spending your time? Answer in the present tense. (Don't say, „I would be…" or „I'd like to…" Instead, say, „I am…doing this.")

Remember the last time you felt truly *electrified* by something you were doing. What about that experience made you feel so alive? Write it down.

KEY #2

Get a Guide

AKA: Mentor, teacher, coach, advisor, tutor, role model, consultant, counselor, instructor, trainer, guiding spirit, master, confidante, friend, partner.

When you follow your passion, good luck wants to come along for the ride. Three years into my fledgling career, I met and became partners with the gifted San Francisco photographer Marino Colmano, who taught me how to compose an image, work inconspicuously, and appreciate the beauty of natural light. Our third partner, John Antonelli, was—and is—a masterful writer and producer. While collaborating with Marino and John on a series of groundbreaking documentaries I learned the basic skill set from which I grew my career. And because they were Italians, we always ate well.

As my career unfolded, I often found myself working alongside some of the best shooters, audio recordists,

producers and reporters in the world. I watched how they worked, picked their brains, and—because most people love to share their wisdom—was richly rewarded with new information.

How does one find a guide? One way is to identify a seasoned professional whose work you admire and ask for a mentoring relationship. If rejected, keep looking. Once you've found a guide, develop ways the relationship can benefit both of you. You may have skills to barter, such as marketing, bookkeeping or writing.

It was late in my career before I fully understood the value of a good teacher. Now I know that the level of competence I reached after twenty years could have been accomplished, with the guidance of a mentor, in ten.

Dave using the barrel of a tank as a tripod for shooting the remains of the Kuwaiti Royal Palace on Liberation Day, January 25, 1991. Photo Credit: Mike Cerre.

KEY #3

Practice. Practice. Practice.

AKA: experience, failure, success, commitment, diligence, persistence, patience, perseverance, dedication, tenacity, repetition, baby steps, showing up, just do it, study, repetition, rehearse, work out, trial and error, keep your nose to the grindstone.

"A practice (as a noun) can be anything you practice on a regular basis as an integral part of your life—not in order to gain something else, but for its own sake. It might be a sport or a martial art. It might be gardening or yoga or community service. A doctor practices medicine and an attorney practices law, and each of them also <u>has</u> a practice. But if the practice is only a collection of patients or clients, a way of making a living, it isn't a master's practice. For a master, the rewards gained along the way are fine, but they are not the main reason for the journey. Ultimately, the master and the master's path are one. And if the traveler is fortunate—that is, if the path is complex and profound enough—the destination is two miles farther away for every mile he or she travels." —George Leonard

George observed that if you study any activity, you'll find people performing at four different levels of participation.

1. **The Dabbler.** The Dabbler's learning curve rises quickly, meets an obstacle and then drops to zero. The dabbler gives up the activity and goes on to another, repeating the same curve.

2. **The Obsessive.** The Obsessive's learning curve rises quickly, meets an obstacle, which The Obsessive tackles by redoubling his or her effort, getting more books and tools and trying to figure out ways to get better

results faster and cheaper, and then burns out in a short while when s/he finds that the curve is not a straight line upwards.

3. **The Hacker.** The Hacker's learning curve rises quickly, meets an obstacle or two and then plateaus out on a straight line. The Hacker doesn't consider the need for more instruction or rising above that level. S/he is content with the level reached and plans to stay there.

4. **The Master.** The Master's learning curve rises quickly, plateaus for a while, and with consistent practice, rises again with some regression and plateaus again for a while and so on. The Master knows that Mastery is a lifetime path. The Master enjoys living on the plateau. –GL

Love the plateau. Mastering anything *takes as long as it takes*. There will be times when you think you're beating your head against a wall, not making any headway. But you are. It's just hard to see because progress uses baby steps. Real progress is made *on The Plateau*. If you keep at it, you'll experience a growth spurt. It might be a new client, an award, critical acclaim, a breakthrough—then you'll realize you've arrived on the *next* plateau.

Do what you have to do. "Money gigs" is my term for jobs that pay the bills and finance the growth of your passion. While it's a good idea to find money gigs that relate in some way to the work you want to be doing, *do whatever you have to do* to survive. Waiting tables, for instance, is a no-brainer: positions open up all the

time, you learn valuable skills, meet a lot of people and always have cash in your pocket. And you never know who's sitting at a table waiting to meet you.

Get a room. Make your desk/office a place you like to be – clean, well organized, comfortable and homey.

Just Show up. Growing relationships is key to making a living as a shooter. Make time for prospecting. Dedicate an hour or so

Dave with early Panasonic camera.

each week to contacting potential clients. Let them know who you are and what you have to offer. In this way you can begin to build relationships that can grow and prosper. The day you call just might be the day one of them needs help. It's often a matter of timing.

Before moving from California to Washington, DC in the summer of 1990, I sent a half dozen sample reels to perspective news clients. One afternoon, while strolling through DC's Union Station, I

realized I was in the vicinity of a production company I had sent a tape to but hadn't heard back from. I walked to their office and rang the doorbell. A producer opened the door.

"Hi, I'm Dave Lent, a freelance shooter from San Francisco. I'm running low on sample tapes and figured, since I was in the neighborhood, I could get my reel back from you?"

"So you're Dave Lent! Want to go to Saudi Arabia?"

"Uh…yes!"

"Then go to the embassy, fill out your visa application, and stay close to the phone." Seventy-two hours later I was on a flight to Riyhad for a lucrative thirty-day assignment at the mountaintop hideout of the exiled Kuwaiti government and royal family.

Get a foot in the door. The position you want may not be available but another, perhaps less fulfilling role, might be and may open a door to bigger and better opportunities.

During a lean period in the late 80s, I heard about a production company on the Sausalito waterfront just minutes from my home. Globe TV was doing stories all over the world for the A&E Network. "This is for me!" I decided. I called their office every week for a month or so, with no luck. I called again. "Dave, can you edit?" I said that I could and was hired on the spot. Between editing sessions I badgered Mike

Cerre, Globe's chief correspondent, about sending me to France to produce a segment about The Paris Air Show at Le Bourget Field. Mike soon warmed to the idea and gave me the assignment. That trip led to another shoot in Sudan. Once you get your foot in the door…

Be your own PR agent. Carry business cards. Record a professional outgoing message on your voice mail. Keep your phone turned on 24/7 and close to you at all times. Set up a website, blog or Facebook page with links to *brief* samples of your best work.

KEY #4

Visualize the Outcome

AKA: imagine, determination, dream, break it down, focus, mind-set, plan, goal, deadline, objective, 'to do' list, frame the problem, strategize, keep your eyes on the prize, build a model, go for the gold.

Visualization is the process of creating an image to represent the outcome of something you intend to do or to have. When you decide on something you want, create

a detailed image of it in your mind. Think big, so you won't be disappointed when what you achieve isn't quite all that you had in mind. Then put it outside of your mind, in a tangible form that you will see every day, such as a photo, drawing, affirmation or scale model. Write on it, *in the present tense*, "My House," "The view from our cottage in the Caribbean," "My new camera," etc.

KEY #5

Play the Edge

AKA: the sky's the limit, kick it up, think outside the box, push the envelope, give it 110%, dig deep, raise the bar, go for broke, no pain no gain, no guts no glory, up the ante, all in.

Playing the Edge begins by identifying your boundaries and pushing them outwards, eventually turning limitations into strengths. As the actor Stephen Tobolowsky put it succinctly: "If you find that you are comfortable, you're doing something wrong."

The BP Deepwater Horizon disaster in June, 2010 wasn't a "spill." It was an *eruption*—more like an underwater Mt. St. Helens

than the Exxon Valdez. With producer Dave Hammelburg, I got an assignment to shoot the story for ARD German Television. One morning, at an air base in southern Louisiana, we joined several other crews on a Coast Guard CH144 for a thirty–minute flight to the gutted oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico.

The aircraft had a rear cargo door that opened downward, allowing each of us to have about a minute to shoot what remained of the rig and the cleanup operation. Our pilot made several passes over the site so each shooter would have a turn. I got decent shots, but felt frustrated. Just when the rig came into view, the airplane banked to the right, allowing little time for a sustained shot revealing the scope of this other-worldly scene. Had I the presence of mind to ask the pilot, "On the next pass, can you fly straight for just ten more seconds over the rig before making the turn?", the answer might have been, "You betcha!" The lesson: When you think you have a chance to do something extraordinary, with only one shot at it, don't hold back. Ask for exactly what you want. The boundaries might exist only in your mind.

A good way to think about The 5 Keys to Mastery is by imagining you're an airplane. The 5 Keys are your engines. As you learn to use each one, you gain power and lift. When all five are purring in harmony, there's no limit to how high and how far you can fly.

What you won't find on a path of mastery are shortcuts or quick fixes. Believe me, I've looked everywhere. There will be countless pitfalls along the way, but don't get too discouraged when you stumble and fall; that's where the learning takes

place. You'll recover your footing and get back on your path, provided you're *willing to do the work.*

With passion, guidance, practice, vision and willingness to stretch your boundaries, lifelong success is yours for the making. If you want proof, just do them.

David Lent's career in television spans thirty-five years. David co-produced and shot the critically acclaimed PBS special "Life Without…Inside San Quentin." With Susan Burgess-Lent, he co-produced the documentary feature "Staying Alive," based on Studs Terkel's best seller "Working." David currently works as a news and documentary cameraman for numerous domestic and international clients including BBC, CNBC, BRAVO, FOX News, MTV, GRANADA, TV ASAHI, YLE, ARD, and ORF. David is the author of "The Laws of Camerawork" and soon to be released book, "Video Rules."

FADE IN

Those all important and ominous words…

by David Worth

In today's cyberspace, there is an abundance of information about the art and craft of filmmaking. But there only seems to be a handful of truly meaningful books when it comes to learning the various crafts necessary for film production: producing, directing, production management, production design, lighting, cinematography, sound, editing and post-production. However, there are literally hundreds of books on screenwriting… Why? Because writing a script can be an ineffable and nearly impossible task and nobody seems to have a direct and precise answer when it comes to defining these terms.

Yes, there are hundreds if not thousands of precise answers when it comes to film production. The pre-production, production and post-production workflow is well documented and more or less written in stone. The Producer has to make sure that the money, distribution, cast and crew are in place. The Director has to prepare the script and cast and stay on schedule. The Cinematographer has to arrange the lighting and make sure the camera has the proper lens, film, tape or a memory card for capturing the scene. The editor has to assess that there is enough coverage to make the scene work and that the dialogue in the shot is in sync. Etc… Etc… Etc…

However, when it comes to the art and craft of script writing, there seems to be very few precise answers but an awful lot of opinions… The Protagonist and Antagonist, The Quest, The Heroes Journey, The Turning Point, The Reversal On A Reversal, Act 1, Act 2, Act 3, Act 4, Act 5… Lots of ways to skin or indeed to Save The Cat! That could be because whatever works, works and the formula for what works seems to be in a constant state of flux. Doesn't the abundance of books on the subject of writing, rewriting and endlessly analyzing screenplay writing, point to the fact that if anyone actually had the answer about how to write a good script, *there would not be so many bad scripts*?

And then the only constant in Hollywood might cease to be the sequel and the remake of yet another superhero movie or some long forgotten comic book or TV series!

Basically, if you have a degree in writing or have written a successful script, you have the absolute authority to write a book about how to follow your example. Unfortunately, it does not seem to work that way. If it did everyone who read your book and applied them selves, should write a successful script.

Let's consider what actually goes into the writing, of the screenplay… After a prolonged period of research, self doubt, scribbling ideas and procrastination, the writer at long last sits before his keyboard and reluctantly types those ominous words: FADE IN…

What The F#@k Comes Next? Oh sure, there's the outline, the index cards, the notes, the rambling pocket tape recordings concerning "theme" and "structure". But precisely, exactly where and how to begin? Flashbacks? Voice-overs? A Detailed Pre-credit Crawl? Of course, we must have a grab-you-by-the-throat beginning, a meaningful and compelling middle and a slam-bang thrilling ending… But as Godard has wisely stated, "…not necessarily in that order…"

Where, oh where, oh where to begin…

Until the writer has wrestled with these demons and answered all of the above questions: Guess what, *nobody has a job!*

Especially not the writer, because they are usually writing the script on spec. Not the producer, because they have not as yet been offered the pitch, the treatment or the first draft. Not the director, because they have not as yet been asked by the producer to read the property and come on board. Not the actors because they have not as yet been offered any of the parts. Not the cinematographer, production manager, assistant directors, wardrobe, make up, props, grips, electricians, teamsters, craft service… *Nobody has a job!*

So not only is facing the blank page or computer screen *the hardest job in showbiz*, it is arguably the most important, since without the script, there is no film, there is no production, there is no project, there is no job and no one goes to work. The writer makes it all happen! How, you may ask, can a person possibly shoulder all of that responsibility?

He or she simply sits and exists *a l o n e,* that is spelled, A L O N E, literally has to pull the literal out of the ethereal, has to conjure up the screenplay out of their wits and imagination, word by word, line by line, scene by scene, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, and often, month by month, and year by year.

Hanging on to reality with their bitten and bloody fingernails, escaping insanity and doom by the skin of their teeth. *This is not for the faint of heart!* This is a Homeric, heroic and extraordinary undertaking! This is finding the strength to will the impossible into existence and make it entirely possible. This is faith in the unknown carried to its most daring and absurd heights.

The hardest job in showbiz… *indeed!*

Right… but now let's look at all of this from entirely another perspective. While it's always highly recommended to have the best of all possible scripts, penned by the likes of a David Mamet or a Neil LaBute… Successful filmmaking in and of it self, can also be an ephemeral and imprecise art. If not, then why do so many of our greatest and most gifted filmmakers pray and plead and prod every day of production for the unexpected, the happy accidents, or the magic of catching lightning in a bottle…

And while the theater is almost entirely dependent on a finished script, not so the filmmaker. There have been any number of highly successful groundbreaking films made from outlines, improvised or actually written during production: *Intolerance*, *Casablanca* and *Jaws* come to mind, not to mention *Shadows*, *Breathless*, *A Man and a Woman*, *The Blair Witch Project* and *Once*.

Why? Because Cinema is Cinema and as Elia Kazan has said, "90 percent of the job is casting…" That being the case… *If* you have the right charismatic actors on camera and your material is *compelling*… the audience will watch and be enthralled. The actor's subtext will fill in the spaces "between the lines" and you will have miraculously created a film, a movie… Cinema out of the ether of the ethereal…

If you also happen to be fortunate enough to have a meaningful musical score, like *A Man and a Woman*, or *Once*, you win the Academy Award for Best Foreign Film or Best Original Song. So what have you got to lose?…

Get a DSLR and Final Cut Pro, and Get Off Your A--!

Make Movies Not War…

David Worth's credits include being the Director of Photography on two Clint Eastwood films,"Bronco Billy" and "Any Which Way You Can." He was also the DP of the original, "Bloodsport" and the Director of the original, "Kickboxer" starring Jean-Claude Van Damme. He directed the thrillers, "Time Lapse" with Roy Scheider and "The Prophet's Game" with Dennis Hopper and his most recent production is the horror/thriller, "Hardhat." David's book, "The Citizen Kane Crash Course in Cinematography," can be ordered from www.amazon.com. Read it and feel free to contact David if you have any questions at davidworthfilm@gmail.com.

www.davidworthfilm.com

Another Happy Day

by Naomi Laeuchli

Sam Levinson left school when he was fourteen years old and he's never gone back. "I wrote my entire life," he says, "I always wanted to write and I always wanted to direct...as long as I can remember it's just what I wanted to do... I don't really see them as different jobs to be honest, I just see them as two sides of the same coin."

Growing up, Levinson watched five films a day, "And I'm not joking when I say that," he says, "Which sounds insane and is actually insane... *Contempt* by Godard – I think when I first saw that film I watched it ten times back-to-back. I just couldn't get away from it. It's a film that just disturbed me so deeply and I was in such awe of it that I needed to just watch it over and over again to understand it – to understand how it was put together and how it was accomplished."

Among the many films that affected, inspired and influenced him, Levinson says *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*, also by Jean-Luc Godard, was a prominent one. "There's a scene where the two women are driving up to meet their boyfriends," explains Levinson, "And [Godard] shows all the various ways in which you can shoot this scene and talks about what's the best way to convey the emotions of this scene... He goes through all these various options, plays the scene over and over and over again, and then finally it ends on just a shot of the trees and he says in voice-over, '...or maybe you simply just show the trees rustling in the wind.' And that right there is like a year's worth of film school for me."

Levinson wrote and directed *Another Happy Day* which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival (2011) and for which Levinson won the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award. *Another Happy Day* follows Lynn (played by Ellen Barkin), a middle-aged woman who is thrown into a dramatic family reunion while attending her son's wedding.

"I sat down and I just started writing...I didn't outline at all; I didn't really know where it was going. I just sort of let it find its own way," Levinson says about the script. "And some of the themes that I think were stuck in my head that I couldn't quite shake – was the idea of that gap that we all have between what we mean to say and what we ultimately say, and trying to explore the motivations behind the actions of others. Because I feel like that's sort of the root of all evil in a family or in a country or in this universe... is this idea that we can't communicate with one another, we simply react to someone else's action rather than try to understand and explore the motivation that propelled that action. Also, the very simple idea of trying to find one's place in the universe, what gives meaning to something."

In regards to his influences, Levinson says, "I'm greatly influenced by theater and by playwrights, and I would certainly say that most especially Chekhov in that fine line that he walks between humor and tragedy... And it's something that I set out to apply to this film."

Levinson says he reads lots of plays. "I think it's important just in terms of history and the history of writing. Film is only of the last century, so what about everything that came before? So I think I'd be remiss if I didn't immerse myself in everything I possibly could that came before."

Born in Taipei, Taiwan, Naomi Laeuchli has lived overseas in nine different countries where her family has been posted with the American foreign service. Currently located in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Naomi studies screenwriting and works as a freelance writer.

Priorities of Recording

The Process of Establishing Your Game Plan

by Fred Ginsburg, C.A.S., Ph.D., MBKS

What are the objectives or goals of the Production Mixer? When a mixer arrives on a set, there are a set of priorities that we follow in planning out *what* and *how* to record. This article will lead you through the thought process of establishing your *game plan* or *approach* of which soundtrack elements need to be recorded.

Dialogue

The number one priority for Production Sound is to get usable *dialogue*. The editor needs crisp, clean performances in order to convey the script. Use any technique that you can to insure that all of the dialogue is sharp and usable for the big screen. Don't worry yet about perspective, sound effects or backgrounds – all of that can be achieved in post-production if necessary. Right now, just concentrate on being able to clearly hear everything that the actors are saying.

Even if you are sure that the dialogue will need to be replaced by ADR or "looping", always strive to get the best audio that you can. During the ADR session, actors rely on listening intently to the "scratch track" in order to time their delivery for lip synch, but also to re-create the emotional mood and intensity of the original performance.

Another reason to always bring home the best dialogue possible, even if you know that it will probably be looped, is: job security. If you just give up on the task, and record only a minimal quality "scratch track" – the producers may question the need for a high quality sound mixer such as you. It is possible that you will be let go from the production, and replaced by a less experienced, albeit less expensive, soundperson. Why pay someone the big bucks for only a low grade scratch track?

On the other hand, if you continually demonstrate that a usable, original dialogue track would be possible, say if it hadn't been for the noisy generator – then the person risking replacement might more likely be the gaffer or the generator operator!

Control Perspective

Only after you are confident that all of the dialogue will be captured crisp and clean, begin to consider recording with proper perspective. By perspective, we mean that the audio heard by the audience should roughly match the camera point-of-view. Of course it may not match the POV absolutely realistically; some allowance for poetic license must be granted, or we would never hear actors in a long shot!

A common mistake for novice mixers is to record close-ups louder than medium and long shots. This happens a lot because when close-ups are boomed from above, the microphone is ideally placed relatively close to the actor. During the wider takes, the boom needs to be further away – thus resulting in lower volume.

But when these various camera angles are intercut, the abrupt changes in volume are annoying and unnatural. Use your mixing panel to lower the volume on close-ups so as to match your medium wide shots. The only time the volume should vary from close-up to wider shot is when the actor notably walks further away from the established POV. Volume can change for perceived *distance*, but should not change for *angle of view.*

What really changes when we go from a tight shot to a wider angle is the viewer's perception of ambiance. In real life, volume changes but little when someone converses with you from only a couple feet away, and then backs off to several feet. What does change, though, is how your brain filters the data stream.

When we are "zoomed in" on a close face, our brain tends to filter out background information. We "see" in a close-up. Think tunnel vision. At the same time, we stop paying attention to background sound and just listen intently to the person staring us in the face. It is a mental illusion that we no longer hear the more distant sounds of our environment.

But when a person steps further back, we "zoom out" and observe more of them and their surroundings. At the same time, our brain wants to hear more of the surrounding environment, and we become aware of more noises.

Therefore, in cinema, we can re-create this mental process by controlling how much background we allow into our soundtrack. Close-ups should be primarily dialogue only. Wider angles should consist of a subtle blend of dialogue (no change in volume) and a little more background ambiance.

When the actors are miked with an overhead boom, this blend occurs naturally and automatically. When the mic is closer overhead, we record cleaner dialogue and less background. Move the mic further away, and more background sound joins the dialogue.

However, if the actors are wearing lavaliers, all of the close-ups and wider angles will sound exactly the same, since the mic remains in the same relative place. We can correct for this by using our boom mic to pick up general ambiance and possibly some sound effects (such as footsteps). Gently mix just a touch of audio from this "bleed mic" into the soundtrack to simulate a wider perspective, and minimize the background during close-ups.

Beware of common perspective mis-matches. Most of these are caused by improper boom placement.

For example, a front to back mismatch will occur should the actor move forward, approaching the camera, but is being boomed from deep in the set (away from camera). When the actor is deep in the set, the boom had no problem keeping the actor under the mic. But as the actor moves forward, the boom cannot keep up with him, and begins to mic the actor from the (actor's) back. Then, as the actor moves even closer to the lens, the distance from the mic keeps increasing. So instead of the actor sounding like they are close to the audience, the resulting audio sounds like the actor has turned his back and walked further away! Solution: the boom operator should walk parallel to the actor to maintain relative position; or let the actor begin further away from the mic and walk towards the boom (which is near camera rather than being downstage).

A similar problem will result if the actor walks side to side across the set (or perpendicular to the lens), and the boom operator is locked into a position that prevents the mic from keeping up with the movement. From the camera POV, the actor's relative frame remains constant (assuming the camera dollies or pans with the actor), yet the resulting audio will drift in and out. Once again, the solution is to encourage the boom operator to parallel the movement of the actor, or to swing the boom from near the camera in order to maintain position above the actor.

Finally, be cautious when mixing between the boom mic and other mics that may be deployed around the set (including lavs worn by actors). Pay attention to the relative perspective. For example, a "plant" mic hidden deep in the set, further away from camera, should sound weaker than the boom mic, which may be closer to the lens. Use the deep mic in order to pick up some dialogue that the boom may not be able to reach, but use just enough volume to achieve clarity without the plant mic sounding overwhelming. The name of the game is *subtle*.

Sync Sound Effects

Recording sync sound effects can really help the editor, but strive not to risk dialogue by recording overlapping effects. If a sound effect falls between words, then it is no problem for the editor to drop it to another track and deal with it independently. But when a sound effect

coincides over dialogue, then the editor is stuck with it as recorded.

You may think that just be adding another mic, and assigning the sound effect to its own recording channel will solve your problem, but sounds on a set tend to carry over and most likely will still be picked up by the dialogue mic.

If the sound effect is the result of the actor, then politely explain to the Director or Assistant Director why it is a problem and ask him or her to adjust the performance. The Mixer should never shout instructions to the actor directly; always follow the set etiquette. Sometimes the director may refer the actor to hearing an instruction from the Mixer, and that is okay so long as the director made that call.

Some simple solutions include: timing the sound effect so as to fall between words; faking the action so as to avoid making the effect (and then adding the sound effect in post); replacing a hard prop with a rubberized or soft one; replacing a hard surface with something softer to impact; or even cheating the camera angle.

Wild Lines

There are three basic categories of wild lines: off-camera; hidden lips; and protection tracks.

Off-camera or off-stage dialogue is pretty familiar to everybody. It is the voice on the other end of the phone, or the voice coming from behind the door. Or maybe it is the (person) hiding behind the drapes.

Hidden or distant faces. If you cannot read the lips, then synch does not matter. When clear view of the speaker's lips are hidden by a prop, set piece, or mask – those lines of dialogue can easily be dropped in by the editor.

If the actor has their back to camera, lip synch is no longer an issue. Concentrate on getting good dialogue from the actor that we *do* see! Be careful to avoid overlaps, so as not to ruin the quality of the visible actor. When the shot angle is reversed, you will have an opportunity to record clean dialogue of the (first) actor. Dramatic overlapping of lines can be achieved by editing the good dialogue of the (unseen) actor underneath the synch dialogue of the partner.

If an actor is rather distant (i.e. small in the frame), it is a simple matter to paste a wild line in to represent his performance. That can save you from having to run extra-long mic cables or to use up a radio mic.

Complex master shots from hell *(panic when you see the words steadicam, motorcycle, cherry picker, and helicopter all in the same shot description!)* can be simplified by use of wild lines and borrowed dialogue. When the camera and actors are all moving quickly through a scene, it is very difficult to discern lip synch. Clean dialogue can usually be grabbed from the series of close-ups that are inevitable. Should the frame actually stay on an actor's face long enough and close enough to reveal lip synch, then it is merely an exercise in sound cutting for the editor to carve the wild audio to fit acceptably. I usually concentrate on getting the audio of the supporting cast members who will not be covered in subsequent close-ups, since there will be no future opportunities to "steal good dialogue" for them.

The third category of Wild Lines are what we refer to as Protection tracks.

Sometimes it is a lot easier for the editor to just manually cut in a short section of dialogue than to wait for a formal ADR session. Or perhaps the actor is just appearing out of courtesy or for a brief cameo, and will not be available for any future re-recording session. Before the actors leave the set (permanently), it can be valuable to just have them read through all of their lines so that you can get clean coverage.

If the script contains profanity, it is also prudent to record some alternate readings. Even though an R rating may be okay for theatrical release, one never knows what the future may bring. A PG version might be needed in a few years for television, or some other conservative market.

Along this same line of thinking, pay attention to any actual references of names, brands, trademarks, models, etc. The lawyers who initially approved the original script may be pressured into changing their minds, and having some alternate dialogue archived could come in handy.

Wild Sound Effects

Wild Sound Effects are sound effects that just play underneath a scene, and do not have a specific visual reference that they have to synch to. Or, if there is a starting frame or ending frame for the effect – it would be very simple for the editor to lay the effect in. For example, a door slam. Or turning a blender on. The wild sound effect is either non-sync or a simple sync.

These effects are recorded "wild" without picture and devoid of any dialogue. If you cannot record a good effect on the set, then they can readily be recorded or downloaded from an effects library in post. However, editors really appreciate it when you can supply them with good effects and save them the extra labor.

Background Effects are wild recordings that can be laid under a scene in order to establish the location as well as to convey a continuity of events. For example, a scene that supposedly takes place at lunchtime in a New York apartment may have actually been filmed over a few days, and at all hours of the day. After the scene has been cut, a wild recording of continuous "city traffic from outside the window" might be laid under it, to create the illusion that it was all shot in "real time".

Background Effects are captured as good as possible, using the best available mics, optimum record levels, and optimum mic placement. Sometimes, we even opt to record the backgrounds in stereo or surround. Bear in mind that Background Effects are distinctly different than Room Tone/Ambiance!

If the time and situation permit, I also try to gather any unique sound effects or background tracks that may be available – even if they do not pertain to the current production. Editors love to collect exotic sounds for their working library; making them a gift of some rare effects will earn their gratitude (and that could lead to future referrals).

Ambiance or Room Tone

Although last in this list, capturing the Room Tone is one of the most important tasks to be performed. Room Tone differs from Background Effects and is used very differently during editing.

Whereas Background Effects are clean recordings intended to suggest environment and continuity to a scene, the Room Tone is a "dirty" slug of audio used to patch the holes in the dialogue.

During a dialogue scene, noise may occur that needs to be lifted out of the track. Examples may be a cue from the Director, or a distracting noise. If these problems fall in between words, then the editor cuts them out of the track and just leaves blank fill.

But the blank fill will stand out like white spackling on a gray wall! Instead of pure silence, the editor really wants to replace the noise with the exact same background audio that would have been recorded during a pause in the middle of a sentence. We want the "silence" to have been recorded with the same mic as the ongoing dialogue, from the same angle, and at the same recording level. Whatever slight sounds are on the set during the dialogue should also be present during the Room Tone. That includes actors, crew, lights, and everything else that would be present during the filming of the scene.

In other words, we want to apply dirty gray spackle to a dirty gray wall. Otherwise, our filler may be too perfect for what we need it to do.

Unfortunately, too many sound mixers wait until the scene is wrapped before they attempt to record room tone. After everyone has left the set, and the lights are struck – all that remains to be captured is an empty tomb of a stage.

Review of Priorities

Dialogue. Crisp, clean, usable.

Perspective. Does what we hear match what we see?

Sync Sound Effects. Never overlap the dialogue. Fake it when possible.

Wild Lines. If you cannot see the lips, then cheat it!

Wild Sound Effects. Clean, background tracks to enhance the illusion.

Ambiance or Room Tone. The sound of a dialogue scene without anyone talking.

My approach is to go for the Room Tone just before the first take of each major location or scene. Do it just before the clapstick, while everyone is poised for a take. As the Assistant Director calls out to "Roll Sound" – that is when I announce that we are recording 30 seconds of room tone.

Doing it on (before) the first take is important, because after that the actors and Director may establish a rhythm. Directors hate to break that rhythm and may resent waiting for Room Tone when they really want to shoot another take as quickly as possible.

Of course, the crew will never stand around silently for 30 whole seconds. After just several seconds, the room will buzz with dozens of whispered conversations. But if you can get just a little bit of good ambiance, then the editors will be grateful. When the noise becomes audible, just move ahead and tell them to shoot the scene.

One other way that I record some extra Room Tone is to take a deep breath and enjoy a Zen moment after voice slating the take and before I shout "Speed". That will give the editor and extra second or two of Room Tone for every shot. Similarly, after the Director calls to "Cut" – I always let the recorder continue for a few moments. If anyone complains, I tell them that we need the extra footage for when we digitize into the Avid, as the system tends to cut off the first few and last few frames. (Not completely true, but everyone accepts the explanation.)

Fred Ginsburg, C.A.S., Ph.D., MBKS is a specialist in production sound recording for motion pictures and video. His background includes nearly two decades as a sound mixer on feature films, episodic television, commercials, as well as corporate and government. His long list of credits include "Beverly Hills 90210," "St. Elsewhere," "A-Team," "Love Boat," "MASH," "Hawaii 5-O," "Platoon," "The Island," "Clear and Present Danger," "Terminator 2," and "Patriot Games." Author of over one hundred technical articles and one textbook, Fred is currently an Adjunct Professor at California State University Northridge and Columbia College Hollywood.

Show Me Your License

4 Options for Licensing Music

by John Manchester

Music libraries, more accurately described as *production* music libraries, supply music for productions. Why do you need one? Can't you just use whatever you want from your CD collection? *No.* If you want to do just about anything with recorded music aside from listen to it, federal law requires you to get one or more *licenses* from two parties:

(1.) The publisher of the music.

(2.) The owner of the sound recording.

The Licenses

(1.) Synchronization License. If you are making a production, a *synchronization license* gives you the right to marry music with other media, such as visuals, sound effects and voice-over.

(2.) Mechanical License. If you want to make copies of your production, for example, on DVD, you will also need a *mechanical license.*

(3.) Performing License. If your production is to be played in public you need a performing license. For this purpose the definition of "public" is broad, encompassing everything from broadcast radio and TV, and cable; to websites, YouTube videos, music-on-hold and phone apps. Here it gets a little complicated, because Performing Rights Organizations such as ASCAP and BMI sell licenses to many of the outlets where productions are performed. In these cases a producer is not required to get a performing license, as it's already been granted by ASCAP or BMI. But the producer needs to check.

Options for Licensing Music

(1.) Mainstream Music. If you wish to use music on a record with a major or independent record company, you need licenses from both the record label (for the sound recording) and the publisher (for the song.) These parties are usually different. It typically takes many phone calls over several months to negotiate with both parties. If you're lucky the license will cost only $500; not so lucky and it could be $50,000. I've seen cases where the answer is simply no, you can't use the piece you want for any price.

(2.) A Composer. The right composer with a sophisticated computer music system can make you a nice custom score. But it's still going to take him some time to produce the music, and what if you don't like what he does? More time, and maybe more money. To increase the odds that you'll like what the composer makes and that it won't take until next year for her to do it, you need someone with talent and experience, not your cousin who recently got Garage Band. That's going to cost at least several thousand dollars. And what if you need a piece that has live instruments? Now we're talking going the New York, and big bucks.

(3.) Music in the Public Domain. Say you want to use a piece of Mozart. In the US, music written before 1923 is in the public domain, which exempts you from getting a license from a publisher. *However,* you still need to get licenses for the sound recording. So unless you know someone who plays well and you know how to record them, you're back having to contact a record company.

All of which might lead you to….

(4.) A Music Library. Production music libraries have a great variety of music, pre-recorded. The better ones have, when appropriate, hired live musicians; first call New York cats and European orchestras. Prices for most applications are set. Even in the case where a price needs to be negotiated, it can be done in a few minutes. With an online library, you can browse for what you want, and download it along with a license and pay with a credit card for as low as $45.

Now, if you still need to use that song by Prince…

John Manchester has published over 500 pieces of production music. His music is broadcast daily worldwide on programs and commercials. He played guitar for Livingston Taylor, opening for Linda Ronstadt and Fleetwood Mac. He co-wrote songs with Livingston which are on the Epic label. John is the owner of the Manchester Music Library at www.manchestermusiclibrary.com.

How to **Make Money** in the Film Business

Two Methods to Consider

by Stacey Parks

How do you make any money in this business anyway? Believe me, I'm the first one to promote and rally behind all the new distribution and even financing possibilities that exist for filmmakers right now. But, the main problem seems to be that many filmmakers are still sitting around scratching your heads saying, "I didn't decide to go into this line of work to aim low and make ultra low budget films for the tiniest of budgets and have to defer everyone's salaries including my own and not be able to even sustain myself."

So here's the way I see it. Right now there are two ways to go about making a decent living in the film business:

1. **Make films for the *studio* pipeline** (whether financed independently or by the studios themselves). And by *studio* I mean both the Studios (Sony, Universal, etc.) and the mini-majors (Lions Gate, Summit, etc.). In this model you may not have full ownership or control of your material, but you will get paid a producers and/or writers fee and hopefully some back-end profits down the line. Obviously back-end when you're first starting out is elusive at best, but at least you'll get paid a fee up front. (Obviously I'm not referring to selling your finished films to this pipeline, rather making them within this system). Note: this is not by any means the easy route when you are just starting out in your career and is more applicable if you have a couple projects under your belt and/or have relationships with established producers/executives that you can leverage.

2. **Make films for the DIY/Hybrid route.** By this I mean make films at a low enough budget (under $250K seems to be a sweet spot) and for a big enough target audience, that you can sell to directly and sustain yourself on the high margins of direct to consumer sales and possibly a few traditional distribution sales both domestic and foreign. I know this route doesn't sound very exciting but if you do it well for a couple of films, it could catapult you to making bigger films and into scenario #1.

Obviously the long term goal is to get to a point where you're doing either or both of these successfully (i.e., making profits) so that you earn the right to make whatever films you want and can sustain yourself either by working for the 'system' or scaling up the hybrid approach.

Stacey Parks is a film distribution expert with over 16 years experience working with independent filmmakers. As a Foreign Sales Agent for several years she secured distribution for hundreds of independent features and programs worldwide. Stacey is the author of 'The Insider's Guide to Independent Film Distribution' (Focal Press). Her website is www.FilmSpecific.com.

4 Key Pointers of **Film Marketing and Sales**

by Richard La Motte

Making a film has never been easier. With all the advances in digital cameras and editing programs, virtually anyone can make a film with limited resources, *but* making a film is only one-fourth of the problem. So what are the other three fourths?

(1.) Come up with a saleable idea and put it on paper.

This includes a script (with a short synopsis and long treatment), schedule and budget, and maybe some sketches and/or storyboards, as well as a marketing plan. Why the marketing plan? Well, first of all, I don't mean that you have to design the one sheet for the film, but ask yourself this: "If someone asked *you* for money to make a film, wouldn't you want to know *how* the Producer planned to pay you back?" In other words: *What audience do you have in mind? How is the project to be released?* The answers to these two questions will have a tremendous effect on your script.

First: Who *is* your audience? To answer this, search out attendance demographics for your genre. *Who* and *why* will anyone pay money to see your finished project? What's the *hook*, or *selling points*?

Second: How will you take this to Market? What Market will you take it to? Theaters, television, foreign sales, digital release on computer, direct DVD sales? Your eventual releasing venue will have an impact on your method of shooting, editing and scoring, and the cost thereof.

If you don't do your homework on sales, then your filmmaking is a hobby project and harder to raise money for.

(2.) Find an Investor.

Remember the words of an old Producer, "Anyone who funds their own project has a fool for an Investor." That might be a little harsh, but the point is that getting someone else to believe in your project enough to put up some money means that your package has been well thought out – and – it means that *you* have reached the level of maturity where *you* can *sell* your idea. If you raise money, you will have to sell that idea many times over to Actors, Technicians, Location Owners, Exhibitors, etc. You might as well start selling it early.

(3.) Make the Film.

Two things that can help are: Location Scouting and Storyboards. Locations can give you ideas that you didn't have while writing your piece, and storyboards can help you get the shots you will need in editing that you might not think of when facing the pressure of shooting. The other thing is planning the days work and sticking to it.

(4.) Sell the finished project or market it yourself.

Selling the project means just that: selling it to a releasing/distributing company and getting some kind of return based on a percentage of sales income. The traditional drawback with a sale is that *all* distribution expenses are put against your release as is the split with the theatre before you see any profit. Remember the words of an old Exhibitor, "If the Producer leaves with any money, I haven't been doing my job."

Big movie makers used to look to the U.S. theatrical release as a way to break even, and the sale to foreign markets and T.V. as where they would finally make money. Less money would be made with showings in Hotels, Airlines and Military venues, and the final bump would come from video sales (now DVD).

There is a new market in on-line "pay-for-view" cable and computer outlets, but you will have to do your research in finding them, then negotiating with them.

Remember the words of the old technician, "Anything worth doing is worth doing for money."

Richard La Motte, a 35-year veteran of the business, has worked on numerous movies, serving as Property Master, Production Designer, Military Costume Technical Advisor ("Last of the Mohicans," "Pearl Harbor"), and Costume Designer ("Gods and Generals," "Crazy Horse," "Tecumseh," "Rambo III," "Goonies," "The Island of Doctor Moreau"). He is the author of the book, "Costume Design 101," published by MWP. Richard's website is www.richardlamotte.com.

Ryan Pickett

Member Profile: Ryan_Pickett
Job: Director
Location: United States
http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/Ryan_Pickett

"Look"
Shot on the RED.

Ryan Pickett's short film *Look* was shot on location in Nashville, TN, while Ryan attended Watkins College in a post-graduate filmmaking program. After graduation he moved to Los Angeles where he studied at Stella Adler Studios. He worked for major entertainment corporations, including Playboy, Ascent Media, Film House, Washington Redskins and Henninger Media. Ryan decided to start an independent production company called Ryan Pickett Productions while attending Watkins College of Art, Design and Film. After submitting a copy of his first film, *You Only Loved Me Twice*, as well as his business proposal, Ryan earned his way into a top 5 finalist spot in the Race to Be Film Entrepreneurship Competition hosted by media mogul Russell Simmons at Sony Picture Studios in Los Angeles. Ryan recently was voted one of Nashville's Best Visual Artists as well as The Best Filmmaker by Nashville Scene in 2011.

The second short film that Ryan made, *Look*, has won awards in the Accolade Competition and Best Shorts Competition and received the Gold Award in the student film division at the 2011 California Film Awards.

StudentFilmmakers Magazine: What inspired the story for "Look?"

Ryan Pickett: *Look* was inspired by the short films Chanel was releasing. Something I wanted to accomplish was to evoke a strong emotional response with the use of very little dialogue and in a short period of time. Many shorts tackle huge issues without enough time for development, and these films are drowned in unnecessary dialogue. Viewers subconsciously hold back emotion because the issues are being forced upon them so quickly. I wanted a topic harder to grasp but when the film is over, the audience would still be analyzing its meaning. I didn't want to tell the viewer what to think or feel.

SFM: Tell us about the story.

Ryan Pickett

Ryan Pickett: Basically *Look* is a story about perception and how strongly it affects our lives. Everything in *Look* is up for interpretation. I really enjoy when people just start talking to me about what they got from the story and how they could relate to it. Basically *Look* is asking, how do you see yourself? How do others see us? How do we want others to see us? What are we really showing others about us? I would look at it not only from John's POV, or the waitress' POV, but also the model. There is a lot of depth in all of their stories just like in real everyday life.

SFM: Did you use storyboards?

Ryan Pickett: I did use storyboards and I went over all of them with my cinematographer as well as made copies for the crew. I worked closely with my AD as well to figure out complexity and time allotment.

SFM: How many people did you have in your crew?

Ryan Pickett: Around 10 crew members. The DP was Shane Bartlett and the Camera Operator was Andy Kugler. I was the Director and Editor.

SFM: What cameras did you shoot with?

Ryan Pickett: I used the Red One 4k and that was the only camera used.

SFM: Could you describe one of the lighting setups for one of your most favorite, unique or memorable scenes?

Ryan Pickett: The shot of Theresa Meeker in the wedding dress was my favorite. It was beautifully shot and the lighting setup was the easiest because we left the stage light in the shot. The one side had huge windows letting in so much natural light and the way it fused with the white really worked well. The way the camera pulled back and the scene developed in front of it was something that has moved me in film and something I was proud to pull off. I had the shot actually going way more back but the dolly track was beginning to show so we had to cut it short.

SFM: Tell about some of the camera movement techniques used in the "Look."

Ryan Pickett: I use a lot of static camera because I like the scene to develop in front of the camera naturally. I did work in some dolly shots that can be seen in the scene where Theresa walks in front of the windows in a black dress and the wedding dress scene. I bring scenes into and out of focus as a metaphor for awakenings in perception. I also had a lot of close ups of eyes because they are central to the theme. A lot of the camera techniques and shot selection was done the way it was because I knew how I wanted it edited. I think you should be able to see the entire film in your head before you shoot anything.

SFM: Did you experience Murphy's Law on set?

Ryan Pickett: About as bad as it could have been. When I showed up the morning of the first day of shooting, I opened my computer to find that the hard drive was dead. I had everything I needed on the computer, which I had planned to use though out the entire shoot. All I could do for a lot of things was go off memory. The show must go on as they say.

SFM: If you could share a tip or piece of advice to aspiring filmmakers and storytellers around the world, what would it be?

Ryan Pickett: Do it how you want to do it. I learned this from a previous movie I shot, *You Only Loved Me Twice*. I edited a scene, which someone told me to change because it looked off. I guess they meant not by the book. Well, I did the change and while it may have cleaned the film up it took all that was unique from the shot. I had changed the shot to an edit from a textbook and not a unique piece of my art. I share this because I really hope others stand strong to their convictions as a filmmaker. Take the entire film into your hands and make sure when it's done, it's how you want it to be. Trust people, but always have the final say and do what you feel is right in the end.

SFM: What is your tip or piece of advice for submitting to festivals and creating award-winning short films?

Ryan Pickett: Submit wisely. Everyone is trying to make money so there are thousands of festivals and this can get very expensive. Really try to find ones that your style of film will have a chance in. Also research the festival a bit. See if it's legit or just some people trying to make money.

Photos courtesy of Ryan Pickett Productions.

On the set of 'Look'. Photo credit:
Shane Bartlett, www.shanebartlett.com

Actress Theresa (Meeker) Pickett and Actress Alison Parson in Look. Photo credit: Ryan Pickett.

David Daudelin

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David Daudelin.

"Only Way Out"
Shot on the Sony HVR-Z7U.

StudentFilmmakers Magazine: What inspired the story for "Only Way Out"?

David Daudelin: The semester before I made the film, I happened to see a student I knew, and she didn't look very good. It stood out to me so much that I sent her an e-mail asking if everything was okay. She responded saying she thought no one cared about her and it would all be over soon. This message was sent around 4:40 AM, and I didn't get it until about 8:30 AM when I woke up. I replied to the e-mail trying to encourage her, but didn't hear anything back. I also went to the office where she worked and heard that she'd sent her boss a similar message. So I was praying for her, as well as many other people and two days later I saw her and talked with her and she didn't do it.

SFM: In your own words, tell us about the story.

David Daudelin: Not to give away too much, the story is about a student in deep despair who decides to end his life. He writes a short letter to his friend, delivers it very early in the morning, and heads out to do it. When his friend wakes up a short time later and sees the letter, he rushes to stop him before it's too late. At the end of the movie, I relate an incredible true story which unfolded while I was making it.

SFM: Did you use storyboards?

David Daudelin: No. As the director, producer, DP, and often actor in my own films, I can afford to be more informal with the script. For *Only Way Out*, I came up with the story, selected the soundtracks for it, and then listened to them over and over again. While listening to them, I envisioned the specific scenes for the movie to fit with the score. I then chose locations for those scenes and conveyed the information you'd find in a storyboard to the cast/crew who

needed it when we were shooting.

SFM: What cameras did you use to shoot "Only Way Out" and how many cameras did you shoot with?

David Daudelin: I used two cameras for the movie. My main camera was a Sony HVR-Z7U, and the camera I used for the underwater footage was a Canon Vixia HG20.

SFM: How many people did you have in your crew? Who served as DP, camera operator, director, and editor?

David Daudelin: I only had one person specifically as a crew member – a friend of mine named Timothy Esposito. Greg, the main actor, also helped out with things, and for the pool scene Thomas Hunton, the younger brother of one of my friends, came out to serve as a lifeguard. I performed the other roles except camera operator for some of the scenes.

Timothy filmed most of the scenes where I'm acting, and Greg filmed the rest. Even though Timothy is a Computer Science major with no former experience in filming that I know of, he has a natural gift with the camera and in my most recent narrative short film, *Crosswalk*, he did the majority of the filming. The motion in his handheld shooting is amazing.

SFM: How did you shoot the pool scene?

David Daudelin: When I looked at how much a full underwater case would be for my small Canon camera, it was pretty expensive, [I think over $1,000]. Instead, I got what is essentially a heavy duty plastic bag with a glass window for the lens that cost about $80 and it worked great.

SFM: Could you share a tip or piece of advice when it comes to potentially dangerous scenes like the pool scene. What safety tips can you share?

David Daudelin: The pool scene isn't as dangerous as it might seem because the suicide method depicted in the movie doesn't work. Greg had to swim down, I'd shoot for about 5-10 seconds, and then he'd swim back up again. We did this many, many times to get the prolonged sequence depicted in the film. In the end, I actually didn't include most of the footage taken for the real scenes. It didn't convey the right emotion for the first part of the underwater sequence so I used some of the unintentional footage captured while he and I were trying to get in place to film.

SFM: Could share some camera movement techniques used in "Only Way Out"?

David Daudelin: Throughout the movie, I changed the camera techniques to convey the emotion shown at the time. At the beginning of the movie, there are a lot of still shots. In other parts, I used simple pans on a fluid head tripod to convey a smooth progression. When the action became more intense, I switched to a completely free, handheld camera. When I shoot like this, I often try to get into the emotion and let the camera movement reflect the intensity of the scene.

SFM: Did you experience Murphy's Law on set?

David Daudelin: Actually, I had an amazing experience which was the opposite of "Murphy's Law" while shooting *Only Way Out*. I really wanted the outside setting to be rainy for the movie and with the deadline I was on for the project

and Greg's school schedule, I didn't have the freedom to wait for the perfect day. Eventually, I decided to just go ahead and shoot it one morning when the forecast looked like it might rain. It turned out to be a mix of rain and snow like you see in the movie which was unusual for April when I filmed it and I think looks better than just rain. After I put the film together, though, I showed it to a friend and he noticed that there was an inconsistency where I was wearing the blue bag in some scenes but not in others. One of the scenes where I didn't have it on was an outside setting. Now I had a problem because it was unlikely I'd get another day like that with snow in April. In the end, I decided it wouldn't be too bad of an inconsistency and went out one day with Timothy to re-film while it was at least overcast. As we got ready to shoot, it began snowing just like before. If you watch it, you can see the scene we re-filmed where I'm running with the blue bag and it perfectly matches the previous weather.

SFM: You've created videos that won first place in video contests, and "Only Way Out" won the Jersey's Best Short Film Award. What advice can you share for submitting to contests, winning contests, and creating award-winning shorts?

David Daudelin: One thing I've learned about this is to be persistent. Before winning first place in the three video contests in 2009, I made a video which was ranked nearly last in another contest. *Only Way Out* was also rejected by many other festivals so I've seen that even if some people think your film isn't good, there may be other places which like it.

SFM: What are you working on next?

David Daudelin: I just recently finished two 3-minute "short short films" for a video contest – one a drama titled, *Crosswalk*, and another one which is a documentary/news video titled, *Behind the Mic at WRNJ* about my local radio station. You can watch these and some of my other videos, including *Only Way Out*, at www.lafango.com/SinceAllElseFails.

Also at that link, you can watch a preview of a fifteen-minute short film I'm currently working on titled, "Nels" which I'd like to finish by December.

Photos courtesy of David Daudelin.

David Daudelin behind the camera.

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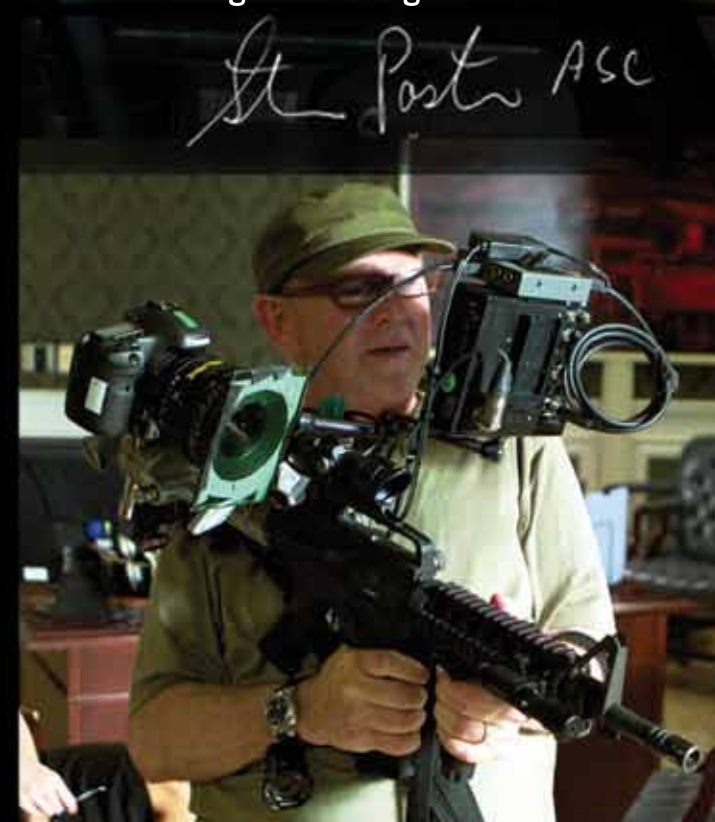or send an email via our online form at
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