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A Conversation with Award-Winning Cinematographer

Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC

Clearing the Haze about Fog Filters

Lighting for Various Outdoor Shoots

Graphic Filmmaking Techniques

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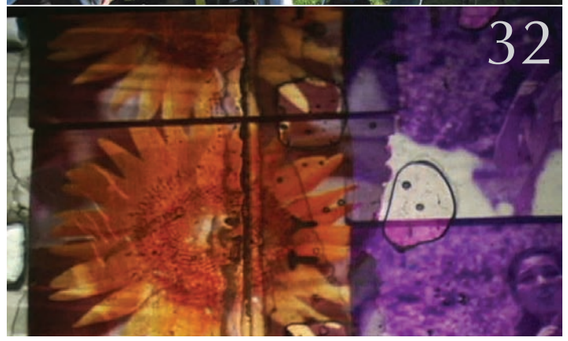

On the Cover
Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC on the set of *Lust, Caution*

We are very proud to announce the completion of our second BPA audit, which reflects our readership and growth over a six month period. Circulation grew from 15,822 in January 2007 to 18,408 in June 2007. This month's circulation is well over 20,000 with bonus issues going to the major tradeshows in the Entertainment Industry.

We are very excited to return to Denver, Colorado, for the Annual Rocky Mountain VidExpo 2007, the largest event in the Rocky Mountain region dedicated to providing a forum for new and changing ideas and technology, networking with industry leaders, and building relationships with customers and manufacturers. Drop by our exhibit at Booth # 1311, and sign up for a complimentary subscription to StudentFilmmakers Magazine, the #1 Educational Resource for Film and Video Makers.

This month's cover story is an in-depth, informative, and inspiring interview with Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC. Read Jacqueline B. Frost's Q & A with the award-winning cinematographer who wins Best Cinematography at the 64th Venice Film Festival for Ang Lee's "Lust, Caution," which also wins Best Film. Rodrigo talks about his process for preparing for a film, as well as collaborating with Ang Lee, Alejandro Inarritu, Oliver Stone, and other renown directors. Rodrigo discusses a variety of topics, including film versus digital technology, the digital intermediate, and formats.

We welcome new contributing writer Adam Matalon, who offers film sales and distribution tips in his article "Exploring Sales and Distribution Trends 'Before' Making Your Movie". Actress and writer Vanessa Daniels returns after shooting four national commercials this summer with her article, "Understanding the Commercial Audition." Read Carl Filoreto's excellent lighting tips in "Working with the Sun for Various Outdoor Shoots." And, don't miss Ira Tiffen's "Clearing the Haze about Fog Filters."

In the upcoming months, we will be exhibiting at the HD EXPO in Burbank, California, November 7th & 8th. We will be exhibiting at GV Expo 2007 in Washington, DC, November 15th and 16th. And, we will be exhibiting at DV Expo West in Los Angeles, California, December 5th through 6th. Please stop by our booth and sign up or just to say hello. Enjoy this issue and be sure to keep checking our website at www.studentfilmmakers.com for the most up-to-date information on trade shows, events, and other breaking film and video news.

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

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Clearing the Haze about Fog Filters

When Atmosphere is the Effect

by Ira Tiffen

White. Impenetrable. Fog. Atmosphere we can see, fog is capable of inducing an array of emotions from somber reflection to fear incarnate. A powerful image element. Yet, controlling fog is a bit like nailing Jello to a wall – tricky even at the best of times.

As with most weather-related effects, fog doesn't come when called – you may need to fudge things. The original 'fudge factor' for fog is a filter that creates misty flare of highlights, and a modest degree of contrast reduction. As it happens, it also softens sharpness. When they were first introduced, 'Fog filters' were the closest things to simulating fog. Today, highlight flare is their main goal.

There is generally too much contrast and not enough sharpness when using Fog filters, especially in the stronger grades, when compared to the look of natural fog. Use them for that warm, romantic glow around candlelight, but not for a convincing fog effect.

Double Fog filters are not industrial strength Fog filters, but they are two effects in one – a mild flare plus what becomes a strong contrast reduction, especially in the higher grades. The combination can very closely simulate the look of natural fog in many situations.

We look today at a situation where it does not. Natural fog has the ability to shroud the distance within its dense mantle. Get up close, though, and you can often see more clearly. As the distance to the subject increases, so does the accumulative amount of water droplets suspended in the air that comes between, causing the thickest fog at the farthest distance. A good example of this is in the image made in a natural fog without a filter. The wooden structure in the foreground is darkly silhouetted against the pale farther shore, which itself is visible only as a faint outline.

With a special exception, optical filters have no such ability to differentiate with distance when simulating fog. Returning to the same scene some months later, the unfiltered scene, also in overcast light, but without the natural fog, shows the farther shore in dark detail, blending with the foreground structure.

The Fog 3 filter produces a misty flare, but remains too contrasty to look like a natural fog. While not a great example, in this scene the Double Fog 3 filter does produce a more natural fog effect, reducing contrast more realistically, with reduced flare, when compared especially to the same, unfiltered image. Yet it does not have the ability to differentiate foreground from background, near from far, as does a natural fog.

The aforementioned exception, the Harrison Scenic Fog filter, employs a gradient fog effect that allows one part of the image (preferably the background) to appear in a greater fog than the other (preferably the foreground), more accurately emulating reality in certain situations.

It's when you *don't* want to 'clear the air' that it helps to be clear about the capabilities of Fog-effect filters.

Photos by Ira Tiffen.

In over 30 years of making optical filters, Ira Tiffen created the Pro-Mist, Soft/FX, Ultra Contrast, GlimmerGlass, and others, netting him both a Technical Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and a Prime-Time Emmy Award. Elected a Fellow of the SMPTE in 2002, he is also an Associate member of the ASC, and the author of the filter section of the American Cinematographer Manual.

Figure 1. Natural fog, no filter.
Figure 2. No fog, Double Fog 3 filter.
Figure 3. No fog, Fog 3 filter.
Figure 4. No fog, no filter.

Working with the Sun for Various Outdoor Shoots

Ways to Make the Sun an Ally Rather Than an Enemy

by Carl Filoreto

Control. It's the reason producers and DP's like to scurry inside to a well-appointed hotel suite when they face capturing an important interview for video posterity. Need to shoot a vital on camera segment with the host of an hour long documentary? Well, the first instinct is to look for a nice, cozy indoor location. Why? Simple. It's easier to control the many elements that can adversely affect the shoot. Factors like harsh lighting, extraneous noise and foot traffic.

The art and science of video production though, often means going outside and working in the natural environment. This scenario is fraught with risks and danger and can throw a shudder through even the most seasoned camera practitioner. Moving outside literally opens the door to a variety of factors that the video crew now must handle with dignity and grace, but most importantly, without any loss of quality. The two primary culprits are the sun and noise. Urban settings come replete with a staggering assortment of unwanted and uncontrollable sounds like traffic, horns, sirens, construction noise and loud voices rising above the general chaos. I've even encountered bizarre noise problems in pristine natural settings located far from the concrete jungle. Let's focus for now on how we can come to terms with handling the sun for various on camera outdoor shoots.

Fortunately, there are ways to make the sun an ally rather than an enemy. And if you're working with a limited, or in some cases a lack of, a budget, then you'll be delighted to know there are some low cost solutions available. Now my primary rule when handling outdoor interviews and on camera segments is to make sure the person on camera is always facing away from the sun. During many years in the business, I've yet to find anyone who enjoyed looking directly into that fiery orb in the sky. It's unpleasant, it makes people squint and it induces lots of sweat. And if you're not shooting during the "magic hour" period when the sun is low on the horizon, it can cause the dreaded black hole look. This condition occurs when shadows are created under the brow line as a result of a high sun angle, thus bright vibrant eyes are transformed into dark empty shadows. These results are not good for the production, or your career.

Of course, the simplest solution is to put the subject in the shade, and proceed from there. Unfortunately, things are usually more complex. So if you can't get the subject out of the sun, situate the subject so that his or her back is to the sun. This simple maneuver accomplishes two very important things. One, it creates an instant natural backlight, and that's always a positive step. Second, the background has a good probability of also being shaded. If you think about it conceptually, and contemplate the angles involved, you'll see that for the same reason that the subject's face is in the shade, the background will be in the shade. This makes it much easier to control exposure, and prevent any problematic hot spots in the background.

A 6x6 china silk is used to diffuse the sun as MSNBC's David Shuster interviews singers Amy Grant and Vince Gill. An 800 watt and a 400 watt HMI act as the key lights. The location is the plaza at Snowmass Village, CO. Photo by Carl Filoreto.

Sometimes, though, you're going to have overexposed areas in the background, and you have to somehow get more light on your subject in order to equalize your exposure. Reflectors are an elegant solution. They're usually oval or round, light, have a handle so you can carry them around, and come in a variety of colors, textures and finishes. They're small enough that a producer or handy production assistant can hold them in place, and quite cleverly most are made with a different colored surface on each side.

Optimally, I'll use a white-sided reflector since it creates the most natural look. Hopefully, the light generated by the sun will be intense enough that a white reflector will bounce back sufficient amounts of light to fill in any facial shadows. In reality, I've found that's rarely the case, so I've grown fond of reflectors that are often billed as being a "sunlight" color. When you look at these closely, they have a weave of gold, silver and reddish-hued threads that in combination often offer a decent match to the ambient outdoor color temperature. Lots of folks like to use a gold or silver reflector. Keep in mind, a gold or silver reflector is going to reflect, well, a gold or silver hue. Too much of a good thing can result in an unnatural look. So when using these colors, try to check skin tone in a monitor, or use a discerning eye, and make sure you're not creating an uncomfortable metallic glow.

Several years ago, I was hired by a political action group to shoot a ten-minute video highlighting one of the burning issues of the day. A principal interview location was a large park located in the middle of downtown Denver. The state Capitol was located on one end of the park. The iconic City and County Building of Denver was situated on the opposite side. And, the Denver skyline peered over the trees in another direction. These are all fabulous backgrounds for politically focused interviews. During a site survey, the prospect of shooting in this seemingly wonderful location was shattered by one critical detail: there wasn't any power available. None. To muddy the waters a bit more, two of the interviews were scheduled as two camera interviews. And to ratchet up the degree of difficulty, the first interview was scheduled to begin at 11:30 in the morning.

Lighting two people sitting opposite each other in the great outdoors when the sun is directly overhead is a serious production problem. In this case though, one of the most versatile outdoor lighting controls, a collapsible modular product made by Westcott called a scrim jim, came to the rescue. It consists of aluminum tubes which attach together to create frames that are 4'x4' or 4'x6' or 6"x6" in size. The tubes have Velcro attached to one side enabling you to mount a dizzying array of scrims, silks and nets. On this particular day we deployed a variety of 6x6 frames using sunlight reflectors and china silks to bounce light into and remove light from the participants in the interview. When we finished, we were all pleasantly surprised at the quality look of the interviews. It almost appeared to look like we were lighting the set with a bank of HMI's attached to a generator truck.

In this configuration, I'm partial to china silks, which are made from a white fabric that cuts down on the intensity of the sun, and gently diffuses the light that does penetrate it. I often use a 4x4 china silk to remove the harsh shadows created by the sun, and then fire up an HMI and direct it into the locations that need to be "punched". In the scenario I depicted earlier, I'll use it to cut down on the amount of sunlight hitting the back of a subject's head, and mold a pleasing backlight with it.

Now suppose you eye up your shot, and everything is fantastic, but you notice the background is brighter than your subject. Black nets are a simple way to cut down on the amount of light generated in your background. Position the net far enough behind the subject so that the lens can't see it, and voila, the background is muted. Both china silks and black nets can be purchased or rented according to f-stops. A two stop black net will, you guessed it, cut down the amount of background light by two stops.

So what happens when you're in a

A 6x6 china silk is used to diffuse the sun during the taping of this stand up delivered by Tom Brokaw.Two 400 watt HMIs act as the primary light sources. Both lights were powered by inverters. Tom Levy mans the silk while Steve Dalton handles audio duties. The stand up was an element in an NBC News Tom Brokaw Reports broadcast during primetime on NBC. Photo by Carl Filoreto.

The author adjusts a 4x4 china silk used to diffuse the light on NBC News correspondent Jennifer London. This is a classic interview/stand up outdoor set up. The black net is deployed to cut down on the intensity of the light emitted by the background. I was rehabbing a broken ankle at the time of this shoot. Photo by Steve Dalton.

national park, it's raining, the looming ponderosa pines are cutting down what little light is available, and your interview subject looks alarmingly dark? If you can arrange the interview to happen near a road, and your car is handy, then you can use a great device called an inverter to provide instant power, and thus light, to the scene. By attaching to your car's battery, inverters convert the direct current produced by your vehicle, and magically change it to the lovely alternating current we're used to using every day.

Inverters come in a range of outputs, and I've gravitated to the 800 watt variety. It provides enough power to comfortably use a 400 watt HMI, and on a good day, it'll fire up a 200 watt HMI as well. I used to haul around a 1650 watt inverter, but it was bulky and heavy; and I found that most car alternators simply wouldn't generate that amount of power anyway. The 800 watt versions can be purchased in the tool section of most home improvement stores for under a hundred bucks.

I'll provide you with a cautionary tale that'll encourage you to purchase a spare as well. Several years ago, I was dispatched to Montana by NBC News to do an interview with a forest ranger about bear attacks in the area. It couldn't be more simple, just an interview and several minutes of b-roll with the ranger. When I arrived at the meet point outside Missoula it was raining, it was dark, and we were setting up in a park campground. I was unphased by the conditions until I wired up my trusty 1650 watt inverter, and proceeded to watch it disintegrate under a flurry of sparks. Well the clock was ticking, and it set off a mad scramble to find a power outlet, which we miraculously located nearby. So here's an example of a simple shoot that easily could have had a disastrous result. I learned my lesson and now carry a spare. And I even use a small 30 watt inverter with an attachment that allows me to plug it into the power receptacle in my car so I can power a battery charger, cell phones or my laptop.

Carl Filoreto is an award-winning DP, and his company is Elk Run Productions, Inc. (www.elkruntv.com), which has a roster of clients that spans corporations, production houses, crewing agencies, and broadcast and cable networks, including Dateline NBC, The Food Network, and The Travel Channel. Prior to starting his business, Carl won seven regional Emmy awards, numerous national and regional National Press Photographers awards, and multiple awards from Colorado Ski Country and the National Snowsports Journalists Association, while working at KMGH-TV in Denver, WTNH in New Haven, and WGGB in Springfield, Massachusetts.

A Conversation with Award-Winning Cinematographer
Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC

"Lust, Caution" Wins Best Film and Best Cinematography at the 64th Venice Film Festival

by Jacqueline B. Frost

Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC

Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC wins Best Cinematography at the 64th Venice Film Festival for "Lust, Caution" – which also wins Best Film.

Rodrigo is one of the hottest cinematographers working in the industry today. Nominated for an Academy Award for the beautiful cinematography in Ang Lee's "Brokeback Mountain" (2005), he is also the cinematographer of Ang Lee's most recent film, "Lust, Caution," (2007). He has collaborated with Alejandro Inarritu on "Babel" (2006), "21 Grams" (2003), and "Amores Perros" (2000). He was the Director of Photography on Oliver Stones epic, "Alexander" (2004) and "25th Hour" (2002) for Spike Lee. He shot "Frida" (2002) for Julie Taymor and "8 Mile" (2002) for Curtis Hanson. Although "Original Sin," (with Director Michael Cristofer, 2001) was Rodrigo's first big, American film, his list of credits in Mexico is extensive. I met with Rodrigo in Brentwood to talk about his work as a cinematographer with some of Hollywood's biggest names in directing.

Could you talk about the collaborative relationship between the director and cinematographer? What is the ideal situation for you? How do you like to work with a director?

Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC: One of the things I like about what I do is precisely the collaboration with the director, and the opportunity to work with people who I find their point of view [how they see things] interesting, and to work with someone who would approach things completely differently than I would. I find that it helps me grow when I get involved with someone else's point of view. And I have to learn to listen and see why a director would go in a path that would not have been my first instinct. But, then discovering what it is about that path that I can work on, it helps me to grow, and sometimes it's painful. It can be difficult to find your way in a certain new perspective.

Ideally, I try to get myself in tune with the director's point of view. And what I enjoy is then coming back with a set of ideas that conform to that basic structure or groundwork and bring something additional to the plate.

What is your process for preparing for a film?

RP: My process is, I of course, first read the script, and from there, ideas are generated, but I try not to fall in love with my ideas – just get some basic concepts. I try to listen first to what the director has to say, maybe talk about some of the concepts I had on my first read. Then once I understand the approach to what the director is trying to do, then I go to my photography books or visual references and try to come up with visual ideas that I can present to the director. Maybe a certain scene could have a certain type of framing or grain structure or color. And I present these ideas to the director so we can ping pong ideas back and forth, discard some, keep some – and that will evolve during preproduction. For me, that's very enjoyable, and that's exactly the process I'm in right now with the current movie. I'm doing investigation, and then, of course, the production designer and research will come into play as well. So it's a three-part collaboration. I try to be involved in all of it with the Director and Production Designer.

Of course, the ideas are all based on the director's original intention, but we all try to come up with ideas that will work together. It's a whole process that's really enjoyable and for me. Prep is like going to film school all over again. I try to keep an open mind and test, test, test everything that I am imagining. I always try to test things I haven't done before, not for the sake of doing something different but to explore different avenues and to see what we can get. Then, I present these ideas and tests to the director, and from there, we narrow it down to what will be the movie.

One thing I enjoy very much is working with a director on the shotlisting, which doesn't always happen, but it's something I like to do a lot. Some directors don't shotlist. Others like to do it on their own in private, and will even do a storyboard without the DP involved, and that's fine. I've worked like that as well.

What if a director comes to you with the storyboards all prepared and says, 'I want it like that'?

RP: That happened to me only once on a movie in Mexico, and I actually tried to quit. Even while scouting locations, any proposal I had about camera placement or framing would immediately be shot down because everything had to be exactly how the director planned it on the storyboard, so there was no room for anything. So I said, 'what do you want me for, find someone else.' But then he said, but you can do whatever you like with lighting, but this is what I want with camera angles and framing. So I decided to go for it and told myself I would learn to work like this, and it was a good experience for me in the end. I try not to set myself into a definite way of working because every director is different, so I try to be flexible and work in different ways.

That movie many years ago helped me to work with Ang (Lee). He doesn't do shot lists or pre-storyboarding. It comes up in the set after rehearsal, and he'll stand there and contemplate. He'll ask for the directors finder with a specific lens, and he'll set the angle and framing, and that for me is different than what I had done with other directors. It wasn't easy for me when we started "Brokeback Mountain," but I got used to it. Ang has very good taste in terms of framing and choice of lenses, and it always makes sense to me. Because the choices he makes are correct. It doesn't hurt me because it's not a thing about 'ego, he picked it, so then I'm upset'. No – he's

right, it's a good angle and a good lens, and I have no problem with that. You only have a problem when it doesn't feel right. When you know that choices could work better another way. But most of the time, the differences between what he'll pick and what I would have done have to do with camera height. Ang always wants the camera to be the eye level of the actor, no matter what. I find that's not always the best angle. It's almost like a mantra, it's the way it is. Sometimes I would have to really talk him into the slightest adjustment. I certainly do find Ang's approach very much organic with the material. The choices have to do with the characters and the story, and they are very subjective and I like it. I enjoy working with him, although it is not the kind of collaboration I have with Alejandro, or Oliver Stone or Curtis Hanson.

With Alejandro (Inarritu), we shotlist together, sometimes storyboard. I can draw a little bit, so sometimes I'll do some storyboarding. At times we've hired storyboard artists, but we do sit down in preproduction. And I really like the process, even if we don't use it during production because it gets us talking very specifically about the scene and what type of lenses, why would we start with a detail or a long shot, why? Why are we doing things, of course, we use our intuition when we are shotlisting, but it really gives a sense to the way each scene is covered and helps very much in editing. Alejandro has a really good sense of editing and sound, so in storyboarding we also talk about how it's going to cut together. We shotlist as if we are editing, we even makes sounds, or do music. So it's a very enjoyable process. And on the set, we have a blue print, whether we chose to use it or lose it.

So Julie Taymor is the only woman you've worked with so far?

RP: My second film was also with a female director. Here name is Eva Lopez-Sanchez, and the film was called, "Dama De Noche." With Julie, it was very exciting to do "Frida" because it was very collaborative. We shot listed the whole movie together. We would also have meetings with the production designer and several people involved, and talk about all the things that were not scripted, transitions, paintings turning into reality. Many of those transitions we worked on together. She is incredibly creative, and she'll come up with these amazing ideas. But she is open to listening to all of our ideas too. It was really exhilarating.

What would the first meeting for a potential project be like with a director?

RP: One of my first meetings like that was for Michael Cristofer for "Original Sin." I really wanted to do a period movie, something totally different then "Amores Perros." No one knew me at that time, so I was nervous. I try not to worry if I'm going to get the job or not, so I just go in and say what I think about the script, about the project. Even if there are things that are not working with the script, I'll say it, even at the risk of not getting the job. I figure if there is something that I really feel strongly about, then why do it? Usually a director will say, yeah, we're working on that, or yeah, or whatever. It's a way of showing I'm honest about my feelings about a project, and I won't shy away from my opinion. But I am not a person who will be stubborn. I just point out what I think.

My second big interview was with Oliver Stone for "Beyond Borders." Which, in the end, he did not direct, but we did some prep work, some documentary footage in Africa. I expected an intimidating interview. I found out the day I went in, so I didn't have a chance to get nervous. The chemistry was great. I felt very comfortable with him. I thought he was going to tear me apart, but he didn't. We watched some clips from "Amores Perros," and he told me about his project. And I think I was fortunate to have good interviews like that early in my career.

Curtis Hanson was interesting because he interviewed me like four times before he gave me the job. He was very deliberate about the process, and he wanted to make sure I was the right person for the project. He had seen a lot of my early Mexican movies, so he was familiar with my work before "Amores Perros." I was working on a whole different style then, reacting to the aesthetics of the movies of the 70's. What I was doing was more stylized with deliberate lighting, more beauty lighting. Curtis did not want that for "8 Mile", and kept asking if I would fall back into that. I assured him that I didn't do that in "Amores Perros," and that I would light for the style of the film, and eventually he agreed to hire me. He just wanted to be sure the look for "8 Mile" would be very naturalistic and gritty.

What attracts you to a project creatively?

RP: One thing is the challenge; I look for a new challenge. I tend to choose projects that are different than the one I did before. Although it's not so much on purpose, I have to find something in the script that is close to me in some way, or close to my heart or something that I'm interested in exploring. Almost as if it would be something I would direct as well. So far, I have never chosen a project as a job. It's always been something I want to participate in for many reasons. The experience of "8 Mile", with Rap music Detroit, was interesting to me, learning about it. Same with "Alexander" or Ang Lee in China. When I decided to do "Lust, Caution," there were other interesting projects to choose from, but choosing that movie was, of course, the collaboration with Ang Lee. And also being in China, and learning about the Japanese occupation after the war, something I was not aware of. It's


Ang Lee and Rodrigo Prieto, ASC, AMC working on the set of "Lust, Caution"

really very interesting. You have to dive into these worlds. So all of those are elements of choice. It's also balancing my work with my family life, to be near by family. Now I'm doing a movie that more than half will be shot in LA, so that's another factor. But mostly it's about my heart telling me this is something I want to do right now.

What if you don't like the script?

RP: I read a lot of scripts, and I won't even finish it if it is not talking to my heart. Genre is important also, I try to dip my feet into all sorts of different genres. I did turn down a movie recently because it was a classic Western, and I don't like Westerns. The script was really good, it had cowboys, shoot outs, everything, a classic Western genre film. I don't go and see Westerns, so if I'm going to do a movie, it is one I would go see in the cinema. Who knows, maybe later in life I will change my mind and do a Western? [laughs]

What attributes do you like in a director?

RP: For me the most important thing is passion. And a director who is not passionate about his project turns me off. That means sometimes I work with directors who will really challenge me and the crew, and we will work long hours, and it's tough. But I much prefer that, to someone who just wants to get it done in a reasonable amount of time and go home, just get it in the can. So passion is the most important thing.

What kind of visual references have you used in communication with a director, or a director has used to communicate with you?

RP: Curtis said he wanted "8 Mile" to look like' weeds growing out of a sidewalk.' I think a big part of the color palette came from that, lots of cyans. With "Alexander" for example, I presented Oliver with a set of scanned photographs and paintings with references of color, composition, grain, and lighting, including photos of Sebasteao Salgado, and paintings from Rembrandt and Caravaggio.

For "Amores Perros," when Alejandro presented the script to me, we had worked together on many commercials before, in this sleek style, precise lighting. He knew my past work, and he was afraid I wouldn't want to do gritty dirty movies. So I read the script and came in to our first meeting to talk about the visuals with a book from Nan Goldin that I had recently discovered. Alejandro had the same book with him as a reference, and he said you may not like this, but here are some references for the movie. And I pulled out the same book, so our starting point was the same. For "21 Grams," we used some Nan Goldin and Laura Letinsky on "Babel."

Do you expect or like a director to know specific focal lengths and understand depth of field?

RP: It helps that they do understand technical aspects, but it is not essential. I see advantages of both cases. When I worked with Julie Taymor, she had already done "Titus," and she had a certain language of film, but she wasn't extremely technically savvy. But I think it helped because she would come up with ideas that weren't constrained to the traditional limitations that you think of the way you shoot something, or visual effects or whatever. So then, I had to figure out technically how to achieve her idea. So I tried very hard not to limit her by saying that would be really difficult because of this and that – okay, this is what she wants, and how do we do it? So, it was exciting, and I think in that case, it was to our advantage that she didn't know the limitations that technique will put in her brain. There is always a way to achieve something.

But Ang Lee, for example, he is very technically savvy. Most of the directors do understand focal length, they are very experienced, but for Ang the subtlety between a 32mm and a 28mm is a big deal for him, one filter versus another, so he's very aware of the subtle differences. If I show him the difference between one film stock and another, he will see the differences; other directors may not, so sometimes you have to present them the differences that are bigger. Such is the case with Oliver Stone, he is not about subtlety, when you propose something it has to be bold and he has to see it, it's interesting, both ways I enjoy, it's just a matter of jiving with a director.

Have you worked with directors who use focal length and depth of field aesthetically to amplify the thematic elements of the script or scene?

RP: Usually in the movies I've done it has been something I brought to it. Ang Lee has his choices of lenses. Usually he will do a master shot with a 27mm; a 25 is too wide angle, medium shots will be 50mm, close ups 75mm. I tried to propose in certain parts of the story going more with a long lens and hidden. He liked the idea, but when we were shooting, it would always be the same lenses, and that's just his way of working. He would be the director who was most specific about lenses, but it was because he was comfortable with those lenses. In "Amores Perros," for certain stories, we used different focal lengths to tell the stories. The story of the homeless guy with all the dogs, we used longer lenses because we wanted to convey more of a sense of spying, because he was going around looking at people. Another story was more kinetic. It was all handheld but with different lenses. It was something I brought to Alejandro and he liked it. On "Babel," we used shallow depth of field to represent the perception of the deaf, mute character in Japan.

Do you prefer primes or zooms?

RP: I like primes, but I guess one of the main reasons is that once we find the frame that we like, then that's what we're doing. With zooms typically then the director will want to zoom in, and I prefer to move the camera closer. Sure, it will be faster [to zoom], but then all the coverage will be with a long lens, which could be fine, if that's what you are going for. But I generally prefer to be close with the camera. The feeling of intimacy is very different with a 100mm or a 50 or 40 right close to the actors. It really feels like you are with them, invading their space with the camera a little bit, so for the audience it's the difference between being voyeuristic and safe. Looking at something from a distance, or being right there with the actor. It's a different vibration, and being there living with them. That's why primes work better. It forces us to move in for coverage. But I like to work in different styles. But, if the director has that way of working, I'll go with it.

Do you ever feel a connection to the actors when you are operating the camera?

RP: Absolutely. I think the main reason I operate when I can, although I don't always. But it's to see the performance. I do get involved with them when I am looking through the camera, and the actors are feeling these emotions. I will get emotional too. Several times I have cried on camera. It really is amazing. You get the front seat of the best performances of the best actors in the world, and you are right there, best seat in the house. So it's really amazing.

Regarding video village, do the directors you work with watch the live performances or the monitors?

RP: A little of both, although the monitors are pretty magnetic. Most of the time, directors will be by the monitors. But they are moving them closer to where the performers are rather than being in a video village far away from the camera. Alejandro will be right behind the camera with a clamshell, and Ang Lee will be right near the camera with a small monitor. On "Alexander," there was a video village, but that was because we had several cameras, and it was necessary for Oliver to see all of the cameras, so it depends. But I have found that directors like to see what is actually going to be captured on the film. But still being closer to the performers is what the directors I've been working with do.

What time of day cannot be re-created on set, or is difficult to recreate?

RP: The most difficult is sunlight on a big area of a set. To have a bright hard light source with a precise shadow, I don't think there is one unit that can create that in a big area right now. There are the soft suns that are very bright and cover a big area, but the shadow will be slightly soft. I think that's probably the biggest challenge. In "Alexander," I lit a scene with a 100k soft sun and tried not to see the floor. It works fine in the close up, but in the wide shot you can tell more that it is lit. I think large areas of sunlight are very difficult to recreate on a sound stage.

What about magic hour?

RP: Magic hour is about softness, lack of shadow, it's not that hard to do. It depends on what units you use. Recently, I had a very big challenge in "Lust, Caution" in the final sequence. It's supposed to happen at sunset. Ang wanted a purplish light combined with the golden light of sunset. I was terrified of it. How do you create the afternoon sunlight on a sound stage on a huge street? I had sunset light coming in through the alley, and it was difficult; it had to be one stop over. I had maybe eight dinos, concord lights, jumbo lights, lit up like a stadium. And then it started to get to magic hour. Right now, I'm color grading it. That scene is the main scene we are doing a DI [digital intermediate] for this movie. On "Brokeback Mountain," we did not do a DI, because Ang was skeptical of DI's. But the only way I could really see doing this ending scene in "Lust, Caution" was with a DI, to get what he wanted. So in this case we could isolate the sunlight and keep it going while still getting the purple glow he wanted. The first DI I did was on "Frida." It can be like a double-edged sword.

Has the Digital Intermediate changed the way you shoot a film?

RP: A little bit, for example, on "Lust, Caution," I wasn't sure in the end if it would be a DI or not. So all the time I kept talking about that purple scene because Ang kept asking me how I was going to light it. And I would say, I can't, there is no DP in the world that will light this huge street with purple light, it's impossible. We have to use this ambient light and make it purple in color grading. Two, three days later, he would ask me again. I wasn't sure if we were going to have a DI, but that is the one scene I was counting on for the DI in color grading.

One thing with a DI that complicates matters is that a director is expecting that you can do anything with the DI, and it's not really like telecine. In telecine, you can do more than a DI because you have the print on film. Sometimes I lit in a certain way where I lose detail in certain shadows and I want that, but on telecine, there is detail there, because the negative has it [the details], but the final print won't have the same details. So the director sees their dailies on video, and they see all these things that you won't have on the final print, but they want it. So I've been suffering with DI's a bit because they sometimes want to brighten the shadows more than was my intention. How do you get dailies to look the way your print will look? The difference between how the negative responds and the print is just not the same.

I am now using EFilm where you scan the negative in from the beginning so you see dailies that are color corrected to match with the look of a print. So hopefully our dailies will look more like the end result. For visual effects, you can color correct as you go, and it stays with it. That will make the DI in the end more effective and will take less time. Then everyone agrees where you are going, so there's less tweaking in the end.

Regarding formats, what makes you decide between a super 35mm, or regular 35mm format, or even super 16mm over HD? Do you suggest format to a director based on the project?

RP: Whatever I think works for the subject matter, I have no preference at all. I like to vary it. On "Babel," we ended up going 1:85. I think almost a natural choice would have been widescreen. But when we were scouting locations in Morocco, we checked with my viewfinder, and saw the locations with the 2:35 and the 1:85, and Alejandro felt the 2:35 was too beautiful. Because the mountain ranges

looked fantastic, but he wanted to feel the ground where the people lived. He wanted to see the floor, so we actually ended up favoring compositions that sort of saw the floor, felt the ground. So that was the main reason we wanted to go 1:85 on the movie. Even though in Japanese sequence I used anamorphic lenses, we cut off the sides and used only the 1:85 portion of it. I wanted the anamorphic look for the depth of field but the aspect ratio was 1:85. So it varies. I think on this movie I'm going to do now I'll probably go anamorphic because we do want the 2:35 aspect ratio. But for the depth of field, I could go super 35. The choice it just depends on what you feel for the subject matter. And so it's something I always discuss with the director from the beginning. But I don't have a preference. Some DP's swear by anamorphic exclusively, and that's fine. That's why right now I don't own equipment. I did for some time own some ultra prime lenses. I like them very much, but for example, in "Brokeback Mountain," I used Cookes. On this movie, I may use Panavision. I prefer not to be married to anything. It may be good business to own your own gear. I prefer to be free artistically to choose whatever I think works great for a scene or a movie.

What do you think of digital technology such as the HD cameras available today?

RP: I did shoot "Ten Tiny Love Stories" in HD. We used the Sony F-900, but it was simple monologs to camera, so I didn't put it through the works. Then I tested a Viper camera for "Babel" for the Japanese story. For this new movie I may use HD for a portion of the movie. If you're going for a certain look, it becomes a creative decision. I do find the technologies are getting better.

Do you think it's harder to light digital?

RP: Yes, it has been case, but some of the newer technologies are trying to address that. I found that when I did the "Ten Tiny Love Stories," we had windows in the backgrounds, and I had to worry about the highlights. I didn't like how they were clipping, so all this hype about it being easier and cheaper, and you don't need lighting, it's ridiculous. So I experienced it first hand in that case. It can be more complicated to light, but in low light, it does have its applications.

Do you think it's better to stay away from contrast in those situations, to stay softer with digital?

RP: Just in terms of highlights, that's where it gets complicated. That's what you have to watch out for. It's maybe a little like when you are shooting reversal or cross processing or bleach by pass. That's where you have to be conscious of highlights, like when I was shooting "Amores Perros" or "21 Grams." But it has its applications. Maybe you are going for clipped highlights in some scenes, so why not?

Like your blown out windows, it became kind of a stylistic thing?

RP: [Laughs] Yeah, you know there is a difference. It's the way highlights blow out on film. It's the curve, it's that shoulder, overexposure on film becomes soft, and I like that. I sometimes use that, the softness of overexposure. But on digital, it's a hard edge, and I don't like that, usually, unless you go for that for an aesthetic decision.

Are you worried about film?

RP: No, not worried, not now. I used to be earlier. I heard all this hype and tested these first cameras. I did the movie with the F-900. And they were hailing it like, this is it. I could see it was certainly not at all the quality of film, let alone the look. It didn't have the resolution or color depth, no matter what they say. It just didn't have the same range of film in terms of latitude or color, so what' so great about this? And all these cables and electronic inductions, a lot of problems. I just couldn't figure out what people loved about it. Maybe the fact that you can keep rolling, and advantages like that, which have its applications. But aesthetically, I didn't see it. But now, I'm looking at the new cameras that do nearly 4k resolution like the Dalsa, or the Red, although I'm not totally convinced about the Red in terms of latitude. I could still see the highlights clipping, but I was very impressed by the tests I saw of the Dalsa, which really had a high contrast situation, and it held up beautifully. It still had two or three issues, but it seems like we are finally approaching a situation where digital cameras will have a quality that is close to film.

On my new film, "State of Play," I'm thinking of using digital on some scenes because of the lack of grain. Digital becomes a different palette which enhances the possibilities of different textures on a movie. I will use film for some scenes for its characteristics and its grain, and I will use digital for its look and its lack of grain. It's adding to our possibilities. And I'm also learning a lot. It's like being in film school again still trying to understand all this technology. This new language I didn't have to deal with before. It's interesting, exciting.

Jacqueline B. Frost is a Los Angeles-based cinematographer and author. She teaches cinematography and advanced film production at California State University, Fullerton, as well as a course through the UCLA Extension entitled, "Cinematography for Directors." Jacqueline has shot numerous short films, independent feature films and documentaries that have screened in film festivals around the world. She has also taken on the role of producer, director, and editor on many projects.

Directorial Chutzpah 101

Quality Essential to Directing

by David K. Irving

"I'll snatch this story out of nothingness, by surprise tactics. And if fate's against me I'll deal with fate. I'll cheat it with some card trick."
~ Jean Cocteau

Chutzpah is the element that binds all the craft and psychology a director can muster. Chutzpah is an intangible. Hard to explain, difficult to acquire, yet essential to directing. This is what drives a director, separates the uninspired from the innovative, and provides armor to handle rejection. It is the passion to cling to an idea like a drowning sailor to a wooden plank. Chutzpah is utter nerve, guts, spunk, and gumption. Ultimately, it smacks of courage. "Courage," said Winston Churchill, "is the greatest virtue; it makes all the others possible."

Too much chutzpah is obnoxious, too little ineffectual. There is an extremely fine line between assertiveness and aggression. The proper amount of chutzpah spells someone who is aggressively self-assured. In the shark-infested sea of show business, this quality is what keeps a director's head above water. The film industry is divided between those people whose job it is to say 'no' and those who say 'yes'. It is so much easier to say 'no'. *No* to risk, *no* to uniqueness, *no* to new talent, *no* to experimentation. If an executive says 'no' to a film that does wind up getting made and then flops, that executive is vindicated. And, in fact, more films flop than hit the jackpot. (I won't dwell on the fates of those who said 'no' to *Star Wars*.)

Someone must say 'yes' or films wouldn't get made. 'Yes' means committing huge sums of money. 'Yes' means mustering large numbers of people. 'Yes' means possible unemployment for the yes-ee. One of the best reasons to say 'yes' is to hire a director who has unflagging passion for the project. For a producer to hand a production over to a director, the producer must be confidant in that director's ability to deliver.

Chutzpah and passion do not translate into success. Although craft and passion make a great one-two punch, too many other factors contribute to a film's success to make any venture sure-fire. There is no formula for success; otherwise all films would hit their mark. But one can surely imagine the opposite. How would a producer feel about a project if the director committed by saying in a subdued tone, "Sure, why not?" Or, "Okay, I guess I can do it."

Chutzpah is not jumping up and down on a table shouting, "I can do it! I can do it!" It's an unspoken quality that makes everyone associated with the enterprise convinced this director, and only this director, is the anointed one. The director exudes passion that infects the company with confidence. This infection is the glue that holds the company together, through thick and thin.

Akira Kurosawa once said, "I am a director...that is all. I know myself well enough to know that if I ever lost my passion for films, then I myself would be lost. Film is what I am about." This total commitment to the craft, this unbridled enthusiasm, is gold to a producer. Directors with passion know about their dedication from an early age. They often begin as a cineaste. They get the bug by being transported by the works of both contemporary and classic directors of note. Many family members will say this zeal is foolish, but as Edgar Allan Poe once said, "I have great faith in fools—self-confidence my friends call it."

Terry Gilliam said (when making *Brazil*), "Like most of my projects I ended up wanting to do more than I was capable of doing." Directors constantly strive for excellence. They push themselves and the cast and crew who surround the picture.

There is no room for mediocrity in cinema. The most serious crime in show business is to bore an audience. Alfred Hitchcock, in a 1947 press interview said, "I aim to provide the public with beneficial shocks. Civilization has become so protective that we're no longer able to get our goose bumps instinctively. The only way to remove the numbness and revive our moral equilibrium is to use artificial means to bring about the shock. The best way to achieve that, it seems to me, is through a movie."

Sometimes it is necessary to push the material so as to shock the audience from their complacency. These are akin to growth spurts. Once upon a time, a character could be killed on screen by a single gunshot and no blood. Then comes color, then blood packs, then multiple blood packs, then spurting blood packs, and then slow motion spurting blood packs. Once a trend has been established, directors rarely go back to olden ways. Instead, they build off the common practice and blaze new trails.

Chutzpah is so widespread in the industry, it is an assumed bravado. Luis Buñuel flaunted this trait when his film, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* was nominated for an Oscar. Four Mexican reporters asked him if he thought he was going to win that Oscar. "Of course," he quipped. "I've already paid the $25,000 they wanted. Americans may have their weaknesses, but they do keep their promises." A few days later, headlines in Mexico City announced that Buñuel had bought the Oscar.

One would like to imagine talent is sufficient for success. Talent is a good thing, and it may be the key to longevity in the film business, but talent without chutzpah withers on the vine. In real estate, they say, 'location, location, location.' In film it's 'persistence, persistence, persistence.' Most people in the industry work a 60-hour week. Persistence is enduring hardship and stress. To have talent and wait by the phone will only get you a sore butt. To be a filmmaker, one has to make film. Start and never stop. Some of the work will be good, some bad, some excellent, and some horrendous. It is the body of work that makes a filmmaker, not one movie.

Although many directors and actors are well paid for their services, money should be a minor factor in deciding whether or not to do a film. Luis Buñuel said it best: "As unlikely as it may sound, I've never been able to discuss the amount of money offered to me when I sign a contract. Either I accept or refuse, but I never argue. I don't think I've ever done something for money that I didn't want to do; and when I don't want to do something, no offer can change my mind. What I won't do for one dollar, I also won't do for a million."

Directors who break the mold, take risks and persist against overwhelming odds are said to have chutzpah. Eric Von Stroheim was only allowed to make nine silent films because of his extravagance. But they are some of the greatest films ever made.

When Fritz Lang was so far over budget on *Metropolis* that the production had to be shut down, he merely waited until the additional financing was raised. "The production company is invested so heavily in the film, they must finish it to make their money back. Kurosawa played the same waiting game on *The Seven Samurai*." (Donald Richie)

John Ford insisted on shooting his films on location in Monument Valley. Preston Sturges demanded to direct in exchange for selling his screenplays for a dollar. Francis Ford Coppola shot *The Godfather* in extremely low light, and Stanley Kubrick expatriated to England to distance himself from the studios.

A very talented director went to Paris to direct a play by Shakespeare, *Henry V,* at the famous Academie Francaise. The director had never directed a Shakespearian drama before. With fear and intimidation, he faced the incredibly well-trained and disciplined actors for the first rehearsal. The director looked into the determined faces of the actors, trained professionals familiar with drama, knowledgeable about Shakespeare. He knew if he admitted to these actors he had never directed any Shakespeare play prior to this experience, he would be not be able to gain their confidence and exercise the command necessary to execute the role of director. So he lied. He greeted the cast and announced that he had just come from Germany where he had successfully staged three of Shakespeare's history dramas, including the play schedule for the Academie Française, *Henry V.* The actors then picked up their scripts and began the first read-through.

David K. Irving is a film director, writer, producer, and an Associate Professor in film production at New York University. He has written and directed dozens of documentaries, and his feature directing credits include *Night of the Cyclone*, *C.H.U.D. II*, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Rumpelstiltskin*.

A standard close-up. Use for either the Objective or Subjective Interviewee.

A tight close-up. Use only for the Subjective Interviewee.

Tips for a More Successful On-Camera Interview

Who to Interview and Why, Do's and Don'ts, and Sample Questions

by Sam Kauffmann

Nothing is more basic to documentary filmmaking than the on-camera interview. It seems so simple – you ask the person a direct question and get a succinct, interesting answer that fits perfectly into your film. But the reality is often far different. The person rambles, the important questions aren't fully answered, and you're left without much to show for hours of work.

Let's take a look at some interviewing tips to see if we can't make our on-camera interviews more successful. But first, let's determine whom to interview and why.

To examine the different types of people one might interview and the role they play in your documentary, let's divide possible interview subjects into two groups. The first group we'll call the "Objective Interviewee," and the second we'll call the "Subjective Interviewee." If you're investigating a crime, for instance, the Objective Interviewees are the police and the lawyers. The Subjective Interviewees are the victims of the crime. The Objective Interviewee can tell you why something happened, how things work, or provide facts and background information. Subjective Interviewees can tell you what happened to them and how they feel about what happened. They can explain the pain, confusion, disappointment or elation that flowed from the event.

When you develop your list of questions, keep in mind the sort of interview you'll be conducting. Will you be filming an Objective Interviewee or a Subjective Interviewee? Because the questions should be very different.

Let's examine the questions you might ask when covering a devastating flood.

For the Objective Interviewee (public officials, professors, lawyers, engineers), you develop questions that will explain, illuminate, or make clear what took place and why.

1. How much rain fell in the past 24 hours?
2. How many homes were destroyed?
3. When will the waters recede?
4. Will standard homeowner's insurance cover the damage?
5. Which government agencies can the victims turn to for immediate help?

For the Subjective Interviewee, the questions should get at their personal experience and explore their individual emotions.

1. When did you first sense danger?
2. What did you do when the water surged into your house?
3. When the water first reached you, what did you feel?
4. Can you describe the damage to your house and property?
5. All your possessions are destroyed—how does that feel?

When coming up with your questions, design them to elicit more than "Yes" or "No" answers.

Don't ask: "Did you feel afraid?"
Answer: "Yes."

Instead ask: "When you saw the house start to fall, how did you feel?"

Don't ask: "Was it cold in there?"
Answer: "Yes."

Instead ask: "What about the temperature? How did it feel in there?

A good documentary often includes both Objective and Subjective Interviewees. The former provides information about an event and the latter helps us understand its impact.

During the Interview

When conducting an on-camera interview, never appear rushed, even if you are. Make the person feel that you have all the time in the world. When you ask a question, look the person in the eye, and make him or her feel as if everything they say is absolutely riveting. If you show impatience, annoyance or irritation, things will only get worse.

Really listen to the person you're interviewing. Are you getting the information you need? If you rephrase the question might the answer get better? Can you skip the next question because the person already answered it? Is he or she hiding something?

After asking your question, you should give encouragement while the interviewee is responding, but make sure you give only non-verbal cues. Don't say, "uh huh," or

"I see," or "right!" The microphone will invariably pick up your voice, and you may not be able to cut it from the interviewee's answer. Instead, nod or smile with encouragement. Make all your interviewees feel as if they are doing a great job.

Don't be afraid to ask the difficult questions. That's your job. If the person didn't want to answer your questions they wouldn't have agreed to be interviewed and they wouldn't have signed the consent form (you *did* get them to sign a consent form, didn't you?). Ask all the questions your audience would want to ask if they could be there in your place.

When framing the interviewee in the viewfinder, I usually start with a medium shot and move in to a close-up as the interview progresses. Tight close-ups are great for the Subjective Interviewee, but seem inappropriate for the Objective Interviewee.

Always be conscious of the background. What's behind the person's head? If removing a weird plant or distracting painting improves the shot, ask politely and then remove it.

Good sound is almost more important than good picture. Turn off radios, shut windows, and close doors to eliminate background noises. I often place a lavaliere on the subject and run the mic cable to the camera. I try to hide the microphone wire beneath the subject's clothing, with the microphone itself barely visible. I'll place a second lavaliere on the person conducting the interview, whether it's me or the on-camera talent. Most prosumer cameras let you record sound onto two distinct channels, and that's a big help when editing.

When you've finished the interview, thank the interviewee profusely for their time. Remember, if he or she makes it into your final film, you two will have a bond forever. For me, the best part of my filmmaking career has been the opportunity to interview so many amazing people, whose honesty, bravery, and wisdom have graced my films and without whom I wouldn't have a career.

Photos courtesy of the author.

Sam Kauffmann is an award-winning filmmaker who teaches film production and digital editing at Boston University. His most recent film, *Massacre at Murambi,* aired on the PBS series P.O.V. in June.
www.samkauffmann.com

Understanding the Commercial Audition

Six Important Tips for Auditioning and Booking A Commercial

by Vanessa Daniels

There is more luck involved when auditioning for a commercial than any other type of audition. Unlike a film or theatrical audition where an actor is given at least a couple of scenes to prepare and demonstrate skill, in a commercial audition casting directors will see hundreds of actors for small bits like slamming a door, giving a reaction, walking down steps, etc… So how on earth could they possibly know what they are looking for amongst hundreds of people capable of doing any simple task involved in a 30 second spot? Understanding your chances of booking a commercial involve understanding the rules of advertising, demographics, and chance.

Vanessa Daniels on set.

A commercial is produced when an advertising agency is hired by a corporation to create an advertising campaign for a specific product. For example, Jane Doe Advertising teams up with MasterCard to create the infamous "Priceless" campaign. They then search for a production company or freelance director who can hash out the details and produce all the elements involved with the campaign including casting, filming, post production, special FX, etc…

The director, agency, and corporation then contact casting directors who contact commercial agents to begin the cattle call of "types" for the audition. Say the particular product being advertised targets a young, Midwestern female, age 20 to 25, that is college bound. One can bet they will cast a young, Midwestern female, age 20 to 25, in the commercial and air the spot during shows and times when that specific demographic will most likely be watching television. Commercials are advertising and all aspects are catered to the consumer because a company wants the end result to be the sale of a product.

Say you are that lucky female that books the 30 second spot. There is always a chance that your part will be edited out in the editing room or that the agency and corporation will decide not to air the spot altogether, which means very little pay out and exposure for the talent. This above mentioned information may seem depressing, but by understanding that so much of booking a commercial has little to do with your ability and everything to do with your look and the demographics that campaigns are catering to can actually help free you in an audition. Since so many elements are out of your control the best thing to do is leave an impression in the casting office by making the most of what remains in your control.

Tips:

1) **Dress to suggest the character and product being advertised.** For example, if you are auditioning to be a customer service representative in a Domino's Pizza ad, wear something that suggests that role and incorporate the blue, red, and white color palette associated with Domino's Pizza.

2) **Don't over dramatize a simple task.** This is not Shakespeare, people. If you have one simple line to say in an audition than say it simply and naturally. Don't treat it like a piece of theater just to get more camera time. You will stand out the more natural you are.

3) **Connect with the camera.** If you have to deliver lines directly to the camera lens pretend you are speaking to a close friend or family member. Be relaxed and sincere. Don't try to "sell the product." Think of it more in terms of playing an action: *"I am going to help my friend by suggesting this product." …"I am going to confide in my mother about this product."*

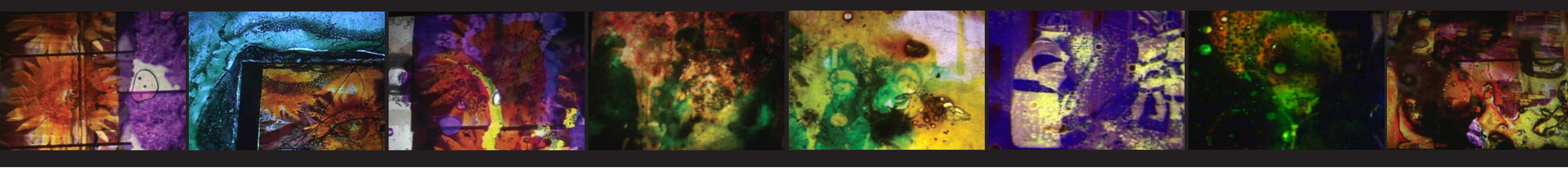
4) **Do not over-do hair and make up.** Unless a commercial audition has specified they are looking for a drag queen look – keep your hair and make up pretty and natural. Consumers want to relate to the fresh face girl selling moisturizer not be intimidated by how glamorous she looks.

5) **If you have to hold the product** make sure the label is facing the camera and is in full view.

6) **Smile and be friendly to the casting and advertising people.** This doesn't mean talk their ear off and waste time. But show them you are a very easy going person to work with.

Do your best while in the room and leave the rest to chance.

Vanessa Daniels recently booked four national commercials this summer. Her credits include *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, *Boiling Point* (MTV), *Trackers* (Oxygen Network), *The Difference* (Nickelodeon), the feature film, *The Sandpiper*, and numerous commercials, student films, and regional and off-broadway shows.



Graphic Filmmaking Techniques: ‘Light and Rhythm’

One Kind of Filmmaking that Can’t Be Replaced with Video

by Dana Dorrity

Although Kodak has stated definitively that they are committed to continuing to make motion picture film – word on the street, on studio lots, and in the corridors of film schools, is that digital video, particularly high-definition video, is gradually but inevitably replacing film for most commercial and independent film applications. But there is one group of filmmakers that feel fairly confident when they say that they will not be switching to HD, and these are film artists that create graphic film.

Graphic filmmakers paint and scratch directly onto the celluloid and use a variety of chemicals to alter and distort the film images. “Graphic film is abstract and non-representational like music. It’s a different way of telling a story; a different way of creating a narrative. I’m bored with normal plot devices, and some of the things I want to draw on are techniques that the graphic filmmakers used. But it’s all about telling a story,” says graphic filmmaker, Jordan Stone.

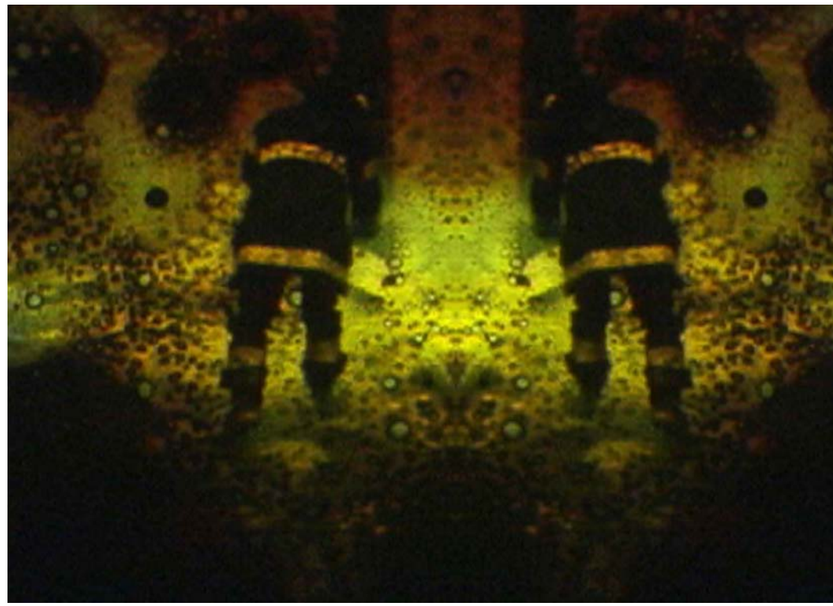
One of the more well-known experimental filmmakers, Stan Brakhage, actually glued and taped moth wings onto film stock then rephotographed it to create his film, *Mothlight*, which came out in 1963. Brakhage’s silent films tended to be deeply personal and lyrical. His film *Window Water Baby Moving* recorded the birth of his first child. In the middle of the delivery, Brakhage passed his camera to his wife so that she could film his reaction to becoming a father. In other films, he intercut images of arguments between himself and his wife and images of their lovemaking. In *Sirius Remembered*, Brakhage recorded images of the corpse of their family dog as it decayed and decomposed in the woods behind their house.

Stone was inspired when he saw *The Dante Quartet* by Stan Brakhage. “It’s almost entirely non-representational, splashes of glass paint, really deep color, then out of all that, came a face, and it made me start thinking about film in this three dimensional way. The surface of the film is a thing, a place to draw or to paint or to color.” By altering the images or creating new images on the surface of the film, graphic filmmakers break the relationship between film and photography and representation, enabling them to create narratives about mental illness, drugs, memory, and spirituality.

Stone studied with contemporary filmmakers Peter Hutton, Jennifer Todd Reeves and Peggy Ahwesh at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. “When I saw work by Jennifer Todd Reeves, even though it started from the same school, there was a story there, about sexuality and gender and mental illness, and a really interesting use of music. I’m a musician, so her work talked to me. And that’s what got me interested in Harry Smith and Len Lye.”

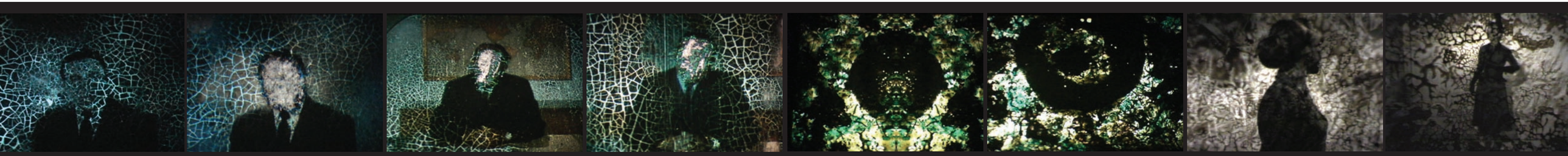
In the early 20th Century, New Zealand artist, Len Lye was reading interviews with painters who talked about using different techniques to depict motion. One morning when he was out delivering newspapers on his paper route, he watched the sunrise and realized that the way to paint with motion was to paint on something that moved. He began studying animation in Australia, but eventually rejected the techniques of animation, where pictures are drawn and photographed one cel at a time. Instead, he decided to paint directly onto the film. His first films, *Tusalava*, inspired by Samoan art and imagery, and *Colour Box,* were completed in the late 1920s and early 30s.

People have painted on film and experimented with altering film images since the beginning of still photography. The first innovators in graphic cinema were inspired by jazz. Harry Smith, the founder of The Anthology of American Folk Music



on Folkways Records, was one of the earliest American innovators in abstract, hand-painted, cameraless motion pictures. He saw Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie perform and this was his inspiration to begin painting on film to create the kinds of abstract images that the music of Parker and Gillespie evoked in his mind. Smith eventually began projecting his films at concerts. Using a projector with variable speeds, he could alter the pace of the film so that it was always in rhythm with the music. He felt that his film, the projected images, and the projector itself became like another instrument, a visual member of the band.

Harry Smith gained recognition for his avant-garde films when they were presented



as part of the "Art in Cinema" series at the San Francisco Museum of Art in the 1940s. This series, curated by Frank Stauffacher, presented new work by Bay Area artists, like Sidney Peterson and Christopher MacLaine, as well as surrealist films by European filmmakers like Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dali. Around the same time, Jackson Pollack was developing his action painting technique of dripping and splattering paint onto the canvas. These techniques which revolutionized painting also influenced and inspired graphic filmmakers who considered the gesture and process of creating and distorting film images as being equally important to the results of their work.

Some filmmakers work directly on film stock, but other graphic filmmakers, like Bruce Connor and Bill Morrison, used found footage, which was edited, altered and distorted to create new stories. Connor's 1965 film, *Report*, used footage of the Kennedy assassination that he filmed off of his television set. Through repetition of the coverage of the assassination and the addition of footage from other sources, Conner's film comments on both the media coverage of the assassination and the collective memory of this event. Bill Morrison's *Decasia* is an assemblage of found decayed film footage shot on highly flammable cellulose nitrate film stock.

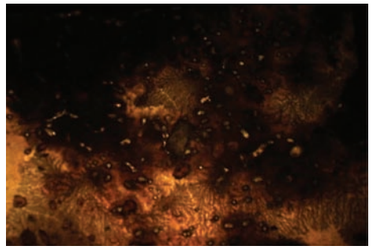
"Different people use different media, but I use a lot of glass paint and ink," says Stone. "I use dark room tricks like solarization, toning and reticulation. And I'm interested in decay, anything from burying the film to dumping chemicals on it. Plus I use a lot of different film stocks. And after I do all that I optically print it and I transfer that and edit with Final Cut Pro on the computer."

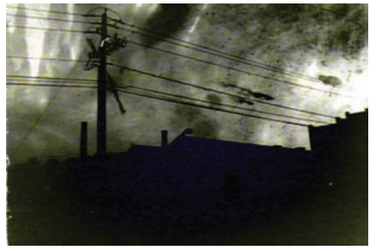
Until recently most of these films were nearly impossible to see outside of film schools and occasional screenings at Anthology Film Archives on the Lower East Side. But today, films by early graphic cinema innovators and contemporary film artists like Peggy Ahwesh can be accessed on Youtube.com. Graphic film techniques have all been also used for credit sequences, as in the film, *Seven*, and in music videos like *Stupid Girl* by Garbage.

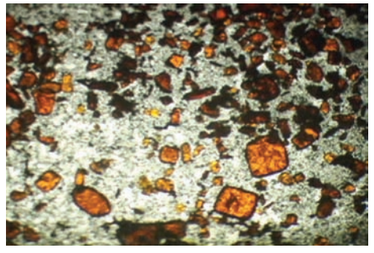
When photography emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, it freed painters from traditional portraiture and landscape and abstract expressionism emerged. Now that HD is replacing film for television and Hollywood movie production, it would be interesting to see if film becomes the medium for more abstract modes of expression. When discussing his interest in using graphic film techniques for his film projects, Jordan Stone explains, "It has to do with the idea of resolved and unresolved. I like the film to go out there, like jazz does. It's totally related to be-bop and Charlie Parker. You can play any note, so long as you resolve it with a note from the original key. And that's what I would like to do with film."

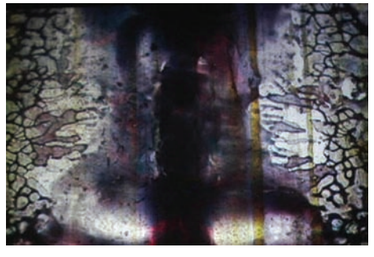
Images by Jordan Stone.

Dana Dorrity is an assistant professor of Communications and Media Arts at Dutchess Community College. She has an MFA in screenwriting from the American Film Institute and teaches media writing, screenwriting and video production classes.









From top to bottom:

glass still

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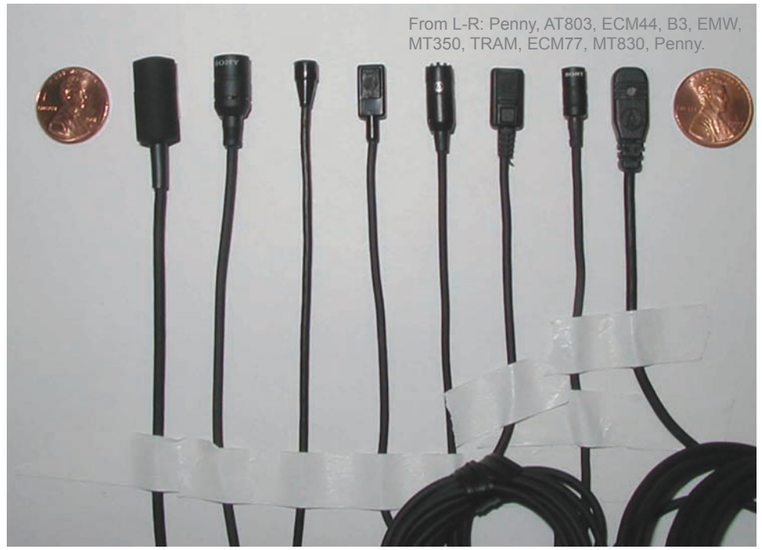

From L-R: Penny, AT803, ECM44, B3, EMW, MT350, TRAM, ECM77, MT830, Penny.

Selection and Use of Lavalier Microphones

Comparing Different Lavs and Rigging

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

A Brief History

Originally, the term "lavalier" referred only to the "neck-worn" or "body-worn" class of small microphones. These days, the working definition of lavalier has been extended to include virtually any miniature microphone small enough to be worn on the body and/or hidden in the set.

The first lavaliers used by our industry were large, dynamic microphones about the size of a cigar tube. These mics were traditionally worn around the neck by means of a lanyard (lavaliere). The mics were very rugged, but had a very short pick-up range and had to worn close to the mouth. Because of their relative insensitivity to sound, they were very feedback resistant. Units manufactured by Sennheiser and ElectroVoice were very popular in their time. Many can still be found at garage sales, priced to go at almost free.

(I still keep a vintage ElectroVoice 649B dynamic lavalier in my sound kit for use as a slate mic or as an "expendable" sound effects mic.)

The technology of the sixties saw a miniaturization of the lavalier. The Sony ECM-50 became the broadcast standard. The ECM-50 was an electret condenser, omni lavalier. Compared to the older dynamic lavs, the ECM-50 was considered miniature, even though it was almost one inch long by half an inch in diameter. The ECM-50 was far more sensitive, and its greater bass response complimented the golden throated newscasters of the era.

Years later, Sony introduced the ECM-30, a smaller and less expensive version of the ECM-50. Film and video people took a liking to it immediately. The ECM-30 was much smaller and easier to hide. More importantly, the mic lacked the extended bass response of the ECM-50, which translated into less wind noise and rumble when used outside of a studio.

(Sony evolved the ECM30 into the ECM44; and the ECM50 became the ECM55.)

Of course, over the years, other manufacturers entered the marketplace with lavaliers of their own. Witness the ElectroVoice CO-90, the TRAM TR-50, the MiniMic, the Sennheiser MKE-2, and others.

Which brings us up to the present.

Proximity vs. Transparent Lavaliers

(terms coined by the author)

Modern lavaliers can be described as being either "Proximity" or "Transparent".

A Proximity type lavalier is defined as a microphone that works best when kept fairly close to the source of the voice, emphasizes that voice, and suppresses background.

A prime example of this sort of lavalier is the ECM-55 (the current successor to the ECM-50).

Proximity lavaliers produce the "lavalier perspective" – emphasis of the voice in a "tight close-up" sort of way. You know – the newscaster, stand-up reporter, on-camera narrator, radio interview, voice of authority kind of sound.

Proximity lavaliers are the best way to go if you desire an authoritative sound with minimal background noise. They are also the mic of choice if there is simultaneous sound reinforcement (public address), since they are not as prone to cause feedback as other more sensitive mics.

Transparent lavaliers are defined as sounding more like omnidirectional recording studio mics. They are very sensitive to sounds, and their volume-versus-distance characteristics are far more gradual than that of proximity lavaliers. Transparent mics can be deployed at greater distances. And, they are far more forgiving of talent turning their heads away from the mic.

Transparent mics sound much more natural and less forced than proximity mics. Used on a video set, these mics will intercut much easier with overhead boom mics.

The drawback to transparent mics is they are much more sensitive to background noise, and also require greater skill to hide under clothing.

The Microphone Lineup

As mentioned before, the Sony ECM-55 is a longtime standard of the industry and is a proximity type lavalier. It is cylindrical in shape, measuring roughly 1/2" in diameter by 1" long. This mic has a pronounced bass response, and is excellent for audio interviews, narration, and public address. It is not as useful a mic to use outside of the studio, due to its sensitivity to wind and rumble. This mic is not very forgiving of off-axis voice. When talent turn their heads away, the sound level drops off considerably.

On the border between proximity and transparent is the Sony ECM-44. The ECM-44 is probably the most popular all-purpose lavalier on the market. It is more open sounding than the ECM-50, but still does a good job of suppressing background. It is somewhat forgiving of head turns. The mic exhibits a slight warmth in the middle frequency range, which promotes the clarity of voice over background. Also, the ECM-44 does not have the bass sensitivity of the ECM-55, making this a better sounding microphone to use in the field. Very similar in sound quality, but less expensive, is the Audio Technica AT803b.

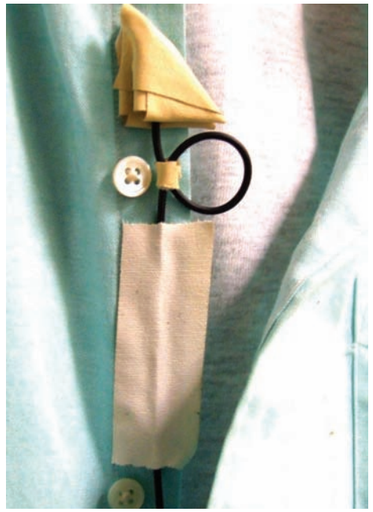
Moving towards the transparent group of lavaliers, we come to the TRAM TR-50. This very tiny microphone differs from the Sony's in that it has a front facing grill. The Sony's have their openings on the top.

Remember, all of these lavaliers are omnidirectional, so it does not matter which way the mics or their grills are oriented. Just pay attention when you are rigging them so that you don't accidentally block up or tape over the hole.

TRAMS are famous for their wide array of mounting clips and tricks. In addition to the traditional tie bars, TRAMS also offer "vampire clips" (not TRAM's designation, but a nickname that has caught on), boundary plate style plastic mounts, leather tape-downs, and a host of goodies.

The sound of TRAM is very good. It is more transparent and natural sounding than the ECM-44, but not quite as open as some of the other transparent mics.

Countryman and Voice Technologies make some interesting lavaliers. The Countryman mics are offered in a flat faced configuration (EMW) as well as a miniature round top (B3). Countryman also makes a super miniature round top not much thicker than a spaghetti noodle (B6). Voice Technologies offers a flat faced configuration.



What makes both of these brands interesting is they are proximity mics (short range, strong rejection of background) but with a very natural sound. Originally created for Broadway shows, these mics are useful to filmmakers who need to mike actors within a noisy environment. But they are not good as plant mics.

My favorite transparent lavaliers to use are the Audio Technica AT899 & MT830, Sennheiser MKE-2, and the Sony ECM-77. All of these lavaliers are extremely sensitive, and work very well as plant mics or body mics. They sound very natural, and intercut perfectly with overhead boom mics. They make excellent plant mics hidden in sets. They also allow the pickup of other persons near the actor wearing them, which is very handy in a documentary or covert situation.

Their drawback, however, is their sensitivity. Sometimes they can hear too much background. They also require more care in rigging under clothing. But they do sound great!

Rigging Lavaliers

Outside the Clothing

In many situations, it is permissible for the microphone to be visible in the shot. Needless to say, this simplifies the process of rigging the little devils quite a bit!

To begin with, you should be familiar with the proper technique of using a tie bar type mounting clip.

Secure the mic capsule (head) in the clip as one would expect. Then, loop the mic cable around in a "J" so that it circles upward and re-enters the tie clip. The cable should pass freely through the closed end side of the clip where it hinges (the side farthest away from the jaws). With the tie bar in place on the clothing, continue the mic cable up and around so that it completes a circle behind the clothing. Bring the cable back down (still behind the clothing) and secure it inside of the spring jaws of the clip. The action of the metal clip will serve to eliminate conductive cable noise from being transmitted to the mic capsule. It will also strain relief the mic from any tugging or pulling on the cable.

The remainder of the lavalier's mic cable should be hidden behind talent's clothing. Although it is acceptable for the microphone itself to be visible to the audience, there is never an excuse to see a sloppy cable!

The thin cable of the lavalier terminates at some sort of XLR connector/power supply. This supply should be hidden either in a pants pocket, waistband, or at the ankle. Never encourage talent to drag this XLR connector around. You risk great damage to the frail cable and electronic connections. Instead, always secure the connector end to talent, and simply plug a standard XLR mic cable into it. At the end of a take, simply unplug the heavy mic cable from talent and they are free to roam the set without risk to your lavalier mic.

I have found that a heavy duty rubber band with a safety pin works well to secure the power supply inside of a waistband if there are no convenient pockets to use. A heavy sock (or at least the ankle portion of one) works well at the ankle, as also does an ACE bandage or a salvaged ankle holster. Even a strip of gaffers tape works well, but remember to line the ankle with cloth or toilet tissue first. Velcro straps are fine on males, but will destroy fine hosiery and stockings.

Clip-on lavaliers are often attached to the center chest opening of a shirt/blouse or to the necktie. They can also be attached to the lapel of a sports jacket.

If attaching to a lapel, make sure that you attach to the side most likely for talent to turn towards. (Towards the interviewer, towards the projection screen, etc.)

Although the lavalier is visible to the camera, it does not have to be conspicuous. Remember that in a wide shot, the lavalier is very tiny on screen. In a close-up, the lavalier will be framed out of the shot.

Just a little judicious camouflage will make the lavalier all but invisible. Cover the visible portions of the mic and clip with small strips of white camera tape. Color the tape with magic markers to match the color and pattern of wardrobe.

Hiding Lavaliers under Clothing:

Hiding a microphone under clothing requires much more attention to detail. Not only must the mic be hidden from view, but you must also contend with the problems of clothing noise.

Clothing noise comes in two varieties: **Contact and Acoustic.**

Contact clothing noise is caused by clothing physically rubbing against or striking the mic capsule or mic cable. The best means to eliminate this type of noise is to immobilize the clothing around the mic. If the garments cannot move in relation to the mic, then they cannot rub or strike the mic!

Different sound mixers have different techniques for accomplishing this feat, but my preference is the use of sticky triangles (often augmented with pins).

But first, we have to eliminate cable noise. Do this by forming one or two complete loops of the cable just below the mic capsule.

The loops should be around 1/2 inch in diameter. Tie the loops in place with a piece of thread or dental floss, or even a thin strip of camera tape sticky side out.

The loop should be secured loose enough to open and close freely when the cable is tugged. This becomes your strain relief.

Secure the mic capsule within two small triangles of sticky tape. I make these triangles from a 1" wide by 2" long piece of camera or gaffers tape, folded corner to corner several times like a flag, sticky side always out. The mic is centered within the two triangles. Be careful not to tape over the grill or holes of the mic. Round top mics are easier to rig, since they can be surrounded by the tape, with only the top grill exposed. Flat facing mics require more care, since the stocky triangles need to be offset so as not to block the side port.

This sticky triangle rig can be placed just above a button of a shirt/blouse. The cable loop falls opposite of the button itself. The next inch or so of the lav cable should be taped directly onto the shirt, with the tape lengthwise between buttons. Any tugging of the shirt or cable with be strain relieved by this strip of cable. The floating loop isolates the tugging from the mic capsule. The sticky triangles anchor the clothing on either side of the mic. A couple of straight (or safety) pins may be used to secure the triangle tips if humidity or long duration are concerns.

Another technique is to use Moleskin strips and a safety pin to anchor the weight of the mic and cable. This is very useful if the actor will be rigged for an extensive period of time, or if moisture (perspiration, humidity, rain, etc.) tends to loosen the hold of sticky tape. Cut some adhesive backed Moleskin (found in the Foot Care dept of any supermarket or drugstore) into french fry size strips. Wrap a strip (adhesive toward the mic, soft side out) completely around the body of the lav, insert an open safety pin, and continue the wrap.

The pin will securely hold the mic, but you may need to add sticky triangles to prevent clothing noise.

When wiring a female equipped with a bra, the sticky triangle can be re-angled so that it is flat-side up, pointy end down, and can be placed inside of the bra, in the cleavage at the "cross your heart" point. The swell of the bosom acts as a shield against clothing noise, and results in excellent sounding mic placement.

The other type of clothing noise is that of Acoustic noise. Acoustic noise is created not from clothing rubbing against or striking the mic, but instead from the clothing rubbing against itself.

Static Guard works very well to lubricate clothing, such as jackets rubbing over shirts. Heavy starch conducts noise, so it is best dealt with by applying or spraying a little water mist around the mic placement area, as well as in any other areas that would not appear obvious to camera.

As a rule of thumb, cottons and woolens are the quietest clothing fibers. Synthetics and silks are very noisy and should be avoided as much as the situation allows.

Lavaliers can also be hidden in other areas than just center chest. Under the collar works well with sweaters and sweatshirts, or women's blouses. Going under the collar of a dress shirt on a male may create a problem if beard stubble is present on the neck.

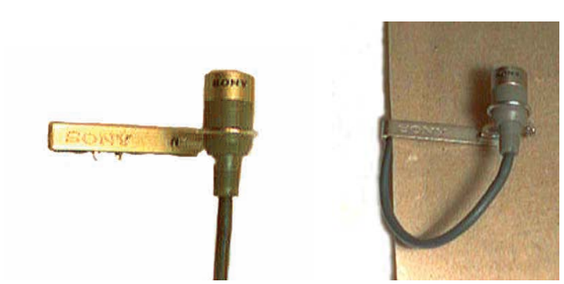
Less conventional mic sites include under the brim of hats, or hidden in the hair at the forehead. Small lavaliers can also be hidden on the frames of eyeglasses.

A very useful trick is to hollow out a plastic pen, and hide a lavalier inside. With but a very small incision in the back of a pocket, a pen mic can be planted in full visibility to the camera, with no clothing noise, and still remain completely "hidden".

A relatively new mic design on the market is the Pin Mic. Although this mic is worn outside of clothing, it is extremely concealable. The concept of the PIN MIC is so simple that it is brilliant. Instead of fussing around with tie bars, vampire clips, unsightly cables, and awkward mic placement — just poke the pins of the backplate thru the wardrobe and cap it with the microphone capsule! Because the microphone is outside of clothing, there is virtually no clothing noise to contend with. Since the mic capsule mates to its electronics via PINS, you can position the mic almost anywhere on talent. You are no longer limited to lapels and center button-up openings. T-shirts, pullovers, and dresses are not a problem anymore.

On the camera side of things, all which is visible is a nondescript round capsule about the size of an aspirin. Using just the black or white sleeve covers that go over the mic capsule, the PIN MIC usually just blends into wardrobe on its own. But if you need better invisibility, you can attach whatever you want onto the face of the mic sleeve (the PIN MIC has ports on the circumference, so that the face is okay for mounting things to).

For example, you can cover the PIN MIC with a spare shirt button. Hide it under a corporate or station logo jewelry pin. Cover it with a snippet of cloth. Mask it with colored tape, or use a colored marker to paint some plain tape. One mixer that I know shoots & prints a digital picture of the wardrobe, and then pastes a snippet of the print over the mic to make it perfectly blend in.



Wind Noise

There are two types of wind noise: **Contact and Acoustic.**

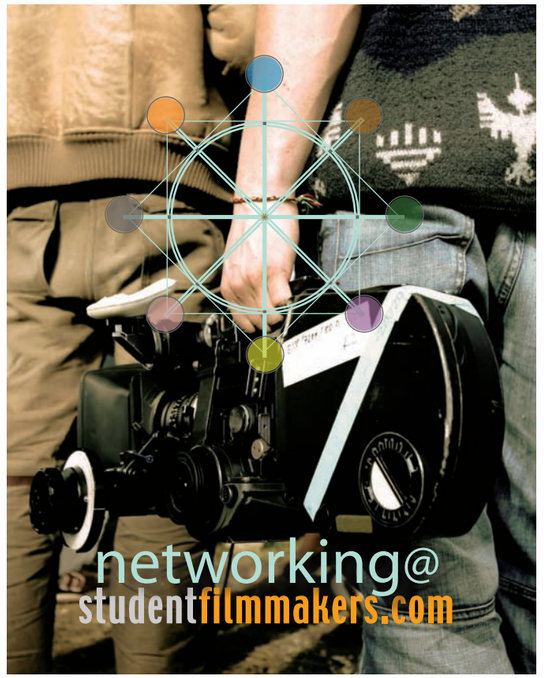
Contact wind noise is the one we most frequently associate with microphones. That is the distortion caused when wind strikes the diaphragm of the mic itself.

The solution is to use a good windscreen. Which you will have to make yourself, because the flimsy little puffs of acoustic foam that come with most lavaliers are merely breath pop filters, not real windscreens!

The simplest tool for blocking wind is to salvage the foam booty that makes up the working end of a video head cleaning swab. After you service your video heads, save these sticks! Believe me, the micro dust collected from a video head will not affect sound quality on a windscreen.

Pull the foam tips off of the wooden sticks, and then slice them open at the base to form a foam cap. Slide the foam over your favorite lavalier, and instant windscreen. Since these screens are disposable, feel free to color them with markers for less visibility.

If rigging under clothing, feel free to sandwich them inside of your sticky triangles. So what if the tape destroys them!



A greater level of wind protection can be achieved by placing an oversize metal grill (such as from an ECM-55) over the foam.

Another trick is to wrap a layer of cheesecloth over the foam and the mic. For visible mics, snip the fingertips off of a pair of wool knit children's winter gloves, and pull the wool "caps" over the cheesecloth. With a layer of wool, cheesecloth, and foam — you're very well insulated from wind noise.

When hiding lavaliers inside heavy winter coats, a good technique is to bring the mic to the outside of the coat (to avoid excessive muffling) and to hide the mic under a patch of cloth or felt. These patches are readily obtained as "sample" swatches from any fabric store. Cut the swatches into a random pattern, so as not to be conspicuous. Rub some dirt over the patch to help blend it in.

The other type of wind noise is Acoustic. That is the sound of the wind howling through the trees or between the buildings. It is a form of background noise, like traffic noise, and cannot be eliminated by the use of a windscreen. Your best solution is to keep the mics close to talent. Rolling off the bass frequencies also helps a little, but wind howling is often all over the frequency spectrum.

Lavaliers as Plant Mics

The best solution to clothing noise is to keep the lavalier off of the body entirely.

Lavaliers are too stupid to know whether or not they are attached on the body, or just near one.

It is a simple matter to hide lavaliers onto many handheld props, such as purses, clip boards, flash lights, cups, etc.

Remember to use a wad of sticky tape to "float" or shock-mount the mic capsule so that it is not directly against a hard surface that might conduct vibration.

To rig a car, hide a lavalier on the inside of the sun visor. Any decent transparent lavalier will pickup driver, passenger, and probably backseat passenger. The visor is padded to reduce echo, and well away from the bottom of the car with related engine and road noise.

Transparent lavaliers also work well as hidden mics in the set. A mic in the centerpiece can give you a restaurant table. A mic in an executive pen set can pickup both sides of an across the desk encounter. A mic on the inside of a doorjamb can give you that short line from a passerby poking his head into the office.

Use your imagination! A telephone booth is a snap to rig. Someone reading directly off of a blackboard or bulletin board is perfect for a hidden lavalier. The headboard of a bed for those "marital relations" shots.

Perspective

A danger of using lavaliers is to forget to take perspective into account. A proximity lavalier always sounds like a tight close-up, even when the camera is fifty feet away.

Transparent mics sound much more natural, but unlike boom mics, their perspective is fixed. Booms move from farther to closer as the frame changes; lavaliers do not.

One quick fix to the perspective problem is to also deploy a shotgun mic directed at nothing in particular. The "bleed mic" is used to capture footsteps, ambiance, and general sound effects from an angle that will not pick up dialogue (two mics capturing the same sound will create phasing problems, echo, and thinness). For long perspective, the bleed mic is mixed (say, 30%) with the dialogue from the lavalier. As the shot narrows to a closeup, the bleed mic is faded down, so that we are only left with the close-up sound of the lav.

Another trick to open up perspective when using lavaliers is to place them a little further down on the chest than normal. This creates a noisier track with more ambiance and less forced emphasis of voice.

Two actors playing opposite each other can be miked from each other's lavalier, again opening up the soundtrack to appear more natural.

Photos courtesy of the author.

Fred Ginsburg, C.A.S., Ph.D. is a Production Sound Mixer with over two decades of experience on feature films, episodic television, national commercials, corporate, and government. He is the author of over 90 articles and *Guide to the Nagra 4.2 and Production Sound Recording*. Fred is president of the Equipment Emporium Inc. and co-Executive Director of the National Association of Forensic Video. He also teaches at the California State University Northridge.

Don Hooper, assistant engineer editing and mixing on Pro Tools.

Sarah Clark recording animation VO for internet project.

Internet Audio Production: Clarity and Loudness

Mixing For the Net

by Bryant Falk

Much has changed in the world of communications. One of the biggest adjustments has been the way in which we watch and listen to media. Think about it. As little as 10 years ago you had three main venues. TV, Radio, and the Cinema. Now with the computer you have the Internet, and of course, it's companion, the iPod (or iPod-like device). This along with the new compression algorithms like MP3 (ok, it's not even considered new anymore), AAC, MP4, and others have led to a new segment of audio production.

The big issue with internet audio production comes down to clarity and loudness. This simplicity stems from the format your listener is going to be receiving your audio. More times than not, your production will be monitored with computer speakers or headphones in less than ideal conditions (busy offices, traffic-filled streets,… or on a sun-filled Miami beach?). We have the laptop to thank for these audio woes. So, when we are given lemons you know what they say… Make an audio mix that doesn't suck!

The world wide web tends to be the "Wild West" of communications. No standards or requirements for posting media. This has led to most people posting audio as hot as possible. So to keep in the game and compete with the existing trend, we also must mix hotter.

Most TV audio is mixed at –10 to –12db. I personally like to mix internet audio at –2db. This level allows for a hot signal while also keeping some headroom to prevent clipping on systems. A good reference for level is to compare against other media sights that post similar material to your own. When referencing, make sure you have as many variables locked down as possible. One example is to know exactly what your speaker volume is set to, and always have it there when making comparisons. Another balance is to use the same compression format and settings. For example, deciding if you will use variable bit rate encoding and at what streaming level (128, 160, 320 kbps).

Next to consider is the clarity issue. Most computer monitor speakers just don't have the performance capabilities to reproduce the full audio spectrum effectively. With this in mind, make sure to mix for what matters.

We have three main components in a mix: dialogue, music, and sound effects. What matters most to your project can be very subjective. Below I've broken it down into a type of cheat sheet for mixing. On the left is the description of the film project, and on the right is the order of our three audio components as to what is most important.

TYPE OF FILM	AUDIO MIX PRIORITY
Slapstick Comedy	Sound Effects, Music, Dialogue
Drama	Dialogue, Music, Sound Effects
Action Adventure	Sound Effects, Music, Dialogue
Romance	Dialogue, Music Sound Effects

Now the above is just a rough guide, very rough. Many movies are a combination of genres, say a romantic comedy, or an action-filled drama. But it should help you get a feel of where your project sits. One rule to always be aware of is if your dialogue is sharing additional information it must be heard! Dialogue is unique in its ability to relate feeling, data, and direction.

Now that you've prioritized your audio, the next big hurdle is EQ. On this I am rather aggressive. Most systems can't handle the low frequency content, so I tend to minimize this area. Keep in mind, there are usually mid to high frequencies in your lows. Like a kick drum, for example. It usually has a lot of bass or low frequencies, but it also has mid to highs. The beater that hits the drum creates them. Bringing these out will create the illusion of a louder kick drum. Minimize your room ambience. The computer and surrounding area will add there own. EQ sound effects that sit right over your dialogue track – an example is a car engine. Using a parametric EQ, aggressively carve out the area in the car engine sound to allow for the dialogue to be heard. I find more aggressive EQ on Internet mixes leads to an effective mix on those tiny speakers we all have.

Photos by Bryant Falk.

Bryant Falk has been a producer and engineer for over 12 years working with such clients as *The Ricki Lake Show*, Coca-Cola, Sports Illustrated, Valley National Bank, and MTV's *The Shop*. His company Abacus Audio (www.abacusaudio.com) handles many aspects of the audio production field from creative and production to mixing and final output.

Gelatin nose.

Creating Prosthetic Appliances with Gelatin

Recipe for a Foaming Gelatin

by Todd Debreceni

The gelatin in Jell-O is what enables you to create all sorts of different shapes. I'm sure you've all heard of it, but what exactly is it? Well, gelatin is a structural protein called collagen found in many animals, including humans. In fact, collagen makes up nearly one-third of all protein in the human body. Collagen is a large molecule that is used by our bodies to make skin, bones and tendons both strong and flexible – that is, somewhat elastic.

To manufacture gelatin, manufacturers grind up bones, hooves and connective tissues of cows, pigs and sometimes horses, and treat these parts with either a strong acid or base to break down the cellular structure of the tissue to release the collagen and other proteins. After this treatment, the resulting mixture is boiled. During this process the collagen protein is broken down, resulting in the creation of gelatin.

Because of its versatility, gelatin is a common ingredient in many foods, and can be used in many ways. Gelatin is used in foods from chewing gum to yogurt. It is even used to make capsules for medications and vitamins to make them easier to swallow.

By now you're probably wondering, *What the heck does this have to do with special make-up effects?* Well, in addition to gelatin being used as an ingredient in foods and cosmetics, it is also one of the primary materials used for creating prosthetic appliances, along with foam latex and silicone. *Ahhhhhh....*

There are a number of formulas for making your own gelatin that you can find on the Internet, as well as purchasing pre-made gelatin prosthetic material from various industry suppliers. When describing gelatin, manufacturers refer to *bloom*. The bloom factor or bloom strength of gelatin is an industrial standard which measures the relative firmness of the gelatin in a cured state. Gelatin used for makeup effects work usually has a bloom factor of 300, whereas gelatin you can purchase from your local grocer will have a bloom somewhere between 200 and 250. This may be just fine for work you will be doing, but just be aware that the tear strength will not be as high as when using a gelatin with a bloom of 300.

Gelatin is considered to be hypoallergenic, that is, allergy-free for use on most people. That is a good thing. Gelatin is also considered hygroscopic, which means it has a tendency to absorb moisture from the atmosphere. This is both good, and not so good. Good, in that it allows gelatin to be soluble – to liquefy and dissolve. With the addition of water, the gelatin particles swell and expand, actually absorbing up to 10 times their weight in water (which, in turn, can make gelatin appliances somewhat heavy). Not so good, in that gelatin appliances can swell in proportion to humidity changes in the air, and shrink over time through evaporation.

One way to help minimize this change due to humidity is to substitute glycerin for almost all of the water used in the gelatin appliance formula. This is very good for creating a variety of wounds and injuries – cuts, burns, bullet holes, swelling, etc. This gelatin can be colored with flocking material, food coloring or powdered cake

Shown counterclockwise from top left: Melting gelatin; gelatin flashing (to reuse); mold halves and gelatin cube.

makeup and stored in small squeeze bottles to be heated until the gelatin liquefies. This is similar to a number of gelatin effects kits that are available commercially. Just be very careful not to overheat the gelatin. Because it is organic material, it can be severely damaged or ruined if heated too much (or too often). And, you don't want to burn your actor by applying gelatin that is too warm. *Always test the temperature before application!*

Glycerin is also hygroscopic, so some formulas replace some of the glycerin with Sorbitol, which is derived from corn syrup and is less affected by changes in humidity than glycerin. Sorbitol also increased the structural integrity of gelatin formulas, making more tear-resistant which is critical for prosthetic work. (I've seen formulas that added white glue for the same purpose with good success.)

Zinc Oxide can also be used in small amounts to add strength and greater tolerance to temperature changes (remember, gelatin tends to melt when heat is applied…). You will have to experiment when using zinc oxide because it will affect the translucency of your finished gelatin appliance. Zinc oxide powder is the preferred form, but it can be tough to find. Zinc oxide ointment will work, though. Regardless of what formula you wind up using and calling your own, keep your finished appliances in air-tight plastic bags, away from the light and in a cool place. They will last much longer.

For prosthetic appliance work, the gelatin you use will need to be light and soft – foamy. So, the recipe I'm going to give you is for a foaming gelatin. The resulting gelatin will not be as light and soft as foam latex, but it will be substantially lighter and spongier than a solid gelatin appliance, and definitely lighter than silicone gel.

Here is a basic gelatin formula. You will notice this recipe does not have Sorbitol, white glue or zinc oxide. Do some experimenting. Makeup effects artists must be part mad chemist.

Note: You can double, triple… quadruple this formula. Very small batches aren't as easy to mix as a medium batch, which this describes. But, once you've mixed a medium batch, you can take small amounts and use them in small molds.

Ingredients:

160 grams (1/4 cup)	Glycerin
40 grams (1/8 cup)	Gelatin
1 gram (1 tsp)	Quick rise yeast
3.5 grams (3.5 tsp)	Water

Pigment color of your choice. (You can also use colored flocking, food coloring, or powdered cake makeup.)

In a microwave-safe bowl, pour the glycerin. Slowly add the gelatin granules to the glycerin. If you are adding a pigment, mix the pigment into a small amount of glycerin before adding it to the batch. Heat the glycerin and gelatin in the microwave for a minute or two – in 5-10 second increments – being careful to PREVENT BRINGING TO A BOIL. If the gelatin boils, the collagen in the gelatin will be destroyed and you will need to start over. Gelatin melts at about 70 degrees C, or close to 160

Shown counterclockwise from top left: Poured gelatin in mold; demolded nose (negative); clamped mold.

degrees F, depending on altitude. When it is completely liquefied, pour the gelatin into a plastic quart cup.

Let the gelatin cool completely. (You can put it in the freezer or refrigerator – you're essentially making Jell-O.) Then re-melt the gelatin in the microwave 3 or 4 times to ensure that all of the water has evaporated from the glycerin.

Before going on to the next step, apply a very thin layer of either petroleum jelly or vegetable oil onto both the positive and negative of your mold as a release agent so the gelatin will not stick to the mold surface when you de-mold your appliance.

When you're ready to cast your appliance, mix the yeast with the water and let this mixture sit for at least two minutes; then, melt the gelatin, being careful not to let it boil, then add the yeast and water mixture, stirring it into the melted gelatin. It will immediately begin to foam. Stop stirring and let the gelatin mixture rise until it stops, then stir well with a large craft stick to refine the gelatin – that is, to remove large air bubbles and to make the foam mixture consistent. It should be the consistency of meringue. If the gelatin cools too much, reheat it briefly so it is pourable. Like foam latex, foamed gelatin can be poured or injected into a mold.

It is a good idea to heat the negative half of your mold in a warm oven until it is warm to the touch. This is an optional step, but may provide a better appliance surface. The positive can be either heated or chilled prior to foaming your gelatin. If chilled, it should be cold to the touch but not frozen. The goal is to speed up the gelling time. Pouring warm foam into a frozen mold could crack it. Experimentation will dictate what is best.

When your foam is ready to pour, fill your mold; use a spatula or large craft stick to work the gelatin into the warm negative mold and close it immediately. Be careful not to trap air bubbles when closing the mold. Clamp or press the mold halves together tightly to ensure a thin blending edge of the appliance, then place the closed mold into a freezer or refrigerator to gel. Depending on the size of your mold and the temperature, it may take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour before the appliance is ready to be de-molded.

You can tell when the foamed gelatin has set by touching the overflow; if it bounces back, it's ready to de-mold. Carefully open the mold halves and powder the gelatin to prevent it from sticking to itself. Place it back on the positive and it is ready for application or painting.

Demolded nose (positive).

Photos by Todd Debreceni.

Todd Debreceni began his career in entertainment with PBS while in graduate school at the University of Tennessee, and has worked at TBS in Atlanta, and 20th Century-Fox Television, Warner Bros., and Walt Disney Pictures in California. Todd has created makeup effects for many theatre productions, and is a recipient of a 2006 Denver Post Ovation Award for makeup. In addition to working in his Aurora studio, Todd conducts workshops, teaches at several Denver-area schools, and is currently writing a new book on special makeup effects to be published in 2008.

Exploring Sales and Distribution Trends *Before* Making Your Movie

A Glance into Film Markets and Business Models

by Adam Matalon

With the heady but stressful production behind you, the first-time indie feature filmmaker will often start to consider how to get the film seen. In my humble opinion, you've just made your first mistake.

More and more, the realities of film sales and distribution should be inherently factored into your production plan. Don't make the mistake of making a film that is a 'tough sell' in the market. Budget the costs of delivering a film and produce it to sell.

Was it worth the entire struggle to make a film you believe in only to have people tell you it won't sell?

My advice to all indie filmmakers out there young or old: **Invest in the price of a film market admission.** Meet sales agents, pitch ideas and get an idea for what is selling and what is not selling. Then go out and make a film that you can move!

Not so long ago, I had a more idealist view, complete with some now shattered illusions about the business of the business. Starting a couple of years back, I began to attend film markets. First Cannes (Marche Du Film), and then AFM (American Film Market). I've quickly garnered a broad education. Above all, I've learned to swim in the deep end of the pool and have a clear and concise plan moving forward with my next two features.

The film festivals are perceived as the vehicles to both launch and sell a film. However, closer to the truth is that they are marketing launching pads for films that have previously acquired either distribution, or a strong sales agent. Of course, films break this rule, and every festival has a break out hit that resonates, but the odds are similar to the lottery.

Most of the savvy filmmakers out there have made prior contact with sales agents and distributors months before their films launch. In many cases, the film already has a deal in place. If you have already created a buzz about your film at a festival without a 'deal,' what else is there left? How can a sales agent create a buzz the second time around? These are all very important concepts to remember. In recent times, I have seen or heard of several films from other filmmaker friends or acquaintances who win audience choice awards and the likes at major festivals only to realize that they *cannot* get distribution.

Why? Well, I believe there is a reason it's called show *business*, and the entertainment *industry*. The sales agents and the distributors are not in it for art. They are in the business of making money off your craft. I don't mean that cynically. That's what they do. And to fault them for that is a mistake. They sell your film for the best price possible to as many markets as possible. If they cared for filmmaking as a craft, that's what they would do. Some companies have taken to that idea, and 'vertically-integrated' finance/production/distribution companies are growing in number. No matter how good your film, if there is no money to be made they will not want it.

The international markets are the best place for new filmmakers to establish credibility, relationships and a small cash flow. However, we all have to understand the market – it changes constantly. What sells in North America does not necessarily translate into the Chinese, French, Australian or Russian markets. Thrillers, action and other genre films permeate these markets. The romantic comedy is the worst film to make. I love the good ones, and domestically they can do well financially, but internationally, without Cameron Diaz or Drew Barrymore, you're dead, and American comedy does not translate abroad that well!

Traditional business models go like this: A sales agent licenses your film, they give you little or no advance and tie up your film for several years. However, what you will have is a film that has representation and most likely distribution with a piece of the equity your film generates. (Having your film on the bottom shelf at Wal-Mart is still cool, right?)

So what are the big film markets? Hong Kong, Cannes & AFM are considered the big three international markets. Hong Kong starts the year in April, followed by Cannes in late May and AFM at the end of October. Film markets are very different from festivals. At Cannes, sales agents from around the world meet at the Palais, various hotels, and other venues to buy and sell their wares. It's a giant bazaar where every genre, price and quality point is represented. Cannes also hosts the Short Film Corner, which is a good excuse to spend the money to go.

My introduction to Cannes was 2006 when I was not only pitching a feature that has been subsequently produced and sold, but I was lucky to have a not so short 'short' (*Sex & Camping*, 38 Minutes) in the short film corner.

Sales and distribution companies take space much like any other convention and hang up their wares. Posters, sell sheets, DVD screeners and the like abound. Companies like Lions Gate, Sony and Weinstein Company alongside companies you have never heard of, who are making money in the market with films like yours. Many of the films that are represented are complete, and some are partially financed, while others are in production or post. What is important is that the films are tangible, and they are for sale.

The best time to try and pitch a film to the sales agents is in the latter half of the market. The first few days, they are very busy, and their main concern is selling the films they already represent. If you attend, spend the first couple of days scouring through the market guide. Look at all the companies. Understand the kinds of films that they represent. There is no point in pitching a drama to a company who deals in thrillers and horror. It wastes their time, makes you look like a fool, and guarantees they will not meet you again at the next market when you do have a thriller. Drop by the booths with your card, try to know what people look like (pictures are often in the guides). Let the person at the front know that you have a film you'd like to talk about. Ask for an appointment with a specific person in the latter part of the market. If they ask for you to leave stuff don't. This gives them the perfect out to say they will "review and respond". Make an appointment and say that you will bring material about the specific project, as well as some other films that you are involved with. (I will assume that you know what the next film is that you're going to make, right?)

Once in the meeting, don't be scared to say you are new to the markets and you are trying to build relationships and get a feel for their company. Some are nice, others are harsh and cynical. It doesn't matter if you have something they want.

They are ideally looking for complete films with at least one actor with some name recognition. They want films that have international appeal. You should have a well-produced sell sheet for the film even if it's not the final artwork. They will decide this if they represent your film, and they will expect to see a really good trailer. If they like what they see and hear, they will request a screener, and then, you take it from there.

If you work backwards from the film markets on upcoming projects and can create a package that includes some sales representation, investors are more likely to jump onboard even if it's your dad — he likes his cash, too, and presumably he's already spent a lot on you.

Okay, now that I've crushed all our dreams, here's the good news and it's *very good*. Make a saleable film, and you will have many companies you can approach. Everyone's looking for high quality product. The international markets are huge, and you can recoup your money and perhaps even make money without your film ever even being seen in North America.

The a recent film that I produced with my producing partner Kevin Burke is a 94-minute horror feature called *Death On Demand*. The film was made for a ridiculous budget (low *not* high) with a great creative team and no name actors. The quality and production value is good. We have North American and international deals in place and were gratified to receive offers from four different companies for the film. However, I will not make a film without names again. My feature documentary, *Seasons In The Valley* has Elliott Gould narrating, and this has been a good sales tool.

You're swimming in the big pool at this point, and there are expectations.

Adam Matalon is a writer/director/producer. He started Chatsby Films to develop his own film and TV projects. He has directed shorts and home DVDs for *Sesame Street: All Star Alphabet* (Stephen Colbert & Nicole Sullivan), *Exploring Together* (Matt Lauer), and *Moving Together* (Sarah Jessica Parker). His film credits include *Seasons in the Valley*, *Death On Demand*, and *Sex & Camping*. He is in early pre-production for a new comedy, *Drive-In* (2008), and he is producing a pilot for a new reality show.

Filmmakers Networking Community

This Month's Featured Networkers

Profile: maryjanca
Location: Mebane, United States, North Carolina
http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/maryjanca

Mary Janca is teaching video production, while studying education in a Masters Program. She will be working on two films within the next two years after completing graduate school.

"I currently am enjoying teaching high school students college-level courses through the film/video program at Piedmont Community College, and it is amazing seeing how the media influences youth and how they think and see the world. It is also amazing to see, when working on video projects, the collaborative process unfold before your very eyes... and see the maturity and creativity grow in young minds..."

Mary is also acting in and co-producing, "Southern Undead: Attack of the Redneck Zombies," a fun film directed and written by Phoenix Mangus. "Our goal is to make it feature-length and put installments on the internet, but it has been getting so much attention that more may come of it, who knows? Because it is low budget, all of the co-producers have been wearing many hats. I have assisted with makeup, casting, location scouting, lighting, audio, scriptwriting…"

Indie filmmaking tip:
"Get tons of people involved in your project, no matter how the project is going, and allow people to take some ownership, even if it is just for the smallest thing, for they may give back tenfold for the glory of their being able to tell stories and share with others their filmmaking experiences. Being charming also helps - I credit Phoenix Mangus for that!"

Profile: ChristinaHodel
Location: Los Angeles, New York, United States, California
http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/ChristinaHodel

Christina Hodel is in pre-production for her graduate thesis film which will be told entirely through tap dancing. Over the summer Christina paired with San Francisco-based master tap dancer and choreographer Sam Weber in preparation for her digital experimental short to be shot in Los Angeles this fall. "Tap dancing is often considered silly and uncinematic since the focus is on the feet, but I want to show just how expressive and uniquely beautiful this dance form can be on film," she says.

Christina looks forward to a challenging shoot in which all of her 90 plus shots are dolly or jib shots. "From my research and own experiences I've found there is a different way to film dance compared to regular blocking. A moving camera will give the audience the feeling they too are dancing with the image on screen."

Christina found it more challenging than she imagined to direct her own dance teacher who plays the lead and who choreographed the entire film. "It is unusual to find a dance film director who doesn't choreograph the dancing for the movie," she says. For Christina's thesis, she had to write the script, the choreographer had to interpret it as a dance for the camera, and as director Christina had to interpret his choreography back into shots and angles that would tell a story. "As a director I'm used to working with actors. It was a little challenging working with another dancer even though I too am a dancer. I asked Sam [the choreographer/dancer] what he needed to understand my script and turn it into dance. Finally he said 'music'. I'm used to putting in music during post, but right away I had original music composed that set the tone I had in mind, and Sam worked out an ingenius dance, and the movie started coming together then."

Go to the **Filmmakers Networking Community** online at
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Profile: stagedradio
Location: Chicago, United States, Illinois
http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/stagedradio

Roger Marsh works independently as Tremont Avenue Productions, and produces with a mix of print, online, stage and film projects. He has three book projects: two in the paranormal field, and one in the political field. He also represents authors as an agent.

"We produced my original stage shows in Chicago for three years with 30 one-hour comedy episodes produced in the style of a 1940s radio show. Two years ago, I began experimenting with digital video, and my first project was a docu-drama I wrote and directed in June 2006," says Roger. "The straight-to-DVD project, "Haunted R&R Station," premiered in March 2006 and is sold mainly regionally in the southwestern, Pennsylvania area where it was shot, and is available online."

Roger followed this project by rewriting one of his stage comedy episodes, "Mars Attacks Chicago," into a full-length screenplay. Also, his comedy, "Mars Attacks Mt. Pleasant," was shot on location in Mt. Pleasant, Pennsylvania, this past June, with more than a dozen film students from regional colleges and universities, a large group of actors locally cast, and more than 200 extras from the region. The project is now in post-production and seeking completion costs, hoping to release it briefly in regional theaters where it was shot, and then straight to DVD by spring 2008. Roger is exploring directing his next independent film, another original comedy, "On a Moment's Notice" in June 2008.

Indie filmmaking tip: "I made an advance decision before directing my last film to constantly shoot behind-the-scenes during production. Our main camera was designated as Camera 1 – and I asked the cameraman to keep shooting between takes. We also tried to have someone on Camera 2 and Camera 3, at different positions, while we were shooting each scene. My point is that I wanted to create two films at one time – the one we were trying to create off of a script, and a second film, which would document the making of the first film. I explored these ideas for three years while producing original stage shows in Chicago, where we gave each of the actors in the production an off-stage persona. When the audience entered the theater – they had no idea that the show was already in progress. We were still putting the set together, running around and sometimes shouting at each other. So the audience was pulled into a behind-the-scenes drama leading up to the house lights going down and the actual production starting. I wanted to do something similar as a filmmaker. "

Profile: Konspiracy210
Location: Gaithersburg, United States, Maryland
http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/Konspiracy210

Mike Greenberg found interest in film and video through skateboarding in middle school, getting involved in his school and surrounding community. He spent three periods a day at a graphic design program that opened his eyes to general aesthetics. Currently, he is enrolled at George Mason University majoring in Film and Video studies.

After working at MVI Post, gaining more experience in production and post, Mike started his own company, Konspiracy Studios last year, as a means of expanding creative work. "Konspiracy has been a journey and changed with my interests. At the start I was primarily working web, yet recently, I've found much more demand for HDV production and Final Cut Editing." Having shifted from wedding videography towards the music industry, Mike is in the process of expanding into the corporate scene. He's finishing up editing a short mini-mentary for "The Weepies" for the new album. This month he has several PSA's that he is editing for a national environmental organization. Later this fall, he will be editing five commercials.

Indie filmmaking tip: When shooting with multiple cameras that are in conditions where they can't be linked to receive timecode, try resetting the cameras timecode to a value of your choice, for example, 01:00:00:00, and then simultaneously selecting "Free Run" instead of "Rec Run" on each camera. You will have virtually the same timecode. Even if one camera stops recording and the other doesn't. Just remember not to turn the camera off or plan to re-sync if you have to change batteries.

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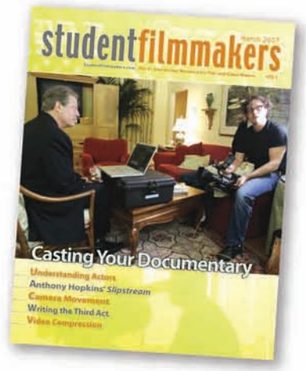

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(7) What Production Tools you	**own**	**use**
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02 Film Camera	☐	☐
03 Videotape recorders	☐	☐
04 Camera accessories	☐	☐
05 Lenses	☐	☐
06 Film	☐	☐
07 Video Monitors	☐	☐
08 Grip equipment	☐	☐
09 Editing software	☐	☐
10 Lights	☐	☐

(8) Annual production budget?
☐ 01 under $50,000
☐ 02 $50,001 to $100,000
☐ 03 $100,001 to $500,000
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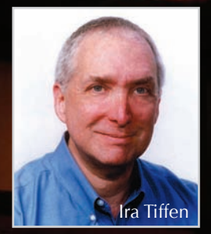
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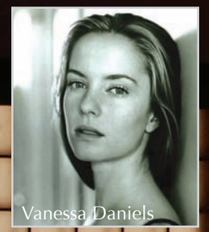
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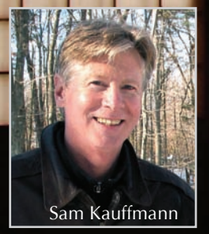
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