February 2009

studentfilmmakers

www.StudentFilmmakers.com The #1 Educational Resource for Film and Video Makers US$5.95

Interview with Director Ken Kwapis

he's just not that into you

Filming a Key Shot for Spielberg's *Hook*

Backpack Journalism: Get Roadworthy

Non-Dialogue Film, *Begotten*: Merhige Talks Ghetto Tech

Dynamic Shots with the Use of Perspective

Audio Recording in the Great Outdoors

Publisher's Desk

I am looking forward to attending the 2009 NAB show this year in Las Vegas, Nevada. It will be the third anniversary of *StudentFilmmakers* magazine. For those who don't know, our first issue was launched and distributed at the NAB show in April of 2006. If you are attending this year, please stop by our booth at C10206 and say hello. For the latest information about the tradeshows we are attending and updates, visit our website at www.studentfilmmakers.com for online resources, contest information, forums, and industry news.

And while you are online, be sure to join the global networking section, which is very much like a MySpace for film and video makers. You can go directly to the URL by typing into your browser http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com. Each month, we select networking members and feature them in the magazine. See our featured networking members in this issue on pages 48 and 49.

I think you will find this issue worth the waiting for. I am sure you are going to find the articles informative and inspiring as I have. For example, be sure you read the article, "Backpack Journalism" on page 8, a fantastic story by Carl Filoreto. The article includes insights and tips from award-winning BP journalist Mara Schiavocampo of NBC News, and Denver journalist Jennie Castor of KMGH-TV. It is about how one person can produce, shoot and write a news story and how this is quickly becoming an integral part of television newsrooms across the country. Our cover story is an interview with award-winning director Ken Kwapis on page 12. And be sure to check out another completely fantastic article on page 22, "Ghetto Tech: Cheap Solutions with Old Gear" by our soon-to-be staff editor David Kaminski.

Please enjoy all the great articles in this issue, and again, be sure to visit the website at www.studentfilmmakers.com to sign up for workshops, networking and meeting filmmakers from around the world looking for people just like you to collaborate with. Also, be sure to use our sponsors' products and services, and drop them a note about the *StudentFilmmakers* magazine and website.

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

studentfilmmakers

The # 1 Educational Resource for Film and Video Makers

Publisher / Editor-in-Chief Kim Edward Welch
Senior Editor Jody Michelle Solis

Contributing Writers
Thomas Ackerman, ASC, Jack Anderson, Anthony Q. Artis, John Badham, Adam Biddle, Kevin Burke, Julia Camenisch, Steve Carlson, Chris Cavallari, Michael Corbett, Vanessa Daniels, Carsten Dau, Todd Debreceni, Jeff Deel, Christina DeHaven, Dana Dorrity, Pamela Douglas, David E. Elkins, S.O.C., Scott Essman, Bryant Falk, Carl Filoreto, Jon Firestone, Brian Flees, Jacqueline B. Frost, Daniel Gaucher, Fred Ginsburg C.A.S. Ph.D. MBKS, Leonard Guercio, John Hart, David K. Irving, Catherine Ann Jones, David Kaminski, Michael Karp, S.O.C., Sam Kauffmann, Christopher Keane, Tamar Kummel, Richard La Motte, Adam Matalon, Matthew Marshall, M. David Mullen, ASC, Dennis Palumbo, Stacey Parks, Richard D. Pepperman, Mark Sawicki, Myrl A. Schreibman, Dr. Linda Seger, Bryan Michael Stoller, Ira Tiffen, Saro Varjabedian, William F. Vartorella, Ph.D., C.B.C., Kevin Zanit, Bill Zarchy

Media Art Director Lien-Chen Lin

studentfilmmakers.com

Publisher / Editor-in-Chief Kim Edward Welch
Media Art Director Lien-Chen Lin

Advertising & Sponsorship Opportunities:
Kim E. Welch 212.255.5458
Jody Solis 212.255.5454

Online/Print Classifieds, Global Marketplace:
http://www.studentfilmmakers.com/contact.shtml

StudentFilmmakers.com Online Store:
https://www.studentfilmmakers.com/store/

Contact StudentFilmmakers
http://www.studentfilmmakers.com/contact.shtml
212.255.5454 (US and International) 212.255.7204 (Fax)

Subscriptions:
U.S., $32.13/year; Canada, Mexico $52.13/year, and all other foreign countries, $72.13/year.
Go to https://www.studentfilmmakers.com/store

For subscription, mailing address change and distribution inquiries, go to http://www.studentfilmmakers.com/contact.shtml

StudentFilmmakers, established in 2006, is published monthly in New York by StudentFilmmakers.com. Opinions are solely those of the authors. Letters, article queries, photos, movie stills, film submissions, and unsolicited manuscripts welcome, but returned only with SASE. Submissions are subject to editing for style, content, and to exclusive rights provisions in this publication. Advertising: Rate card upon request.

Printed in the USA. Postmaster: Send address change to StudentFilmmakers, 1133 Broadway, Suite # 1503, New York, NY 10010.

Table of Contents February 2009

On the Cover

Jennifer Aniston with director Ken Kwapis on the set of New Line Cinema's romantic comedy, "He's Just Not That Into You," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures. Photo by Darren Michaels.

When They Look to You on the Set

Filming a Key Shot for Spielberg's "Hook"

by Jack Anderson

Back in the early '90s, I had the good luck to be B-Cam operator on Peter Bogdanovich's *Noises Off*. There wasn't a lot of 2nd unit work, but I got to do most of it, working with producer Frank Marshall. After *Noises Off* wrapped, I took a vacation in Ventura, on the California coast a little north of Los Angeles. My wife and I had just settled in when I got a page (remember those days before cell phones?). Frank's office had called, asking if I was interested in some 2nd unit work on *Hook*, which he was also co-producing.

Of course I took off like a scared cat, leaving my wife at the lovely coast without transportation – but that's another story.

When I got back to LA, I got most of the grip and electric crew from *Noises Off*, and I went down to MGM. It seemed as though *Hook* had commandeered every stage on that gigantic lot – at least six or seven. The most impressive was the stage with a full-size pirate ship taking up the entire several thousand square feet of the stage. It was enormously impressive. And intimidating.

Thank goodness I didn't have to deal with that right away. But after a day of fairly routine work – things like inserts of shoes – Frank let me know we'd be doing the shot in which the Captain's hook is fitted to his arm for the first time in the movie. Apparently, it was too much trouble for the first unit crew; they'd worked on it, but they didn't want to spend time on a shot without principals.

Oh good; I'm being informed that Dean Cundey's crew – one of the best in the business – couldn't handle this shot; so I get to do it.

Now I know that Dean Cundey would have no problems with this shot. What happened is strictly a matter of conserving time; the producers want the director and the main production unit to spend their time with the actors. Shots without them can be done by pickup crews, like mine.

Nonetheless, I'm feeling the pressure that I'm supposed to do a shot that's been tried without success. I'm supposed to "save the picture" with this shot. A good friend of mine had given me the best advice ever before I started the *Hook* job: "Don't be a hero." He was telling me just to do the work and not to impress anybody with my brilliance and innovative techniques. There's a great temptation in this kind of situation – Spielberg, Frank Marshall, Kathleen Kennedy, not to mention Dustin Hoffman and Robin Williams – to think, "Hey, it's my big chance! This is the one that's going to put me on top. This is when I get to show them what they've been missing all this time."

Of course, when you do that, you're liable to screw up royally just by tripping over your feet. It's enough to do the job, do what they want, do it professionally, and get out.

So I kept that in mind while I'm thinking, "Oh Lord, this is the signature shot to the movie. If I screw this up, I'll never work in this town again."

We check out the set-up on stage. It's the disembodied hook, surrounded by a motley assortment of flashbulbs, some wearing little cones of color gels. I talk to the effects people; they've planned to have these flash bulbs – old-fashioned, large, slow burning bulbs – and various bits of primer cord as the effect lighting. They've got about ten flashbulbs set up. It looks good, and it should make a nice effect. I ask to see what it looks like with all the effects going off. Well, see, we can't really do a rehearsal 'cause we only have 3 dozen bulbs left. Apparently, they used most of their flashbulbs for some other shots. Could we order more? Well, see, the bulbs are a special order. Only one company makes them any more. And since most photographers don't use these flashbulbs any more, the company makes only a certain small number, once a year.

At this point any normal cameraman would think, hey, these guys are blowing smoke up my ass – just get on the

phone and get more. From somewhere. Anywhere. We're from Hollywood!

But I'd done a lot of special effects work with John Dykstra at Apogee, including work with these old-style flashbulbs. And I knew that these guys were telling me the truth.

Time for a little advanced math calculation. I could see that I had enough bulbs for three takes. And I'd better get it right.

Then Frank tells me "Steven" wants this shot to begin in total darkness. Of course, I'd planned it to be dark and shadowy before the effects lighting went off, but I mentioned that I'd like to put a low-level, soft, overall light to simulate a kind of dawn, so we could see the hook inside its box.

"Jack," says Frank.

"Yes, Frank?"

"Listen carefully: this shot begins in absolute black."

Ah, fine. I have to illuminate this shot with only the flashbulbs and primer cord. The shot has to be absolute black to start – not sort of dark, but a black like the pit of hell. Well, that's fine, except I have no idea how much light the flashbulbs put out – the primer cord will be instant flashes, I know, like lightning, but the flashbulbs will last long enough to illuminate the scene and give an exposure. And I'd planned to use Duveteen – a black, fireproof material used to make flags – as my background. Well, I know that Duveteen is not pure black; with any light at all it tends to photograph gray, and "Steven" was not going to like that.

But I catch my first piece of luck. I'm at MGM! This used to be the biggest studio in the world, and there's still a lot of stuff in the storerooms. I ask for a giant, seamless piece of velvet – it had to be about 10' by 15' – and they have it! It's there in a half-hour, freshly vacuumed and as black as night.

But let's calm down. I still have to figure out an exposure and get a usable shot in three tries. I took one of our precious flashbulbs, had effects set it up, darkened the area, pulled out my meter, and set off the bulb. The meter read nothing. Apparently, the flash went too fast for the meter, which is designed to read only continuous light. While I try to look as though I know what to do next, one of the crew says "Hey, doesn't the still man have a flash meter?" Well, of course there's a still photographer – on a big show like this, he's on every day. This sounds like the answer to my prayers. I go over to the main stage and meet the still photographer, and he kindly lets me borrow his flash meter. Back to our stage, set up a flashbulb – we're down to 35 – set it off and read the meter. Nothing.

I don't see any humor in the situation, but my assistant laughs and says "That meter's just for strobes." Oh. It would have been nice to think about that before we used another flashbulb. And he's right: the meter is set to read a strobe light, which is usually around 1/10,000th of a second. Since the duration of the strobe is so short, it has to be extremely bright to make an exposure. Therefore, the meter is set to be very "insensitive." It's set to respond only to a very, *very* bright light – maybe 500 times brighter than our flashbulbs.

So I've got a light source I can't measure: one meter is too slow, and the other is too insensitive.

Now, nobody is pressuring me – Frank's a pro and a gentleman – but I'm thinking that I'd better come up with something fast. Remember, I said I'd worked with these flashbulbs before? The last time was about six years previously on *Invaders from Mars*. And I'd talked with John Dykstra then about how to expose them. He'd worked with the bulb's guide number, a number used in the bad old days before strobe, to calculate the exposure for one of these bulbs. And, most importantly, I remembered that the bulb burned for about 1/20th of a second. For judging exposure, I vaguely remembered (and I could read on the flashbulb's wrapper) that the guide number for a given film speed could be divided by the distance from the lamp to the subject; that gives you the f/stop to use.

I was using 500 speed film, something unheard of in the days when flashbulbs were normally used, so I had to do some paperwork and hope that the guide number tables would extrapolate more or less linearly. I was sure that whatever number I got would be the correct stop; since the bulb burns for 1/20th of a second, it would burn for the entire frame exposure (1/50th second) and not overlap too much from frame to frame. Guide numbers are given for different exposure times as well. But without going into too much detail, I got f /4.5 for a reasonable stop for my shot. Or so I prayed (no atheists on the set). I figured that with 34 flashbulbs left, I could get three takes. I decided to bracket my shots: shoot one at f/4.5, one at f/6.3, and one at f/3.2. At least one of those ought to give a decent exposure. Now, it's a little embarrassing for a cinematographer to think of bracketing shots. Still photographers often do (or did in the old film days), but we're supposed to be too cool for that. Actually, the difference is that we're dealing with an actor's performance. When the actor gets it right, he's ready to move on. No one wants to repeat a scene because the cameraman is uncertain of his exposure. There's no money and no time for that nonsense, and anyone who tried it would soon be out of a job. But in this case, it seemed wise to cover my butt any way I could.

Now I was ready to shoot. I called Frank in from wherever he'd been telephoning (he's a producer, and that's what they do). I said I was ready, and would he like to call action and cut? I hear him say, "Oh no, this shot's too important for me to supervise. I'm getting Steven."

Well, thanks, Frank. I'd just about gotten over my nervousness about no ambient light, and not enough flashbulbs, and my guestimation of exposure time. So now I get to deal with Steven Spielberg on the set. Only the biggest gorilla in Hollywood.

After a short wait, the man showed up and said, "Let's go!" No messing around for him. Everything was ready, we rolled camera, he called, "Action," and exactly six flashbulbs went off. The effects guys checked and found one of their wires was not connected. "Heh, heh." Now I'm down to two takes, and I've lost the insurance of bracketing over- and under-exposure. While we're waiting for effects, my gaffer (who's from Arizona, like Steven) chats up the biggest director in Hollywood. They're having a fine time, and I'm figuring that my one safety take – if I even get it – will be overexposure. That's generally safer (in terms of the film's sensitivity) so I ought to get a good take if I'm in the ballpark.

Effects is ready, and here we go again. Everything fires this time. Steven's looking at a monitor of course, and of course the exposure looks fine – the video's compensating for whatever lighting is used. "Great!" he says. "That's it!" Omigod. He's going to walk away without my safety take. I turn and start to say, "Uh, Steven, I'd like to– " and Frank, over Steven's shoulder, gives me a panic look that stops me in my tracks, if I know what's good for me – and I say " –thank you for the chance to work here." Frank relaxes, Steven takes off, and we've got one take in the can.

Needless to say, sleep and I are strangers that night. For the whole next morning, I barely manage to put one foot in front of another. Lunchtime comes, and with it dailies. We're in the big beautiful Cary Grant Theatre at MGM – there's nothing like film dailies – and I find a seat. Lights down. Pretty soon my shot is up. And holy cow, it's perfect. There's no sound, so I can hear Steven say, "That's the one, Dusty, how do you like it?" and Mr. Hoffman, somewhere in the dark, makes a sound of approval.

I'm a puddle of spent emotion, but a happy one. And I'll always thank John Dykstra for taking the time to explain things to me. And thank God I paid attention.

Jack Anderson is a thirty-year Hollywood veteran. He was DP for "Always Say Goodbye," first-prize winner at the First Hollywood Film Festival. He did second-unit DP on "Hook," "Noises Off," and "Mad About You." Short films he shot won prizes at the Los Angeles Short Film Festival, Crested Butte Reel Fest, Instant Films (LA), Waterfront Film Festival (Muskegon), and Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival. He teaches Cinematography at California State University Long Beach.

Backpack Journalism

Get Roadworthy with Award-Winning BP Journalist Mara Schiavocampo of NBC News, and Denver Journalist Jennie Castor of KMGH-TV.

by Carl Filoreto

Mara Schiavocampo, award-winning journalist and Digital Correspondent for *NBC Nightly News With Brian Williams*.

Against a backdrop of newsroom downsizing, budget cuts and rapidly evolving technology, the concept of backpack journalism is being sculpted into a reality. The idea of one person producing, shooting and writing a news story is not new, but it's quickly becoming an integral part of television newsrooms across the country.

The one man band (sorry for the gender bias) is not a new idea or practice. However, it's being reinvented on a daily basis. "I'm not sure it's the future of journalism," relates Poynter Institute faculty member Al Tompkins, "but it's part of it for awhile." The high quality of palm size camcorders and the ability to edit on a laptop computer has created a highly mobile platform for video journalism. The barriers created by the sheer size, weight and bulkiness of video gear have been removed, and new possibilities emerge on the journalistic landscape due to this transformation.

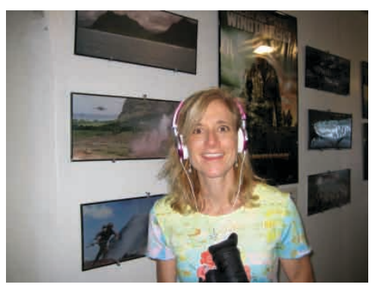
Video journalists. Solo journalists. Digital correspondents. Backpack journalism. There isn't much consensus on what to call the practitioners of the craft, but they're working in greater numbers in more markets. And they emerge from a variety of backgrounds.

"I really wanted to do some international work, so I quit my job, bought some gear and started making reporting trips abroad," explains Mara Schiavocampo, currently the Digital Correspondent at NBC News, the first reporter of her kind in network television. "For me, I thought 'these' are the stories I want to cover, and the only option for getting them done is for me to do everything. The identity of a backpack journalist came much later."

"I didn't look for the job," Jennie Castor, a video journalist/reporter at KMGH-TV in Denver, Colorado told me. "I got the option of trying something different, and thought, okay, I'll try it." Jennie emerged from a solid career behind the camera to try out the new role. And many people in the business are facing the same choice, whether they like it or not. Traditional reporters face learning the skills of shooting and editing, and photojournalists need to ask themselves if they've got the writing chops and flexibility to move up to a larger role in the newsroom.

This wholesale change in the daily routines of newsrooms has sparked a lot of controversy. Just because one person can do the job of two or three or four, is that necessarily a good thing?

Jennie Castor, KMGH-TV, shooting on location in Oahu, Hawaii.



Jennie Castor, Video Journalist/Reporter at KMGH-TV in Denver, Colorado.

"In my experience, there aren't a lot of people out there who can really do it all, and do a good job," claims Steve Sweitzer, news operations manager at WISH-TV in Indianapolis.

"The concerns over quality are legitimate," Poynter Institute's Al Tompkins adds. "I worry about the loss of voices in a story. I can't tell you how many times a photog's thinking saved me from going off the deep end on a story."

While these are legitimate concerns, the role of the video journalist in the newsroom is probably here for the foreseeable future. The cost savings alone will probably insure not only their survival, but their probable growth in the industry. **So what does it take to do a good job in this role, and how do you obtain the skill sets required for success?**

"Everything I learned about journalism I got in graduate school at the University of Maryland, College Park," Schiavocampo explains. "I learned how to shoot and edit, how to write a script, how to tell a story, everything. It was invaluable to what I'm doing now," she adds. For Jennie Castor, some new skills needed to be learned on the job, but she feels she had an advantage. "I think it's easier to go from a photog to an all-in-one journalist, than the other way around," she noted. "To me, it seems it'd be tougher to learn the technical skills. A good photojournalist is a de facto reporter anyway, and knows the elements that make up a good story."

So while a small camera and a laptop editor are nice tools, the vital skills are the same for any good journalist. "Ultimately, no matter what your workflow, what we do is all about stories, so identifying really compelling stories is key," Mara relates. "I always think, would I want to watch this? Writing and editing are integral to the storytelling process. And editing is where you really get to polish your work by accentuating the wonderful and burying the awful." And Mara has traveled the world incorporating these fundamental skills into her work. On the local level, Jennie Castor concurs, "What's most important is being able to recognize a good story, and can you personally tell the story well. Although without the technical skills and the ability to write, you're dead in the water."

Like any cog in a machine, the role of the video journalist has inherent advantages and disadvantages. One of the primary advantages lies on the bottom line: it simply costs less to have one person do the job of several. And potentially, it can provide a way to put more resources into the field. But on the local level, turning a same day story can be fraught with high pressure challenges. "It's stressful to turn a same day story by yourself," Castor relates. "You have to be totally organized and you're constantly playing beat the clock." And even when the challenge is met, and the story successfully airs, the day isn't over. There's a need to write content for the station's website, and possibly a blog as well. "Some days I do well, sometimes it's a bit too much. That's ok, but it can be a long day," Castor concludes.

Jennie's Daily Gear Package

- Panasonic P-2 Digital Camera, AG-HVX200P (2 P-2 cards)
- MacBook Pro Laptop with Final Cut Pro
- Sennheiser EW100 G2 Wireless Lav and Stick Microphone
- Shotgun Microphone with Extra Mic Cable
- Miller Tripod
- Lightkit with Rifa Box Light, Omni Light, Tota Light, 3 Light Stands, etc.
- Skullcandy Pink Headphones
- Travel wheel cart!

Mara's Gear Kit

- Computrekker Rolling Trekker plus Camera Bag
- Sony V1U
- Libec THM20 Tripod
- Lectrosonics UCR-100 Wireless Mics (2)
- Lite Panel Camera Mounted Light
- Power Strip
- Universal Charger
- Firewire & USB Cables
- MacBook Pro Laptop with Final Cut Pro
- 200 GB External Hard Drive

And some stories are better suited to a backpack journalist. “I’m not out there doing legislative stories,” Castor states. “I’m better suited to environmental, entertainment, or tug at your heart stories.” She does work on a number of consumer and investigative reports, though. Globe trekking Mara Schiavocampo has her own set of difficult situations. “Big media events are a real challenge for me and quite frankly, not all that fun. Breaking news has its challenges as well. I don’t think this is necessarily the best model for those situations.” Usually, though, the story creation process and the workflow are comfortable situations for her. “I’ve integrated the workflow so much that it doesn’t feel like multiple tasks. I think that’s the key, mush all your roles together. When I’m researching I’m thinking about shooting, and when I’m shooting I’m thinking about writing, and so on. They’re all links in a long chain,” she says.

Mara Schiavocampo is a member of the National Association of Black Journalists and serves the organization as the Deputy Director for the Northeast.

Both journalists agree the best part of the job is the total creative control they possess over a story. There aren’t any intermediaries to change or alter their vision. But there can be a lot of long days on the road and in the field chasing a story. “It’s lonely,” Castor relates. “I’ve lost so many friends because I don’t work with them anymore. And I don’t have anyone to bounce ideas off. I used to have a human sitting next to me in the car, now it’s just a bunch of stuff.” Mara Schiavocampo agrees. “Day to day, I’m used to it. But on long trips, yes. After eight nights of eating dinner alone I definitely start to wish I had a travel buddy.”

While talking to each journalist, I found it interesting that there wasn’t an emphasis on the “techie” aspect of the job. For Jennie Castor, the camera is now smaller than the cameras she’s used in the past, and for Mara Schiavocampo, the highly portable and mobile gear has always served as a tool, a means to an end. Certainly a separate discussion could be had concerning the overwhelming use of small format cameras in an HD world, but that’s for another day. As new technologies develop though, including the use of Skype for live broadcasts, one must heed the warning of Steve Sweitzer that “I don’t want to watch You Tube quality video on my 52 inch television screen.”

Before joining NBC News, Mara worked as an international contributor and commentator for numerous news outlets and websites, including ABC News, Current TV, Yahoo!, NPR, “Ebony” Magazine, “UPTOWN” Magazine and more.

In 2008, Mara received an astounding seven Telly Awards, including a Silver Telly (highest honor).

For those aspiring to the role of a backpack journalist, there are lessons to learn on the road to becoming adept at a multi-skilled job. “Play to your strengths,” advises Schiavocampo. “Maybe you’re a super shooter but average editor, or an amazing writer and so-so shooter. Accentuate the good and minimize the bad.” And Jennie Castor has a word of caution for new graduates, “My concern about young people coming out of school is can they tackle the big issues, make the contacts, and handle the journalistic side. We as an industry have to be careful in that respect.”

With the television news industry rapidly changing, morphing, and at the moment, contracting, it’s safe to say the backpack journalist will be a fixture for awhile. For those who make it into the business, Schiavocampo offers this advice, “Be forgiving, especially at first. There’s a lot to remember and a lot to do, so don’t beat yourself up over mistakes. Do what you can to fix them, take note of the lesson and move on.” And that’s sage advice in almost any job.

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.

Interview with Director Ken Kwapis

"There's actually no right or wrong way to begin."

by Kim E. Welch

He's Just Not That Into You is award-winning director Ken Kwapis's latest romance comedy feature film, which "tells the stories of a group of interconnected, Baltimore-based twenty- and thirty-somethings as they navigate their various relationships from the shallow end of the dating pool through the deep, murky waters of married life."

The film stars an emsemble cast including Ben Affleck as Neil; Jennifer Aniston as Beth; Drew Barrymore as Mary; Jennifer Connelly as Janine; Kevin Connolly as Conor; Bradley Cooper as Ben; Ginnifer Goodwin as Gigi; Scarlett Johansson as Anna; Kris Kristofferson as Ken; and Justin Long as Alex.

Ken Kwapis, who has moved easily between the worlds of feature filmmaking and television directing, shares his insights on guiding actors and directing feature films versus episodic television. Kwapis also shares some behind-the-scenes of his past work, which connects with how he directed the all-star cast of *He's Just Not That Into You*.

Writer Greg Behrendt (left) with producer Nancy Juvonen (middle) and director Ken Kwapis (right) on the set of New Line Cinema's romantic comedy, "He's Just Not That Into You," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures. Photo by Darren Michaels.

***StudentFilmmakers* Magazine: Where are you originally from?**

Ken Kwapis: "I was born in 1957 in a small Southern Illinois town of Belleville. Nobody has heard of it, however, the birthplace of Buddy Ebsen, and, if you're a fan of the band Wilco, it's also the birthplace of the lead singer-songwriter Jeff Tweedy."

SFM: How did you start directing?

Ken Kwapis: "I started as a filmmaker when I was very young. In the sixth or seventh grade, my father gave me a Super8 camera, which I proceeded to use extensively. In high school, I made films using classmates as actors, some of them are actually kind of watchable. And then, I entered college at Northwestern University, where I studied film as an undergraduate.

"This was in the middle 70s. I was there between 1975 and 1979. It was a very exciting time to be a film student for several reasons. One was, there was a lot of interest in European cinema that time, what was the combination of the French new wave, the German new wave. It just seemed like everywhere you looked, there were great films coming from other countries. And in addition, there was sort of the height, the peak of the sort of early 70s American realistic movement. I guess high points, including films like Coppola's *Godfather* film, and Terrence Malick's *Badlands*, and things like that.

"During my graduate years, there was a kind of seismic shift that happened in Hollywood filmmaking, as typified by films like *Jaws* and *Star Wars*. So all of that was going on as a backdrop to my studying film at Northwestern.

"I graduated and came up to study more film. One film degree was not enough. I applied and was accepted to the USC Graduate School in Filmmaking. For a couple of years, I continued to study film. And, when you're a student at USC, when you're a film production student at USC, one of the high points of the curriculum is 20 minute film shot in 16mm. The class number is 480, and I only mention it because many times, you'll hear USC students just refer to, 'What was your 480 film?' It's the high point of any film production student's academic career at USC Cinema."

SFM: Tell us about one of your student films in college.

Ken Kwapis: "I directed a film that was very unusual, and I want to mention it for a second, because it had a huge effect on my career.

"Everybody wanted to direct a film that showed a prospective employer that they knew how to direct actors saying dialogue. Everybody just wanted to basically have a great resume piece. And again, it felt like the key was to show that you can direct dialogue.

"Well, for some perverse reason, I wanted to try something completely different, and thought it would be great to direct a musical."

Director Ken Kwapis on the set of New Line Cinema's romantic comedy, "He's Just Not That Into You," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures. Photo by Darren Michaels.

SFM: What was that experience like? What kinds of challenges came up?

Ken Kwapis: "Now, even as a student, if you want to direct, say a musical, and if the music is copyrighted material, well, you have to pay for it. And, I couldn't pay for existing music. I couldn't, for instance, license a song by a top performer. But I met a member of the music department – he was getting a master's degree in conducting – and he needed an idea for a thesis project as well. So we pooled our respective needs, and decided that I would actually direct a musical based on a one-act Mozart opera, and he would conduct it.

"So my student film at USC is based on a Mozart one-act, the German title is *Der Schauspieldirektor*. It's usually known, in English, as *The Impresario*. It's a very simple little piece. It's twenty minutes long. It's something Mozart probably dashed off between meals. And the student film is called, *For Heaven's Sake*, and it won the Student Academy Award in 1982. I don't know how the Student Academy Awards work now, but at the time, there were several categories – there was animation, documentary, experimental, and dramatic. So, *For Heaven's Sake* won the Student Academy Award in Outstanding Achievement for a Dramatic Film."

SFM: What happened next?

Ken Kwapis: "As a result of that, I hadn't even finished my degree, when I was offered an opportunity to leave Los Angeles, leave school, go to New York and direct an After School Special. Now, After School Specials don't exist anymore, but they were very popular in the late 70s and 80s. They were normally an hour long, and they aired in the afternoon. They were aimed at young people. They were usually shot in 16mm, and many of them were produced in New York. So I was fresh out of school and suddenly directing as a professional for the first time."

SFM: So you did leave school and take that job?

Ken Kwapis: "I left school, did not complete my MFA degree, and began directing. By the way, even at that time, I always assumed I would return and finish the degree. Because to be honest, how one becomes a director, how one makes their way in the business – I had no understanding of how one sort of broke into the business. I assumed I'd do this job and return and go back to school and finish the degree. I didn't know."

SFM: Tell us about the After School Specials you directed.

Ken Kwapis: "I directed three After School Specials. One of them was a kind of long form of After School Special, *The Scholastic Book Company*. And one of those three came to the attention of some people at Warner Bros. who were, at the time, toying with the idea of making a feature film – the first feature film to star the Sesame Street characters.

"Jim Henson and Frank Oz had already made two or three films, maybe just a couple, starring The Muppets. Now, I don't know if you know the difference between The Muppet characters and the Sesame Street characters, but very simply, The Muppets include characters like Animal and Gonzo and Miss Piggy. And the Sesame Street characters, of course, include Bert & Ernie, Grover, and Cookie Monster, The Count, and Oscar the Grouch. And the one character – only one character crosses back and forth between The Muppets and the Sesame Street group, and that's, of course… "

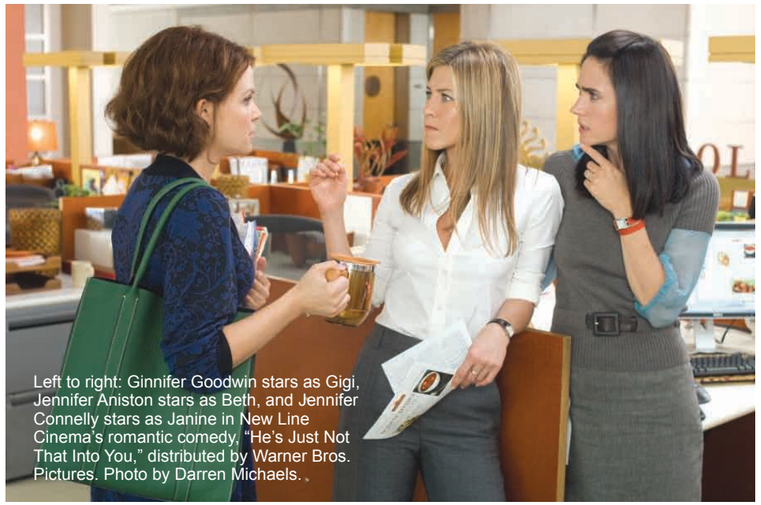
SFM: Kermit the Frog.

Ken Kwapis: "…Kermit the Frog.

"So, Warner Bros. thought, 'wouldn't it be great, the first Sesame Street feature ever, let's find some young guy to meet to do this.' And they saw my work and invited me to meet with Jim Henson. So at age 25, I found myself directing my first feature film, and on top of that, directing Jim Henson and Frank Oz themselves, directing them doing characters that they created nearly 20 years earlier.

"So I found myself in very heavy company. A low budget film, by the way. A film that cost less than $5 million, which even then was pretty cheap. But it was the first Sesame Street film entitled, *Sesame Street Presents: Follow That Bird*. I'm very proud of that film. So, that was my debut feature.

"Now, at the time, there was a big divide between feature filmmaking and television directing. On one hand, if you're a television director, people assumed you would always be a television director. And if you were a feature film director, why would you want to direct television? That was the feeling. Among feature film people, there was an anti-TV bias. It exists to this day a little bit, however, today, everything's turned around. And, in fact, I would say some of the top people that work in feature films are a find to work on creative television series, and some of the smartest writers in the business work not for features but for television. That's one of the significant things that have changed over the course of the 25 years that I have been a director."



Left to right: Ginnifer Goodwin stars as Gigi, Jennifer Aniston stars as Beth, and Jennifer Connelly stars as Janine in New Line Cinema's romantic comedy, "He's Just Not That Into You," distributed by Warner Bros. Pictures. Photo by Darren Michaels.

SFM: Tell us about the feature films you directed.

Ken Kwapis: "I have directed 9 feature films, and they are [in order], *Sesame Street Presents: Follow that Bird* for Warner Bros. I directed a comedy called *Vibes* for Columbia Pictures in 1988, starring the, then, enormously popular, Cyndi Lauper; Peter Falk, and Jeff Goldblum. It was a film produced by Ron Howard. It may have technically been the first film under the Imagine banner. They had just started their company."

SFM: What feature film did you work on after *Vibes*?

Ken Kwapis: "After that, I decided I wanted to develop the next film from scratch. I wanted to direct something that was more personal to me. The next film I did, I co-directed with my, then, fiancé Marisa Silver. It's a film entitled, *He Said, She Said*. And it really was a film that we designed for ourselves, in which the first half is the story of a romance told from the man's point of view, the second half covers the same events, but told from the woman's point of view. It starred Kevin Bacon and Elizabeth Perkins. And that was for Paramount Pictures."

SFM: What films did you direct after *He Said, She Said*?

Ken Kwapis: "After that, I did two comedies. One, a children's film, that I'm very proud of, entitled, *Dunston Checks In*. The main character – the titled character – is an orangutan. So I've directed Big Bird and an orangutan [laughs].

"The film also features Jason Alexander, Rupert Everett, Paul Reubens, who you may know as Pee-wee Herman, Faye Dunaway ~ quite a wonderful cast, and it's really one of my favorite films that I've directed. Not a lot of people saw it when it came out. But it's had a very healthy life ~ afterlife, I should say. It's really a classic children's story. I'm really proud of it.

"I directed a film for Paramount entitled, *The Beautician and the Beast*, starring former 007 Timothy Dalton and Fran Drescher. It's kind of a mash up, I guess you would say, of stories like *The Sound of Music* and *The King and I*, about a beautician from New York who is enlisted to tutor the children of an Eastern European dictator."

SFM: And what followed after *Dunston Checks In* and *The Beautician and the Beast*?

Ken Kwapis: "After that, I decided to go on a very different direction. I wanted to direct something that I wrote. I had never had the experience of directing my own script. And I wrote a screenplay entitled, *Sexual Life*. And it's a very loose adaptation of a very famous play by Arthur Schnitzler. The play is called *La Ronde*.

"I don't know if you know the play, but it has a very simple and unique structure. And here's how it goes… You meet a character. I'll just call that character, Character A. Character A has an affair with Character B. And then Character B, it turns out, is married to Character C, who in turn is having an affair with Character D. And so on, and so on. In the play, there are maybe 10 characters.

"So inspired by this, I wrote my own version of it. And I directed it for a tiny sum of $1million. It was financed by the Showtime Network during a short period in which they decided to create their own independent filmmaking unit. I think they called it Showtime Independent Films. You can get this film on DVD. And several of them have appeared in festivals, including mine. It was, again, a short-lived experiment by the cable network to try and create independent feature films."

SFM: What was your next feature film after *Sexual Life*?

Ken Kwapis: "After that, I've done three films since then. And each of them has been very significant and very important in my career. The first of those three was *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. Now when I started working on that film, a lot of people, a lot of my friends, laughed at me and said, 'You're doing a film about four teenage girls and one pair of pants. What kind of career move is that?' But when I read the screenplay and the novel it's based on, I felt so confident that it was an emotionally rich story. And that each of the four young women, so relatable, the issues they were dealing with, so easy to relate to, I felt really secure that this would be a strong film. It's again a film that has really a strong reputation, and in addition to everything else, it helped launched several of these actors, like America Ferrera and Blake Lively. Blake Lively, who no one knew before this film. In fact, I don't think she held a job of any kind before she was cast in *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*."

SFM: What did you direct after *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*?

Jennifer Aniston as Beth and Ben Affleck as Neil in "He's Just Not That Into You." Photo by Darren Michaels.

Ken Kwapis: "After that, I did a comedy about marriage called, *License to Wed*, with Robin Williams and Mandy Moore and John Krasinski. And, that led directly to the most recent film, *He's Just Not That Into You*, which, in many ways, is a culmination of a lot of things I have been experimenting with in feature films of late. A lot of the reasons I wanted to talk about *Sexual Life* and *La Ronde*, is one of the challenges of that film was juggling eight, nine, ten characters, trying to keep you equally interested in a series of stories. *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* had certainly similar challenges and was also a very female driven film. *He's Just Not That Into You*, again, all of these things lead to this kind of sprawling ensemble ~ nine leading characters.

"And for me, one of the things I'm happiest about with this new film is the fact that I feel like I was about to juggle all nine storylines, and keep you, the audience, equally involved in a wide variety of situations and characters.

"But, that's the feature film side. Now, this is the other thing, though. In many ways, the feature films take a backseat to the television work I've done because over the past 10 to 15 years, I've been very fortunate to have helped launch, or be an important part of, a kind of revolution in half-hour series. Very specifically, comedies that are shot like films that have no laughter track. Single-camera comedies.

"The first break came in the early 90s when I directed the pilot of the HBO series, *The Larry Sanders Show*. Now, *The Larry Sanders Show*, at the time, was quite a radical departure for a half-hour show. First of all, it had a strange format, where he was both shot on film and tape. It included a show within a show. It was not written like a traditional half-hour comedy at all. In fact, there weren't really any jokes. Most multi-camera situation comedies depend entirely on jokes for their rhythm. *The Larry Sanders Show* is very different. It was very funny, but all the comedy was driven from the behavior. It was very character-driven. It also tonally had the ability to shift between light and dark. It would be occasionally quite dramatic or quite satiric. It also had a style that was very different from most half-hour comedies. The style wasn't really a mockumentary, but it sort of felt like you were eavesdropping on the world of these characters, as opposed to, these are people putting on a show for you."

SFM: Did your work on *The Larry Sanders Show* lead to other shows?

Ken Kwapis: "The experience on that show led in part to work on several other shows. I was very fortunate to work on the almost legendary short-lived, shamefully short-lived series, *Freaks and Geeks*, which again I felt was quite ground-breaking. It was an hour show that was hilariously funny and heartbreakingly dramatic at times. And, again, Judd Apatow and Paul Feig were the creators. And they created a show that allowed all of the humor to not only come from character, but in many ways, much of the humor was derived from people just in pain. I don't mean physical pain, but just emotional pain. It was really a great show. And literally at the same time, I worked on a show that stylistically couldn't be more different. But again, like all the shows I'm mentioning ~ no laugh track. I produced and directed nearly 20 episodes of the show, *Malcolm in the Middle*."

SFM: Tell us about your work on *Malcolm in the Middle.*

Ken Kwapis: "*Malcolm in the Middle* was unique for a half-hour show in that it was filled with complicated psych gags and physical comedy. It was also very character-driven, but it had this robust, high definition style. I often said it was the closest experience I'll ever have to what it must have been like during the silent era, where you would shoot, you know, comedy two-reelers every two weeks or so.

"Each week we had to solve complicated logistical problems. The

Wilson Cruz as Nathan, Drew Barrymore as Mary, Leonardo Nam as Joshua, and Rod Keller as Bruce. Photo Courtesy of New Line Cinema.

Ginnifer Goodwin as Gigi and Kevin Connelly as Conor. Photo courtesy of New Line Cinema.

kinds that really you would deal with on a feature film level, but rarely in a half-hour television show."

SFM: You also directed *The Bernie Mac Show*.

Ken Kwapis: "I directed the pilot of *The Bernie Mac Show*. And this is really significant thing because *The Bernie Mac Show* again in many ways has familiar elements ~ it's a family comedy. In a way, it's a cousin to everything from *My Three Sons* to *The Cosby Show*. But the differences are critical. First of all, Bernie Mac had long been approached to do a half-hour show, but didn't want to do it unless he could do it in a single-camera way without an audience. He didn't want to do stand up for a show. He wanted to do something that was intimate and conversational. So the show had a very intimate style.

"The other thing about the show was tonally, it had a very blunt kind of comedy. And again, what was unique about Bernie's character, and I feel like I helped guide this, was that his approach to child rearing was so rough. It was politically incorrect. And yet he was so committed to this point of view. And that's I think what this thing wishes it from every family comedy. You know, the great family comedies of television do not have parental figures who claim to want to break their children's necks. I mean, one of Bernie's lines he used to say about the children in the show is, he'd say, 'I don't negotiate with terrorists.' And so, his approach to child rearing was just so tough-minded and wrong-headed in a way. But the style of the show, again, made that blunt attitude very accessible and very user-friendly.

"All of this finally led to getting to direct a pilot of, one of the most unconventional shows, I think, on TV, and that's the show, *The Office*. I directed the pilot, and I've directed about a dozen of the shows. And again it felt like so many of the things that I had experimented with in different comedies, in terms of unusual tone, in terms of making sure the comedy comes out of character and not jokes, it kind of really blossomed with *The Office*. Which in many ways, some of the most comedic moments are on ones that also make you cringe, and sometimes you're just embarrassed for the characters even as you're laughing. Again, this is just tonally, I think, very unique. Also the style of the show, which I absolutely helped set ~ not simply a mockumentary, but a show in which the cameras often instructed to deliberately miss important information. Because you hear a line of dialogue, and sometimes the camera will pan and arrive at the subject too late. That's fine. That's the style of the show."

SFM: Could you describe a little bit what it was like on the set of *The Office*?

Ken Kwapis: "When I first had my big crew meeting before we started shooting the pilot, I announced to the entire crew, 'Hair, make-up, wardrobe, production design, sound, camera,' I said, 'All the things that in any other circumstances would get you fired are actually very acceptable on this show.' I said that our job is to create the illusion that we're eavesdropping on the life of this office, and as a result, not prepared for the stories that unfold in front of our eyes. We shouldn't be prepared. We should be caught unaware. And so, so much of what I do as a director on that show is try and create the illusion that, in fact, I don't know what's gonna happen next.

"A lot of that sort of fed into this latest film as well. Just a sense of what I told all these actors ~ Ben Affleck, Jennifer Aniston, Drew Barrymore, Jennifer Connelly, Kevin Connolly, Bradley Cooper, Ginnifer Goodwin, Scarlett Johansson, Justin Long…

Scarlett Johansson stars as Anna and Drew Barrymore stars as Mary in "He's Just Not That Into You." Photo courtesy of New Line Cinema.

"I said [to the actors] I want to feel like I'm eavesdropping on the lives of these characters. I never want to feel for a moment like you're putting on a show for the audience. So just let me watch, and, of course, I'm directing a scene, and we have to shape it. But the feeling should be that the audience is getting a little window into the lives of these people."

SFM: Because of how you started in filmmaking, and you've directed some new talent like Blake Lively and others, what techniques do you use to work with less experienced actors? And how do you deal with different kinds of egos on the set and disagreements?

Ken Kwapis: "Well, there are a couple of things. One is, it's just important that when you're casting to make sure that whether or not it's somebody who's well-known, or somebody who is unknown, that they want to participate for the right reason. So whether it's Blake Lively, who came to auditions never having work before, or Jennifer Aniston, who is a celebrated actress ~ you want to make sure that the reason why they're there is they connect with the material. They see an opportunity to say something personal. That they can relate to the story. That it reminds them of something they've been through. My job is to make sure that everyone's telling the same story.

"There's always going to be disagreements. That's what a collaboration is. But, it's not my job to tell an actor how to do their job. But it's my job to remind the cast what the story is we're trying to tell. What I try and do is encourage the actors to figure out a way to relate the storyline to something they experienced. It doesn't have to be the same thing.

"In fact, sometimes Blake Lively and I had very good discussions about character and motivation entirely based on the *Harry Potter* books. I've read them all. She's read them all several times. And we were talking great detail about the motivations of the characters like Ron Weasley, and how that related to the characters in *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*.

"The main thing is how do you open up an avenue for the actor or actress that allows them to connect with the part? It's not about hitting a mark. It's not about saying a joke properly. It's not about rhythm. None of that stuff is important to me. What's important is that kind of "X" factor that an actor will bring to the set because they somehow enable to, in their mind, find an avenue from the fictional role to something they have experienced in their life."

SFM: What kind of guidance or suggestion would you give to someone who is embarking on the path and has decided that this is something that they want to do – which they come in large droves these days – and possibly someone who would be in school who's studying it, and maybe at your old alma mater?

Ken Kwapis: "For me, I think the advice I would give is that there's no right or wrong way to become a filmmaker. You don't need to start at the top. You can direct a documentary. You can direct a public service. You can direct a feature film. You can direct a television commercial. You could direct a music

Bradley Cooper as Ben and Jennifer Connelly as Janine.
Photo courtesy of New Line Cinema.

Bradley Cooper as Ben and Scarlett Johansson as Anna.
Photo courtesy of New Line Cinema.

video. You could direct an episode of a show for Nickelodeon. There's actually no right or wrong way to begin. And it's not possible to know, what doors will lead to the place you want to go to? It's a very unpredictable business. And, by the way, that's what makes it great. As long as you could realize that whatever door you're walking through may lead to something great, it will.

"My feeling, also, is I always encourage people to do two things, and they seem to be different things, but they have to be done simultaneously. One is, you have to know film history, you have to know what's been made before you. You have to know how people tackled the story problems in the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s. Because, in fact, the problems of how to tell a story haven't changed. And people have solved these problems brilliantly over the years. It's imperative to know where people have gone before you. That's number one.

"The second thing is, remember that really, ultimately, your work will only be strongest if you can draw from your own experience.

"That's why I'm saying they're two opposite things. You need to know where others have been, but then you also need to kind of draw from where you've been yourself in your life. Even if you're 10, 15, 20 years old, and you haven't had all that much life experience, there's still enough. Everyone's had friendships and heartbreaks and difficulties and challenges. Don't ever dismiss those experiences. That's the grist for the mill. Whether it's going to produce a screenplay for you, or whether or not, when you're talking to actors on a set, or lining up a shot, or trying to decide how to stage a scene ~ you're trying to produce in the audience an effect, an emotion. And if you can sort of relate it to where you've been in your own life, the audience will feel that."

SFM: What started your collaborative relationship with John Bailey, ASC?

Ken Kwapis: "Well, this is our fourth film together. We do have a wonderful short-hand. We have a shared love of film history. We both take it very seriously. We plan our shots, we storyboard. I've admired John, and I remember when I went to see *Ordinary People*, the first film he shot as the Director of Photography. And I've been an admirer ever since. I don't know what to say. We're kind of like brothers."

SFM: Do you do your own storyboarding?

Ken Kwapis: "No, I hire an artist who can draw. And I try and have the storyboard artist come to the locations, if possible, to see what the physical spaces are like. The storyboard artist also has photographs of the cast as they are assembled. And the goal is to kind of previsualize as much of every scene as possible with the understanding that you might get on the set and throw the whole thing out. And an actor may come up with an idea. John Bailey may have an idea. Something will suggest itself. But at every turn, you have something you've planned that you can fall back on. And it may be the perfect thing.

"And for me, previsualizing is also a way of trying to understand what's really going on in the scene on a deeper level. It's not just about the mechanics of, we need this shot or that shot. It's about, what are we trying to express here? What kind of energy are we trying to create? Should the camera move? Should it not move? Why shouldn't it move? These are all the things related to, what's the most effective way to tell the story at any given moment? And again, I always work with John Bailey and the storyboard artist together. We sit in a room, and we'll act out the scenes together. And the artist will go away and then do renderings of that scene. And again, I love doing it, but I also know good and well that sometimes it's something that you should be prepared to abandon at a moment's notice if a better idea comes along."

SFM: The actors are responsible for, of course, knowing their lines and some character creation. What kind of rehearsing do you do?

Ken Kwapis: "I try and do as much as possible. It's sometimes hard when you're working with actors who are popular and have conflicts of schedules and the like. But, for instance, for *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, I had a very extensive rehearsal because one of my jobs was to create the feeling that these were four life-long friends. There's only about fifteen minutes in the film before these four characters are separated for the great vast majority of the story. And I so had to, in short order, create the illusions of four life-long friends. So, in order to do that, we did a lot of rehearsal, some of which was just designed to get the actors to know each other better.

"Often times, it's not about rehearsing actual scenes, but it's about just meeting and talking about the story and characters and what makes those characters tick."

SFM: You previously said that there are always going to be disagreements that are part of a collaborative effort. What do you do in those situations where there are disagreements?

Ken Kwapis: "Oh, I think that every interaction is different. What you need to do is be able to negotiate with a wide variety of different personalities. And it's not just actors ~ it's the studios, it's producers, it's writers, it's directors of photography, and the editors. You want to encourage people to have ideas, you don't want people to come in and be robots. And so, a lot of what my job is, is to encourage people to bring their best game. And what that often means is I'll bring in ideas that may or may not help tell the story. I never try and squash a bad idea in such a way that would make someone feel inhibited about coming up with something again. And I think that so much of what I do is try and create an atmosphere in which people feel free to explore different ideas. And by the way, I'm not territorial about a good idea. If it comes from someone else, great."

Ghetto Tech

Cheap Solutions with Old Gear

by David Kaminski

I never throw anything away, unless I have to, and I am deaf to the argument that something is too old to work. It either works, or it doesn't. And either it can be fixed, or it can't. It is useful, or it isn't. In the end, maybe the old stuff can solve a few problems for free. And maybe old equipment can offer us new wisdom.

Some of the items I have picked up over the years have outlasted their original owners' need for them. I use old gear at home and at work, and there is no shortage of gifts from people or of old gear of my own. If anything, I have to refuse old stuff since I already have a few of everything I ever needed. Here's a list (in ascending order of cost) of some of those items, and how I make use of them.

Use an Old Cell Charger for a Battery Belt

My old cell phone stopped working, but I kept it and my charger. Lo and behold, when I couldn't find the charger for the battery belt, I used the cell charger cord. Same size plug. Adequate juice. Certainly not recommended by the battery manufacturer, but it did work in a jam.

Free TV Tuners and Playback for Old Tapes

VCR's and more VCR's… The latest use last week was using one as a TV tuner for a projector. I ran coax from the cable company into the VCR, and took an RCA audio out to a mixer and an RCA video connection out and plugged it into the projector so an audience could watch a live television broadcast on a large screen. Easier than getting a cable box.

As for playback, I am still giving away VCR's to desperate people who have VHS and VHS-C tapes piled in a corner somewhere.

Free Tape Stock

VHS tapes. They never seem to die. I even tried to crush one with my shoe in an angry fit a decade ago. I sprained my ankle, but was too ashamed to admit it. The tape still worked in a broadcast-quality VCR after I had hurt myself and gotten over my upset. Lately, the cases shatter more easily, and a strong person with a good grip can twist or snap the case until it explodes into smithereens. (Do not try this at home.) A current use for tapes? Some people still want a VHS tape copy for a legal record, or to mail to an old relative. Don't throw out your blank tapes just yet.

Free Camera for Training with Your Jib

Nothing is better on the end of a jib than a camera that is already broken. Maybe it has a cracked display screen or a broken eyepiece, or maybe the headphone jack doesn't work. All you need is a good video signal out to practice with your jib. Even a VHS camera will work. Using a broken camera is good for your confidence when you start, since you've got nothing to lose.

Free Client Monitors

TV's… I once saw a dozen stacked in a community college TV control room. The person in charge of the facility explained that it reminded students that the signal looked different on every brand of TV. Despite the current belief that all TV is now HD, and it all is perfect, we'd all be smarter to take a cue from this wisdom. If only we could stack an LCD on top of a plasma on top of an OLED on top of a cell phone on top of a portable video player on top of a home theater screen – then, maybe we would know what our productions will look like to our audience. I still run finished work through old TV's and computer CRT's, as well as compress it and watch it on the web, view it on new LCD computer monitors, a new HD projector, and an HD reference monitor. Every picture is different.

Beware. Technology does not advance at a constant rate, or for all people at the same time. A few years ago I was sitting in a meeting with an advanced media group and there was a discussion about the latest technology, and the clarity of HDTV. An older gentleman who had worked with a company to develop high fidelity radio equipment noted that when he and other engineers invited the general public to personally adjust their newest system, all of them inevitably turned the knobs until it sounded like their car radios. The point? Consumers are often not interested in listening to or watching the very best that the engineers can offer. Their tastes evolve sometimes, and sometimes they do not. It may be that habit trumps technology, or that the convenience of downloading even a poor-quality video file from the internet will make people happier than the best HD that money can buy. The older man had accurately predicted the power of low-quality video over the web as a force to be reckoned with.

$1 Mic and Cord

I bought a good-quality vocal mic and a cord for one dollar at a garage sale. I've loaned it out for recording into a computer, for people needing it for rapping into their mixers, and I never worry. It was only $1.

Mic stands are another thing that are often discarded before they are entirely broken. Maybe the plating is flaking off, or it has rusted a bit, but many times you'll need an extra. Last summer, I passed one up sitting beside a garbage can. I already have too many.

$5 for a Bag of Cords ($1 per pound, probably)

Guitar and amp cords, splitters, and barrels were a good purchase for $5. The guitarist was old and didn't want to think about the tangle any more. Cords go bad, but more often than not, they just keep working. Some might be just fine to loan to your friends or to someone who loses things. Others you might keep for yourself.

For securing old cords, I use some twist-ties I bought from the dry cleaner down the street. It cost me $9 for 2000 extra-long twist-ties. I bought the box more than a decade ago, and I am only now running low. It is easy to hand one to a person who needs one for the 2 cents it cost me.

Occasionally, I'll need a Velcro-style wrap. I like the kind that come free around a head of lettuce. No good tech person has ever been confused by the marking "Romaine" or "Red Leaf".

$5 Tripods

Tripods for still cameras are fine for small digital video cameras. Even old 16mm film camera tripods are great. I've gotten both at garage sales. The older ones have steel, brass, and aluminum parts that have already withstood the test of time. They are good back-up gear, and you won't feel bad if you need to use them in a place where they might get damaged.

My old sandbags, made with clean play sand, garbage bags, and a heavier woven mesh bag from the stone dealer have lasted for more than a decade. Funny how an old sandbag still works with tripods, stands, and to prop open a door.

$5+ Stand-up Moviola

Though I got mine for free, I'll put this in the category over $5.

I have read that Steven Spielberg is still fond of using his stand-up Moviola, though perhaps that is no longer true. Whatever the case, if it is good enough for him, perhaps we ought to take notice.

I know someone who purchased one in mint condition for about $300. Not a bad discount considering that back in 1974 when mine was made, it cost as much as two brand-new cars. The distinctive metallic green they used to paint it reminds me of my father's Pontiac built in the same year. His car cost $3,500 then, and the Moviola was about $7,000.

Go buy one, and try your hand at working with film. Maybe you'll get a free 16mm film camera to go with it.

David Kaminski teaches TV Production/Media at Clarkstown HS North in New City, NY about 25 miles north of New York City. His students have earned five Telly Awards and over 50 national awards for their work. They also have screened their films more than 200 times in festivals across the country and internationally.

Dynamic Shots with the Use of 'Perspective'

Give Added Depth to Your Shots and Set-ups

by John Hart

Having taught one and two point perspective for many years at many schools, I know that perspective is the biggest challenge for most students in learning to draw. In this article, I have tried to simplify that challenge.

Here are some visual shortcuts to help you utilize this invaluable tool that will also give added depth to your shots and setups. These examples are adapted from storyboard sketches. The main objective is to convince you to visually utilize one-point perspective – just one-point for now – as two-point perspective is mainly for shooting into corners – rooms or buildings.

Just by simply being aware of the possibilities it will offer, one-point perspective will add dynamism to shots. If you scout hard enough, often selected locales will already have this 'depth of field' advantage waiting to be used by the director.

My main emphasis is to convince you to make use of this invaluable visual tool: perspective. For each of the following examples, there will be simple interpretations given, and each will illustrate basic observations that will enhance your own personal 'visual field' or director's vision.

You should then be convinced to incorporate into your shots one-point perspective for increased three dimensionality, and true depth of field within your framed scenes.

In Illustration 1, notice how the foreground/background separation of planes adds to the depth of this shot. The lines on the building to the couples left also give great depth to the shot.

If you followed the line of the overhang about left and the grey railing, they would converge to a point just the other side of the guy's head, just above the distant shore. That point is called the vanishing point (V.P.), and all the lines coming toward the foreground plane will emanate from that point.

Take a look at Illustration 2. Just by observing how each circle recedes into space, in other words, getting smaller, takes the view deeper into the scenes. It is not a flat scene. Picture two actors in the foreground.

Illustration 1.

Illustration 2

Illustration 3

Illustration 4

Here in Illustration 3, if your eye follows the lines of the boards, they will all meet at a distant point on the horizon. Here, at vanishing point (V.P.) will be just to the left of the Dad's head on the far shoreline. Great depth in this shot.

Now, try a close-up of the child reacting to all that space.

In this shot in Illustration 4, the foreground does have a character occupying the frontal plane. The large building in the background recedes into space. The V.P. for the building would be just above the top of the yellow boat in the right background. From that point, all lines on the building with its blue shutters would converge to that one V.P. Note: Reds as in the balloon guy's jacket also dominate the foreground and give added depth color-wise as the background is in dark browns and blacks. So, what's wrong with spacial concepts?

Another obvious reminder of how simple placement of objects in a scene can have added depth – piercing the frame like an arrow shot into the background. See Illustration 5. Place two figures in the foreground at the table. Great visuals and not distracting to the frontal plane action.

This setup / mise-en-scene in Illustration 6 speaks for itself. Can you find the V.P. there in the background? (Right in the center of the red railing.) Again, great recession of space for your shot.

Illustration 5

Illustration 6

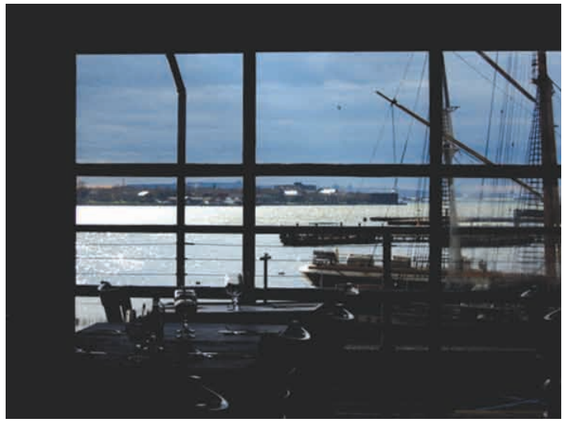
Illustration 7

Here in Illustration 7, the actor will be panned as he moves across the frontal plane, while the buildings in one point perspective add major depth to the shot.

This shot (Illustration 8) is an example of 'atmospheric' perspective. No orthogonals (receding lines to V.P.). Just horizontals and mood lighting. Late afternoon. Silhouetted windows in foreground frame push the eye into the background for true depth. Blue, the opposite of red, recedes into the background.

Ladies frame the foreground action in Illustration 9. Background is again simple horizontals, but the greys and pale blues in the water and sky act as receding planes of color, not lines. Note how the red jumps foreward. Main action figure is off-center to the left.

Illustration 8



Here in Illustration 10, the railing takes the viewer's eye directly into the background. The figure on the bike (off-center to the left of frame) will also take us directly into the V.P. – which is easy to find, as the railing points right to it in the out of focus background. A simple shot, but one that illustrates graphically the depth and three dimensionality that one point perspective can add to your shots.

John Hart is an award-winning author, lecturer, storyboard artist, graphic designer and photographer based in New York. His most recent book is called, "The Art of the Storyboard, 2nd Edition: A Filmmaker's Introduction."

Illustration 9

Illustration 10

The Making of the Controversial Non-Dialogue Feature Film, *Begotten*

Interview with Elias Merhige

by Scott Essman

Elias Merhige, born in 1964, grew up in Brooklyn, and went to school in Tenafly, New Jersey before attending film school at State University of New York at Purchase where he received a bachelor's degree in 1987. Best known to mainstream audiences for his 2000 film *Shadow of the Vampire* (starring John Malkovich and Willem Dafoe), Merhige discusses in this interview the making of his controversial non-dialogue feature film, *Begotten*, which was created when he was just out of film school before becoming a professional filmmaker.

What was the earliest genesis of *Begotten*?

Elias Merhige: With *Begotten*, I was working with a lot of actors and artists at the time, and I had a small theatre company in New York. And we were doing a lot of experimental theatre. And it was the sort of thing where I had envisioned *Begotten* – I mean, a lot of my influences at the time were Antony Narto's theories on theatre and art. You know, I mean like the theatre and its double; theatre as play: all of these very luminal essays about aesthetics and what theatre needed to be in the 20th century. And one of the things that was really important, I thought, was that I had never really seen any of Barto's ideas or any of these very powerful ideas on aesthetics that Nietzsche had about plays and early Greek drama, and I hadn't seen any of it on film. I mean really to its fullest extent. And so it was the kind of thing where at the time – I wrote the script when I was 20. And I originally thought of it as a dance theatre with live music piece that we would do at Lincoln Center. I was making it up as I was going along. But then I found out what it would cost to get the theatre space, what it would cost… And it would actually cost me, at the time, a quarter of a million dollars to produce the show. And so I thought, 'It's weird. There's got to be a better way to do this.' Then the challenge became, really, creating the world. Because *Begotten* really is a world more than anything. It's a world. And so that got me into shifting my whole focus into making a film.

Now how long of a period, from when you wrote the script to when you said, 'Okay. I want to do this as a film'?

Elias Merhige: About six months.

And you were in your early 20s at the time?

Elias Merhige: Yeah. And I finished the film when I was… It took me three and a half years to make the film. That was not because of money. It was because – I built the optical printer that I did all the special effects on. I did all of the cinematography, all of the special effects, everything. And it was really a very powerful experience. It changed the lives of every single person involved with the film. It was really one of these transformative, ritualistic experiences, where the experience itself became what it was about, and the film was just ancillary to the experience. And – sort of like the experience was the flame – and the work itself, the film, sort of became like the vapor, the light coming off the flame. But that was a very powerful experience. But one of the challenges with that film was that it got me into the whole investigative process of, 'All right, if you want to create something that you haven't seen before, how do you do it?' And so I would just talk to everybody. I would call people up. I would call my new cinematographers and sit down with them for hours and talk to them. I would go to – I went to every laboratory in New York City, sat down with their timers, with their developers, and asked them how they – what is it about developing film, and if you develop it higher than the normal mean or lower than the normal mean in terms of the temperature of the developer bath, what does it do to the film? And they would do these experiments for me, and I would actually look at this stuff. You know, people are really helpful. And then I got a hold of a 16mm Aeroflex camera that was borrowed to me, and I started doing every experiment in the world, sort of developing my own film. I started doing just every conceivable thing from in a darkroom on rewinds running the unshot negative through sandpaper, you know, to scratch the negative before I shot on it. And I still wasn't getting the results that I thought I really needed. And then one day, in the conversation, somebody told me about the kind of control that you have with an optical printer. And when it came time to try and make a deal to get an optical printer, it turned out that it would have cost me millions of dollars to have an optical printer for the amount of time that I needed it. And to buy an optical printer would cost me, at the time, since that was what they used to do special effects at the time – there was no CGI – the cost of an optical printer at the time was more than – you know, between a quarter and a half million dollars.

"Begotten" was the first film from the director of "Shadow of the Vampire," E. Elias Merhige.

This is late 80s or so?

Elias Merhige: Yeah. Late 80s. Mid- to late 80s. So I built one. And I went around getting parts from different camera places, different special effects houses, and they would each say, 'Hey, we're not using this old...' I mean, I had an old 1936 Mitchell camera, like number 13. It was just this horse. This workhorse. And then I had a friend of mine that was an electronics engineer out at Brown. And I drove him crazy. I don't think he talked to me for years after helping me with the electronics on it. And then I used an Italian projection gate from the 1940s.

How did you get these parts? Were they paid for, or did you get them – did people loan...?

Elias Merhige: They were things that no one was using, and they just had it. It was like just part of their inventory. And they said, 'No one on earth is ever going to use this. You can have this.' And I would give them like a laundry list of things that I needed, and they would say, 'Well, we don't have exactly that, but we have this.' And then what I would do is say, 'Okay, if I modify this, if I machine it in a slightly different way – can I do that?' And they would say, 'Yeah. Sure.' When I needed money, I just went to these guys and said, 'I'll do some special effects for you. If you guys ever get overloaded with work, I'll do it for you for like half of what any of your other cameramen would do it for.' And that was still a lot of money. That's how I paid for the sound mix for *Begotten*, doing all that stuff.

For various different people? Small little jobs?

Elias Merhige: Various different people. Yeah. There was like Disney jobs – there were just various different things they farmed out to me. There was this one rotoscope job that was like six seconds of this old man looking up at a spire and there was blue screen in the back, and they wanted mountains in the background. They wanted the sun to go down, the stars to come up and the moon to rise over one of the mountains. So a friend of mine, Michelle, rotoscoped the whole thing. Airbrushed the stars in, animated the whole thing, and it looked fantastic. It was actually cool doing it. I forgot that it was for a movie or anything – it was just like my own little six-second world.

You optically printed it off the film yourself?

Elias Merhige: Yeah. Everything was done on film. Everything was done very physical. There were no CGI or no computer elements. *Begotten* was shot in 16mm.

So the optical printer could be used for either?

Elias Merhige: Yup. All you got to do is just take a different camera – you know, I had a 16 camera mount. I used to take that off, put a 35 on. Which in hindsight, I mean, that's what I should have done. I could have just blown up the film myself instead of... But that's something I plan on doing. I do plan on blowing up *Begotten* to 35. Not that it needs to be blown up – I just feel like doing it. Then I did the sound. And the amazing thing, and the parallel between that film and *Shadow of the Vampire* is that there was a very Zen-like incredible experience in directing *Begotten*. Because I am looking through the camera, operating the camera, speaking to the actors; and I'm seeing an idea that's coming out of my imagination becoming flesh and blood in the characters and friends that I'm working with. Then that's being reflected back into the camera and recorded onto the film. And it's like this process where it's moving out of my brain into flesh and blood and back into the lens onto film. It was just an extraordinary thing to be able to speak, and – well – *Begotten* is a silent, obviously.

Non-dialogue. Was there ever a point in which you thought, 'It's my first film. I'm already directing it. I've already written it.' Was it an artistic choice to say, 'I should also operate the camera. I should also star in all the stuff myself.' Did you ever feel like you wanted another point of view?

Elias Merhige: No. It felt very natural. There was a great deal of innocence to making *Begotten*. It just felt like – well, I was so curious about all the different things that needed to [be done]... And it was such a homemade, handmade, handcrafted piece of work that it just made sense that [I crew everything myself]... Because I'm sort of neurotic anyway, when it comes to doing things. I have to just know that something is done, and when it's done, that it's done properly.

Where was *Begotten* photographed?

Elias Merhige: There were three or four different locations, but the main one was a construction site right on the border of New York State and New Jersey, just at the northern part of New Jersey. And they were constructing this corporate park. They were making this huge corporate park. And it – and they just had devastated the landscape. So I had talked to the engineer, the main engineer that was engineering all the groundwork there, and told them what I was doing. And they actually – they thought I was crazy at first, but when I explained to them how I was doing it and what I was doing... I don't know. It was the sort of thing where, I guess, they felt sorry for me, you know, and they just decided, 'Yeah, you can shoot that movie here.' And then, on top of it, as time went on, I told them, 'You know, the composition is almost perfect.' And I would have them look through the lens, you know? And I'd say, 'If it just had a mountain right there, you know? If it just had a mountain of rock just right over there to the right, it would be perfect.' And they would make one for me. They would bring in bulldozers and heavy dump trucks and they would just make a mountain. It was remarkable.

You didn't have to pay for the location at all?

Elias Merhige: No.

How long were you there? How many days in the quarry?

Elias Merhige: Would you believe it was just like 20 days. It was all weekends. My agreement was that I would shoot when they weren't working. And their agreement was to have all their equipment out so I could shoot. [20 days in the quarry for the last third of the film… earlier in the film was at a lake. The middle section was in a house.] A friend of mine was going to hook me up with some Indian friends of his down in Santa Fe or Albuquerque. And they were going to take me on this like fun ritual thing that they were doing in the mountains. Anyway, I never hooked up with them, for some reason – miscommunications. So I ended up going into the mountains myself anyway, and shooting some of those sunrises. I spent a couple of days just shooting time-lapse sunrises and sunsets. That's where you get that big flat expansive [view]. And with that film, you know, that was the idea that I didn't want you to be able to tell the difference between the moon and the sun. And whether it was day or night. It's just this idea: we have opposites just colliding and coming together. And then when I finished the film, it took me two years to get it out there. I mean, I would show it to distributors and people out there, and they would say, 'Listen, if you can show this for free in some high school basement in the Bronx, you're lucky.' And I know people that were really brutal, and I hated them. And I just had this sort of 'Well, what do they know?' kind of attitude. And then the film went to the San Francisco International Film Festival. And it was there that Peter Scarlet and Tom Luddy showed the film to Susan Sontag, who then called me up. And I projected the film in her living room for like 21 of her closest friends, and it was remarkable. Because she brought it to the Berlin Film Festival, and said just wonderful things about the film, that... She used the word "masterpiece". I hate to use that word, but she really loved the film and thought it was just a profoundly original piece of work. And then Werner Herzog had seen the film at just about the same time. And he, also, was very supportive. He was very supportive of the film.

Did Sontag get the film to Nicolas Cage somehow? How did Nicolas end up seeing it?

Elias Merhige: Crispin Glover had given Nick a copy of *Begotten* as either a birthday present or just as a gift. And Nick, just out of his own volition, saw the film and said, 'You know, I'm moved by this piece of work.' And then when he opened a production company, Saturn Films, he gave the videotape of *Begotten* to his partner at the time, Jeff Levant. And said, 'We need to find this guy, 'cause I'd like to work with him.' And that's the way it evolved from there. And then we met, and a 45-minute meeting turned into a three-hour meeting, and we realized that we all liked each other very much as people. And three days later, they sent me the script to *Shadow of the Vampire*. And when I first read that script – you know all that stylistic stuff, with going from color to black-and-white and black-and-white to color? That was stuff that I saw from the first reading of the script. I knew exactly how to do it. And that's what I loved so much about the script is that it was this great balance between technical innovation and great story-telling. And for me, I knew that I could make something really terrific out of this.

How long did you spend in post on *Begotten*?

Elias Merhige: That was what took all the time.

That was three years?

Elias Merhige: Yes. It took me eight months to build the optical printer.

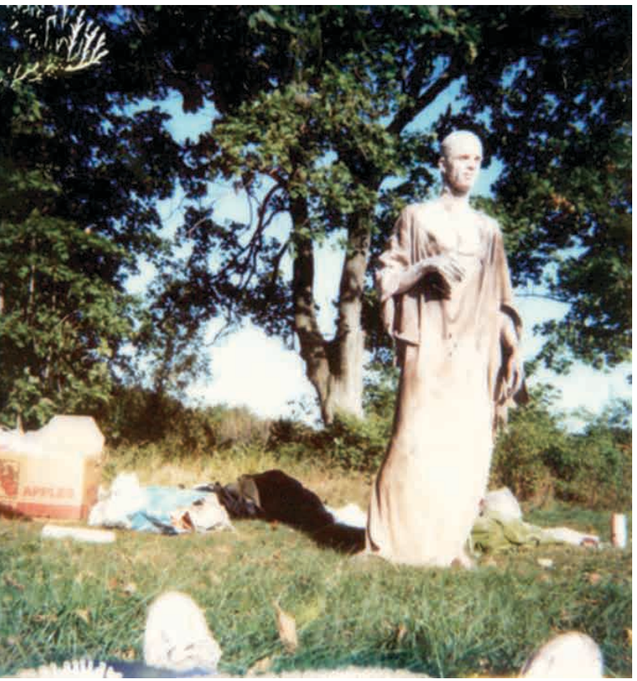
That's with film in the can?

Elias Merhige: Yes. That just drove me up the wall. 'Cause if it's just a hair off, it's off. That's all. It doesn't work. And it just looks stupid. And it's wrong. Everything has to be very exact.

How long on the sound mix? ...The whole movie – about 88 minutes of sound effects.

Elias Merhige: Got to tell you – that soundtrack – that was something that Evan Album – he's a guy that a friend of mine at the time - he was the assistant director on *Begotten*, Tim McCann - had a friend of his who was painting people's houses – not doing frescoes, just painting the houses. And I met this guy, and I was talking to him and I was just having regular conversation with him 'cause we were both waiting for Tim. And it was, 'Well, what do you do besides painting houses?' And, 'I compose music.' I go, 'Really?' ... 'Yeah.' ... I go, 'On what? What instrument's your instrument of choice?' He says, 'On the bass guitar.' I said, 'Really? You compose music for the bass guitar. I've never heard music composed just for the bass guitar.' I said, 'I'd like to listen to it.' So he gave me a tape. And there was nothing in this tape, in this recording that sounded remotely like a bass guitar. This guy was functioning on a totally, completely different plane of existence. And it was at that moment that I thought, 'This guy is the kind of person...,' 'Cause when you talk to composers, they're all like, 'Hey! This is the happy – this is my happy stuff. Oh, this is my scary stuff. Oh!' And with this guy, it was not like that at all. And that soundtrack took a year to do, because – this is going to sound a bit odd, but – we recorded the sound of feet walking on gravel in the winter, feet walking on gravel in the spring, feet walking on gravel in the summer, and feet walking on gravel in the autumn. And used all of them at different points in the film and orchestrated all of that in this careful kind of like mosaic within the film. That's how obsessively detailed that film was. I spent every frame – I mean, I was looking through the camera every single frame... Just remember, there's 24 frames in a second. And 24 frames in a second, it would take me about 10 hours of time to get about a minute's worth of screen time, of film. When you think about that ratio of labor, it's very intense.

From the film, "Begotten," directed by E. Elias Merhige.



At first, did you let many people see it?

Elias Merhige: ...In the beginning, when I finished it, I was very protective of it. 'Cause there were people that hated the film and just didn't care whether it got out there or didn't get out there. So I was very protective of it. And there was never a moment that I didn't totally believe in the film. I always believed in the film. And it's that sort of thing where, when Susan Sontag saw it, it was a major epiphany and pinnacle in my own consciousness. Because it was like, 'Okay. Now somebody who I've always revered and respected believes in my work. And believes that it's great.' And I knew it was great, but when you have it mirrored off of someone who is great, like Susan Sontag, it enables you to suffer all the crap that you have to go through to get a film off the ground, get something out of development hell and into reality.

You were able to get it out there somehow?

Elias Merhige: The film was distributed on VHS. So people could buy it from Virgin Megastore. It wasn't just myself that had to give them a copy of the tape. Rocket Video had the film. Jerry's Video over in Hillhurst that has the film as well. The thing, for me, in making a film, is I that have to just be 300% in love with what it is that I'm doing. I'm not going to spend two or three years of my life on something that I'm half-hearted about, you know?

My take on *Begotten* is pretty clearly that this divine being, in the beginning, is almost sacrificing himself for the birth of the next generation, which becomes Mother Earth... Actually, in the film, Mother Earth comes from behind him. And...

Elias Merhige: She's sort of born from him in a very theatrical way.

Yeah. Born out of him, and he's dead. And then ejaculates him...

Elias Merhige: Yeah. Inseminates herself.

And then from that comes...

Elias Merhige: Comes this new world order.

Who's, hey, got a tough life. Almost an oppressive kind of way...

Elias Merhige: Well, it's interesting, 'cause you have this, like, the patriarchal world, sacrificing itself, giving birth to this matriarchal world, that then gives birth to this new kind of, like, child, who's a balance between the masculine and the feminine, the earth and the sky, and then is ultimately sort of sacrificed...

But then begets greenery and the earth as we know it. Which was a neat effect. I'm sure you did that on your optical printer.

Elias Merhige: Yeah. I did a lot of that with time lapse, too. In a terrarium, I had little things growing.

A small terrarium?

Elias Merhige: No, a large terrarium. And – but it's the kind of thing where – with *Begotten*, I always felt that, having been a big Nietzsche fan at the time, this idea of circularity of

From the film, "Begotten," directed by E. Elias Merhige.

time, the idea of the eternal return, the idea that everything is a circle or a sphere... And certainly Einstein's theory of relativity, you know, that if you go in two opposite directions, you're eventually going to meet again. 'Cause the world through Einsteinian physics is spherical – the universe is spherical. So, it's the idea that – imagine that we had a culture, like 4,000 years ago or 10,000 years ago, that had the technology with cinema, to make movies. And that you're looking into a sort of archaeological discovery of this world, that is now extinct, and was sort of a pre-predecessor to the world that we live in today.

When the earth was really new.

Elias Merhige: Yeah, exactly.

And I took the band of quote, kind of "lepers" or whoever, just to be sort of the outcast, the marginalized and the decrepit of the earth, who don't know what they're doing. Almost – I'm not specifically a religious person – but I almost read it as a Christian metaphor of sorts, where Jesus was born to a world that didn't appreciate him, and he died for the sins of all the others. In that this new being died for their sins, even though they didn't know what they were doing. Here they have this naked thing, who's been born of Mother Earth and God, and they...

Elias Merhige: And they don't even realize it.

And they don't realize it, and they beat him and kill him. And he begets the rest.

Elias Merhige: I think that's very beautiful what you just said. And I don't think that's off the mark. But the thing is, you go not just to the mythology of Jesus, but also to Isis and Osiris, and you go back to Attus and Adonis, and it goes way back to be the pre-Christian ideas and, then certainly with the idea of creation as it exists in the Hebraic sense, in the Old Testament. It's just these themes of sacrifice and resurrection are in every culture and every age. And they're important themes. And I love art that is charged with both pathos and mythos. And you see it in Arnold Bachland's paintings. You see it in a lot of expressionist and symbolist paintings. And you certainly see it in the romantic paintings, and in the Romantic poets like Byron and Shelley. And in Goethe, the German poet. All these voices from the past definitely have influenced me to a very profound degree. And I feel like – that being inspired by these minds and by these works of art from hundreds of years ago, I imbue it into my own blood and invigorate it with a new life and put it out into a new – in a new way, through film and – through the films that I'm making.

Also the elements in both of your films – regarding themes of sacrifice and all that – there's also sort of a haunting feeling throughout both of the films. I think that what's happening in *Begotten* isn't entirely pleasant. It's interesting. It's always sort of fascinating, but it's also upsetting.

Elias Merhige: No. Absolutely.

Much in the way that any martyr, who has to suffer for others' sins or whatever – it's not the most pleasant thing ever. And same with *Shadow of the Vampire*, too. It's always super-interesting, and a reflection on things you said about current filmmaking. But it's also kind of haunting. These people are disappearing, and is Schreck really killing them? And then you start to think, 'He really is a vampire. Or at least he thinks he is. And that's enough.'

Elias Merhige: I can't tell you how much I appreciate you seeing *Begotten*, and having an appreciation of that film. 'Cause I love that film, really. I never thought about, 'Oh, I'm going to go to Hollywood with *Begotten* and I'm going to be a big movie director. It was the kind of thing where I made *Begotten* just purely like a fever. It was like a fever that hit me, and then, when the film was done, the fever broke, and it passed. It was somewhat of an obsession and a great, profound love, making that film. And I learn something new from that film every time that I see it. I don't feel like its maker. I feel like it's got its own life force, and every time I see the film, I'm learning something new from it.

Scott Essman is the publisher of "Directed By Magazine." Special DVD copies of "Begotten" are now being made available as a not-for-profit item for a short time only. To order a "Begotten" DVD, send $12 postpaid via PayPal to: scott91966@yahoo.com .You may also send a check/money order to: Scott Essman, P.O. Box 1722, Glendora, CA 91740.

Audio Recording in the Great Outdoors

Ways to Minimize Extraneous Noise

by Bryant Falk

One of the most challenging types of audio recording is when the shoot takes place outside. Numerous variables start showing themselves. From car traffic and wind noise to ocean waves, leaf rustling, and rain. One of the worst modern audio culprits today is the jet airplane!

Keeping all this extraneous noise out of your shotgun mic can be a daunting task. Here are a few hints to help minimize potential audio problems as you head out into the great outdoors.

The first thing is to create as many options as is reasonably possible on your shoot. Wireless lav mics for on location talent and boom mics will give you more options once you're in the edit suite.

The first largest outdoor audio issue to tackle is wind noise. Even on the sunniest, most beautiful day ever, you can have wind noise challenges. Make sure to have a number of different windscreen options for your boom mic. These wind reducers also known as "Zeppelins" or "Blimps" come in many shapes and sizes. One type you may have seen is the furry "Fuzzy" or "Mic Muff" windscreen. This type of filter gives you good protection against wind noise getting into your shotgun mic.

Other items good to have in your inventory are sound blankets. These are dense fabric material that can be used to cover noisy audio sources such as power generators or refrigerators, (and even if not in the shot, compressors can still make a lot of noise!).

A short film called, "Winter," (directed by Dan Seeley) takes place in a very remote location. Many of the audio issues touched upon in this article needed to be addressed on the set of "Winter". Since much of the shoot did take place at night, what they had to deal with was those pesky generators for the lights.

The crew employed two techniques. The first was the sound blankets over the generators, and the second was distance, getting the noise source as far from the shoot location as possible. Heavy duty extension chords or "Stingers" were used to deliver the power from the generators to the lights.

Unfortunately, some noise, such as flying "jets" overhead, cannot be controlled as easily. One recent challenge was when I had to record a cooking show next to a lake with power boats going by. It took us three times longer counting the breaks from filming to get what we needed, but we did it.

So, as you're heading into the great outdoors, keep an ear out for those extra sounds that may not be so welcomed in the audio suite. Be prepared with ways and options to minimize potential audio challenges when you're shooting outside.

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.

Zylight's Palm-Sized Juggernaut, the Award-Winning Z90 Intelligent LED Lighting Instrument

Zylight sheds light on the inspiration behind its award-winning product: the Z90 intelligent LED light instrument. *StudentFilmmakers* Magazine speaks with Charlie Collias at Zylight to find out more about the Z90.

"Our first product, the Z50, was revolutionary in its design and functionality and many customers wanted a unit similar in size but much brighter. LED technology had advanced greatly in the years following the Z50, and the Z90 was simply a natural product progression," says Charlie Collias of Zylight.

"The biggest advantage of the Z90 over any other instrument in the field is its ability to dial in any color temperature output without any filters or gels. With the Z90, you just push a button or turn the dial to get the exact color temperature output you need for any lighting situation, whether shooting inside, outside or under mixed light sources. A user can also add 10 steps of + or – green on top of those color temps to correct for unusual light situations," explains Collias.

"The Z90's can also output any color of the rainbow, allowing for easy Chromakey or some pretty cool product-shot highlights. Users can vary the intensity and saturation of a color easily and effectively. This feature alone saves on buying gels, which can run hundreds of dollars a year. The Z90 uses a multi-colored LED module to produce different colors and color temperatures. There are no bulbs to break, and no projected heat output so your talent stays cool. It can be powered from AC or external battery source."

Collias adds, "The Z90 also has a cool feature built in called ZyLink, our wireless protocol enabling any Zylight to communicate with another Zylight. With ZyLink, you can set up any number of our instruments, wirelessly connect them together, and have them all operate independently or in concert with the same output. All of our lights can talk to one another. When the lights are linked, they act as if they are one light source. If you dim one light, they all dim. If you change the color, they will all change. The possibilities on your shoot are endless."

For more information, lighting tips, and a sneak peak at Zylight's latest product to be announced at NAB2009, go to: www.studentfilmmakers.com/news/0209_Zylight.shtml

Interview with Randy Ullrich, Founder, President and CEO of FiveSprockets

A New Web-Based Collaboration Software and Virtual Production Studio for Screenwriters

Always at the pulse of incoming tech developments and reviewing what may or may not be useful for filmmakers and storytellers, *StudentFilmmakers* Magazine has come across a new web-based collaboration software and virtual production studio for screenwriters called FiveSprockets. We sat down with Randy Ullrich, Founder, President and CEO of FiveSprockets to talk about his software.

At the very heart, what is FiveSprockets, and what is FiveSprockets about?

Randy Ullrich: Our mission is to help our users make better media. We're doing that by providing education, communication tools, and great web-based collaboration software specifically designed to meet the collaboration needs of our community. After all, media production is a collaborative endeavor.

What are some new things going on at FiveSprockets?

Randy Ullrich: We just launched some enhanced story-development features (http://www.fivesprockets.com/resources/?q=blog/new-story-development-features). This was our fifth mini release since our official beta launch in late September, 2008. In general, we push new releases about once a month, so our users are always getting new features to enhance their experience.

Could you comment on "technologies and the internet" in relation to FiveSprockets?

Randy Ullrich: The web brings together a great set of technologies for collaboration and communication, so it was natural for us to build our company as a web-based software company instead of a more traditional desk-top based software company. Call it Cloud Computing or Software as a Service or whatever, the point is that you can now access the Internet from just about anywhere via a variety of devices. By placing our software "in the cloud", our users can access our offerings and their projects from virtually anywhere.

If you were forced to choose one, what would you say is your favorite tool on FiveSprockets?

Randy Ullrich: vScripter, our free, online story development and scriptwriting software. But this may change by year's end as we have some interesting new products in the pipeline.

Looking ahead, what are some new features or upgrades you will be adding to FiveSprockets, and why?

Randy Ullrich: We'll take the Steve Jobs / Apple stance on that and stay mum!

For more information, go to www.studentfilmmakers.com/news/0209_FiveSprockets.shtml

Los Angeles Film School Expands

LA Film School Adds Three New Degree Programs, Four New Labs, a 4,000 Square-Foot Hollywood Set Sound Stage, and Purchases a Second Theatre to Meet Its New Programs' Needs

StudentFilmmakers Magazine catches up with Los Angeles Film School(www.lafilm.edu), located in the center of Hollywood, California, to find out about the school's news and progress since the announcements of the school's three new degree programs. The new degree programs are an Associate of Science Degree in Film, an Associate of Science Degree in Game Development, and an Associate of Science Degree in Computer Animation.

How are students responding to the new degree programs? Diana Derycz-Kessler, CEO of Los Angeles Film School says, "The response has been great. For our Film program, we have even offered graduates the opportunity to earn an Associate's by coming back to enroll in general education classes. Our Computer Animation program is going to launch next month while our Game Production program is gearing to start this summer."

Los Angeles Film School's Computer Animation Program Director is Bobby Milly; and the school's Game Development Program Director is Michael Blackledge. Milly has credits on a number of top selling video game titles. He most recently spent time as the Senior Character Artist for Activision Central Technology Group and as the Supervisor of Scan Data Division for all of Central Tech. In addition to his work as a modeler, he has taught at the Gnomon School of Visual Effects for the past 10 years. Blackledge has over 17 years of experience in the entertainment and software industries. He headed worldwide quality for Sony Computer Entertainment (PlayStation) from 2000 to 2007.

In addition to the expansion of Los Angeles Film School's campus, the school has hosted a number of screenings followed by guest speakers which have included notable writers and directors. Los Angeles Film School's new Hollywood Set has also become a key part of the school's curriculum. "Students have been working on a comedy series with real directors, producers and actors," says Diana Derycz-Kessler.

Interview with Los Angeles Film School CEO Diana Derycz-Kessler and Director of Education, Joe Byron.

***StudentFilmmakers* Magazine: What things make your programs unique, and stand out compared to other schools?**

Joe Byron: Even though The Los Angeles Film School is a complete self-contained campus, it exists in the heart of Hollywood within sight of major studios, venues, and motion picture services. This gives students a complete "Hollywood" experience which enables them to meet with established professionals, use professional services, and create immediate and long-lasting relationships with the industry.

SFM: Was it difficult or tough for you to get the approval, or accreditation, for your new degree programs?

Diana Derycz-Kessler: Accreditation is a long and time-consuming process. It requires you to expose all operational aspects of the school and ensure that quality of education and overall services to the students are solid and long-lasting. The school must be strong in all areas before approval can be had. However, it is a worthwhile road because approval meant a level of recognition from a prestigious accreditation institution that what we are doing is right.

SFM: Have you expanded your campus in any way to meet the needs of the new programs?

Diana Derycz-Kessler: Yes, we have added four new labs and a 4,000 square-foot Hollywood Set Sound Stage. The labs are an Avid DX Nitrice lab, a Computer Animation Cintiq lab, and a Game Production lab with X-Box and Dell XPS game stations and a new Adobe editing lab equipped with Mac workstations. All in all, we have 200,000 square feet of facilities, including more than 20 labs and a 345-seat theater. We also purchased a second theater, the Ivar Theater, which resides down the street.

SFM: What kinds of equipment is Los Angeles Film School using now?

Joe Byron: The Los Angeles Film School uses the same equipment that the neighboring professional community uses: Sony HD cameras, Arriflex and Panavision 16mm and 35mm film cameras, DigiDesign ICON and ProTools Sound Editing


Film students in class at the Los Angeles Film School.


Joe Byron


Gabrielle Kelly

Los Angeles Film School Producing Faculty Instructor and Fulbright Scholar Gabrielle Kelly

Teaching Philosophy

"Most important to me is to nurture the original voice of the filmmaker and underpin that with the lessons of craft to provide a solid basis for the imagination. Note, it's called show business, not show art, therefore, producing is a key skill area, especially as the filmmaker is now called upon to do more themselves."

On Filmmaking and the Film Business

"As in the world, the Web has changed filmmaking forever. More power, and therefore, more responsibility reside in the filmmakers' hands. As it has become easier and cheaper to make visual content (and that very term shows that "film" doesn't cover everything now possible with new technologies and formats!) it has become harder to find the audience – hence self-distribution is growing by leaps and bounds.

"The film business has become easier to break into with talent and great work; the Web has leveled access by allowing the storyteller, the filmmaker to go directly to their audience. In the end, one thing always remains the same: whatever tools technology gives us – it's all about the story. A great screenplay is gold, a great story is gold, whether it's told in 3 minutes or 90 minutes or 300 minutes, it will always be the magnet for talent, financing and attracting people to work incredibly hard to tell a story in which they believe."

Breaking into the Industry

"Woody Allen said 90% of success in the business is showing up! Meaning, do every job really well, follow your passion and underlie it with craft and good business skills. Think about your audience! You're in the most communicative and collaborative of the art forms, what are you trying to say to someone out there in Mumbai, Shanghai, New York, Idaho?"

Film students in class at the Los Angeles Film School.

One of Los Angeles Film School's theatres.

and Mixing equipment, and Final Cut Pro and AVID picture editing software and consoles.

SFM: Do you have a theatre to view movies in?

Joe Byron: In 2001, we opened our digital high-definition, Dolby Surround, 345-seat THX-Certified Theater. Since then, we have recently added a new Sony 4K projector. It serves host to frequent screenings of major films as well as where students show their thesis projects at graduation.

SFM: Which direction are you going with equipment for the future? And for the near future?

Joe Byron: The Los Angles Film School has close relationships with all major technology developers, and consistently upgrades to current industry standard equipment.

SFM: What is your answer to the age-old question of Film versus Digital?

Joe Byron: Film and Digital moviemaking has a common foundation in the artistic principles of storytelling with pictures and sound. "Film" and "Digital" are both useful tools to support these basics. The Los Angeles Film School will continue to teach and support both areas unless and until the professional industry abandons these sets of tools.

SFM: Are you looking to, or thinking about, adding any other degree programs or new classes?

Diana Derycz-Kessler: Yes! We are looking to build off of our first animation class, to be followed down the road by game production which should soon be followed by other degree programs.

SFM: Do you have a special message or shout out for your first graduating classes in these new degree programs who will in fact be graduating this summer?

Diana Derycz-Kessler: Follow your dreams and continue to make us proud with your work. The sky is the limit!

For more details, go to: www.studentfilmmakers.com/news/0209_LosAngelesFilmSchool.shtml

Film students train on real sets at the Los Angeles Film School.

Columbia College Hollywood Teaches Boot Camps on Its New, State-of-the-Art Gail Patrick Soundstage

An update on the new soundstage at the CCH campus.

Columbia College Hollywood (www.columbiacollege.edu) broke ground last summer with the construction of its new Gail Patrick Soundstage. *StudentFilmmakers Magazine* talks with Andrew Kesler, Dean of Students at Columbia College Hollywood, for an update on the soundstage.

Could you give us an update on the Gail Patrick Soundstage at Columbia College Hollywood?

Andrew Kesler: It is open and in use. We have one class that meets there per week, and we have been doing "boot camps" on the sound stage. There will be a bit of a learning curve for not just our students, but our faculty as well in how to use the dimmer board, for example. Our Digital Studio Lighting class was having a grand time the first week of the quarter as the inaugural group.

Could you tell us some of the features of the soundstage?

Andrew Kesler: It offers a shooting space of 850 square feet with a height to the lighting grid of 17"6', and a Smart Fade 1248 Programmable ETC dimmer board. The stage itself is attached to the building, but for access, one must exit our main building. They thought of everything when designing the stage – it even has an eye wash fountain.

What were some of Columbia College Hollywood's goals and objectives for building the soundstage?

Andrew Kesler: To be candid, a sound stage was the one thing we really lacked. We have a state-of-the-art TV Studio, and other stages as well as standing sets, but to offer our students the most complete, in-depth education, we needed a sound stage. The first day said it all. The 12 students in the first class walked into the stage and were in awe, quiet and wide-eyed like little girls and boys. We know it is not the size one would find on a big studio lot, but as a teaching tool and for shooting our projects, it will be swell.

What other benefits will the Gail Patrick Soundstage provide for students and staff?

Andrew Kesler: Aside from the obvious teaching possibilities for cinematography and lighting, it gives our students a sound-proof environment to construct sets and shoot their projects. It is a space we can devote to production, no sharing with classes from a different department. It will provide the students with experience they can take to the professional world. And, for promotional purposes, it is surely a plus.

We think CCH is a great choice for the student who is truly serious about film. Compared to the film department at regular schools, we are just as theoretical and much more hands-on: we graduate *filmmakers*. Compared to certificate academies, we're an opportunity to learn the whole art and to develop your whole talent. Especially for Californians—with the state system severely curtailing its opportunities—CCH represents an excellent educational and professional opportunity.

*Fore more detials including **screenwriting tips** from Andrew Kesler, who teaches Script Analysis at CCH, go to: www.studentfilmmakers.com/news/0209_ColumbiaCollegeHollywood.shtml*

Featured Products and Services

for filmmakers, videographers, screenwriters, and storytellers

Production Music

Killer Tracks offers over 2,000 CDs from 21 unique libraries, and thousands of quality sound effects and production elements. Fast and easy, one-stop licensing, friendly and knowledgeable Music Supervisors and Account Representatives, and convenient music access online, on hard drive and on CD/DVD. Killer Tracks also offers new Hip-Hop from Chuck D, a new reality library from the composer for "Supernanny", "The Amazing Race" and "Big Brother", R&B Pop from the Grammy winning producers of the #1 smash hit "Umbrella," RedZone Entertainment, epic trailer cues from the world's leading choirs and orchestras, Pop Rock from Miley Cyrus' writers, Dramedy from the composer of the "Sex and the City" theme, and more. Visit www.killertracks.com.

Soundrangers just launched the next generation of its online library which gives users added functionality such as Soundboxes for organizing projects, prepaid accounts for multiple users, better search, and more content. Barry Dowsett of Soundrangers shares, "We created our library specifically with the end-user and their projects in mind. You don't need to search through endless amounts of random linear source, only to have to edit and modify a small portion of it to fit your project." Dowsett explains, "We try to prerender our library into workable content so the end-user doesn't have to look very far. So for instance, we offer looping ambience that actually loops, one-shot sounds when you only need that one sound, various length mixouts of our music tracks, and a design aesthetic that allows seamless integration of our content into the given medium." Visit www.soundrangers.com

Streaming Video & Media Distribution

Vertical Streaming is transforming the way independent filmmakers touch their audience. Be the first to offer screenings in a fully customized virtual movie theatre completely branded for your new venture. With its worldwide content delivery network, Vertical Streaming can deliver your full feature film online at the speed of light. Protect your film with MediaGuard, offering the highest level of security for digital rights management. Issue tickets to VIP guests to watch full screenings or monetize your movies online with our web-based application. Visit www.verticalstreaming.com, and call 888-635-6888 for more info.

Teleprompter Systems

Audio Video Design stays cutting-edge, and delivers quality and innovation with 1Prompter™ teleprompter camera-mount systems, providing a cost-effective alternative to expensive teleprompter software and hardware products. Two years ago at NAB 2007, Audio Video Design announced its 1Prompter™ teleprompter hardware and software products, combining the teleprompter software with a new camera mounting system. Looking ahead towards NAB 2009, Shawn McDermott, CEO and designer of AVD hardware systems says, "We're very excited about introducing our new Voice Recognition software at NAB 2009." Visit Audio Video Design's official website at www.avd-prompt.com. And, find out more about Audio Video Design's three camera-mount systems, the 1Prompter11, 1Prompter15 and the 1Prompter17, at www.1prompter.com.

Consultation and Coaching for Screenwriters

Cupid's Coverage is a romantic comedy screenwriting resource, and offers consultation and coaching for screenwriters. Get connected with what you need to know about the genre. With its unique Coverage & Coaching system, you get the affordability of basic coverage with the quality and personal touch of high-priced script consultations. Even if you haven't written anything yet, you can still sign up for personal coaching, and Cupid's Coverage will help you turn your ideas into a quality screenplay. Additionally, Cupid's Coverage offers a free bi-weekly ezine, with tips on how to beat procrastination, articles on the craft of rom-com screenwriting, and more. Visit www.cupidscoverage.com for more details, and to sign up for its free bi-weekly ezine.

Featured Film, Video, Music & Screenwriting Festivals

Announcing the New 2009-2010 NextFrame Call for Entries

Accepting all narrative, documentary, animation, and experimental student work, NextFrame wants to take your film or video around the world!

NextFrame - UFVA's Touring Festival of International Student Film & Video announces its 2009-2010 call for entries. NextFrame was founded with the intention to provide a first-class festival and much-needed exposure for cutting-edge student work. Internationally recognized as one of the world's premiere touring festivals for showcasing student work, the NextFrame Film Festival dedicates itself to connecting student filmmakers from all backgrounds, providing a chance to share their unique vision to audiences around the world. Once each year's batch of finalists are selected, the festival embarks on a year-long international tour visiting university campuses, museums, media art centers, and independent theaters throughout the US and around the globe. For submission guidelines, procedures, and entry forms, visit NextFrame's official website at www.temple.edu/nextframe.

The 10th Annual Sacramento Film & Music Festival Runs July 24th – August 2nd, 2009.

Next Submission Deadline: April 17, 2009.

Submissions are currently being accepted via Withoutabox. In addition to the core international programs, two days of dedicated programming time are set aside exclusively for student filmmakers: The 4th Annual Sony Creative Software Student Days screenings, sponsored by Sony, are intended to showcase the best of the new generation of filmmakers and future visionaries. The student program is separately juried and the best films are shared with our distribution partners. All student films are eligible. Go to www.sacfilm.com.

Dogma Mobile International Film Festival 2009: Make a Cell Phone Movie and Win Cash

Want to make movies right now? Use your cell phone.

The Dogma Mobile International Film Festival 2009 wants to explore the limits of filmmaking on cell phones. By applying simple but strict rules – inspired by the Danish Dogma Movement – the festival creates a creative framework for making mobile films. And you can join! The festival is an ongoing online event taking place at www.dogmamobile.com right now. Here you can get useful advice, upload and join the cash prize competition with your own films, and exchange ideas with other filmmakers. The next competition deadline is April 15, 2009. The jury is Isabella Rossellini, Aryan Kaganof, Ferhan Cook, Jukka-Pekka Laakso, and Søren Hyldgaard. Visit www.dogmamobile.com.

4th Annual Latin American and Caribbean Film Festival

Download an entry form today at www.lacfilmfest.org, and submit your films!

Important Dates: June 11 - 14, 2009, Atlanta, Georgia.

The 4th Annual Latin American and Caribbean Film Festival series will bring light to current issues, realities, and histories of Latin American and Caribbean countries through film and video. This festival has a special emphasis on African and Indigenous communities. The film festival also has as an objective to document the stories of migration of these communities, as they exist in North America, Africa, Asia and Europe. The Latin American and Caribbean Film Festival is now accepting submissions for short and feature length films. www.lacfilmfest.org

2009 BlueCat Screenplay Competition

The BlueCat Screenplay Competition is now open for submission of feature length screenplays for the 11th year. Important deadlines: March 2 and April 1, 2009.

Every writer receives a written script analysis (over 600 words) of their screenplay. Winner receives $10,000. Four finalists receive $1,500. BlueCat's alumni sell scripts, secure representation, direct award-winning films, and build careers. Visit BlueCat's official website for free articles on the craft of screenwriting and join the community of over 10,000 writers. BlueCat's 2009 Competition Deadline is March 2 (entry fee $50). The Late Deadline is April 1 (entry fee $60). Since 1998. www.bluecatscreenplay.com

The MOFILM Mobile Short Film Festival

Upload Your Films Now at www.mofilm.com.

MOFILM highlights the increasing influence of the mobile medium on the entertainment industry, bringing together art, commerce and technology. The 2009 initiative is part of a wave of a new generation of sophisticated multimedia enabled mobile handsets and value added operator services, providing new opportunities to enjoy short form video. This year's event will be hosted by Kevin Spacey, two-time Academy Award winning actor and director. MOFILM also works with mobile operators and service providers to distribute 'made-for-mobile' content. Find out more about MOFILM at www.mofilm.com.

Challenging Film Festival Draws Premier Student and Independent Filmmakers Worldwide

Compass Film Academy Alumni Board Announces Its Annual 24 Hour Film Festival

Students and professionals are gearing up for one of the most challenging film festivals in the world. The 24 Hour Film Festival, now in its seventh year, draws an array of highly creative student and independent filmmakers who are challenged by the intense timeline to produce a short film within 24 hours.

"You have to come up with an entire short in one day and night. That's creating the concept, writing the script, shooting, editing and making sure it's back in time!" says Gabe Berghuis, Creative Scout at Compass Film Academy. "It's definitely a challenge, but the production teams pull it off and the creativity is absolutely amazing."

The film festival is judged by top industry professionals, both locally and nationally. Cash prizes include $1,000 for first place, $500 for second place, and $250 for third place.

Judges in previous years have included Gedney Webb, sound editor for the musical, *Chicago*; Korey Pollard, an actor in *Stand By Me* and an assistant director on the sitcoms *Life* and *Monk*; writer/director Rik Swartzwelder who directed, *The Least of These*; and author and screenwriter Frank Peretti, with such notables as *The Visitation*, *This Present Darkness* and *Piercing The Darkness*, the first of which was made into a movie and the latter two books had sales of more than 3.5 million.

The Alumni Board of Compass Film Academy created the film festival seven years ago as a way to draw out the most serious up and coming filmmakers who are destined to make a mark for themselves. Since its conception, the festival has grown in participation, with teams ranging from one-person to thirty-person production teams and from high school rookies to professional video production houses. This year, in addition to the overall prizes, special recognition will be noted among high school groups as a way to showcase advancing talent among secondary schools.

"The film festival is not for the faint of heart," said John Pottenger, president of Compass Film Academy's Alumni Board. "It's for highly talented individuals who can think fast on their feet and who believe they can play a viable role in the creativity of the entertainment industry."

The 24 Hour Film Festival film competition begins on Friday, April 17. Film entries will be screened in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on April 23.

For more information about The 24 Hour Film Festival, go to www.the24hourfilmfestival.com or send an email inquiry to info@the24hourfilmfestival.com.

continued from page 49

Global Marketplace

WRITERS' SERVICES & RESOURCES

Attention: : Writers with Quality Scripts. We Have Buyers and Need More Marketable Scripts. www.WritersLiterary.com/ScriptBrokerage.html

Writers' Copyright Association (WCAUK): Copyright protect your work. It's proof you wrote it, and wrote it first. Register at www.wcauk.com.

Cupid's Coverage (www.cupidscoverage.com): consultation/coaching for scripts in the rom-com genre.

FiveSprockets (www.fivesprockets.com) offers free online screenwriting and production software / resources.

Print Classifieds: $4.50 per word or $5.00 for bold/caps. There is a $45 minimum. Payment must accompany order.
Online Classifieds: Ads appearing online at studentfilmmakers.com are seen around the world.

Global Marketplace

For print and online classified text and display ads, please call 212.255.7190

EQUIPMENT RENTAL, SALES, & SERVICE

Big Vision Rentals: Your Hi Definition Production Resource. Rentals, Production, Crewing, and more at: www.bigvision.com

High-Definition cameras, camcorders, lighting, audio, accessories are available for rent at Zilok. Rent out your equipment and gear. http://us.zilok.com

Monster CableÆ Products, Makers of High-Definition Multimedia (HDMI) Cables, Video Cables, Audio Cables for Home Theater and more. Visit www.monstercable.com.New 2009 special at

1Prompter.com: Free hand controller and USB flashdrive with the 1Prompter11. View all teleprompter products at www.1prompter.com.

"Get In-Sync." Go to: www.insyncpubs.com. Motion Picture Equipment / Video.

LIGHTING

Cool Lights USA for all your film and video lighting needs. Visit **www.coollights.biz**, or call 877-272-1419.

VIDEO LIGHTING

Affordable pro video HMI & on camera lighting kits AlzoVideo.com

Film Stock

Raw Stock, Inc.
Kodak and Fuji CHEAP!
www.raw-stock.com
1-888 RAWSTOC
Call for new specials.

PRODUCTION MUSIC

Music 2 Hues. Royalty Free Music Downloads or CD's. Over **1000** Tracks, Quantity Discounts. www.music2hues.com

Killer Tracks Production Music libraries are designed to offer producers maximum versatility and convenience. Visit: www.killertracks.com.

All StudentFilmmakers Magazine advertisers accept full responsibility for the claims made by their advertisement. StudentFilmmakers Magazine assumes no responsibility for the content of any advertisements.

Soundrangers Brand Sound Effects and Royalty Free Music Downloads. www.soundrangers.com

HD FOOTAGE & STOCK FOOTAGE

MotionDrops.com: : Royalty Free Stock Video Footage & Visual FX. Buy it. Use it. Show it. www.motiondrops.com

Greg Hensley Productions: Over 30 years of footage filmed across America. Various collections, films for sale, and more. Visit www.greghensley.com.

RevoStock.com: Professional Stock Footage, Music, Sound FX and AE Projects at Revolutionary Prices. Buy or Sell! www.revostock.com

MOTION PICTURE / VIDEO PRODUCTION

Richter Studios specializes in video production, high-definition filming, post production, 2D/3D animation, and more. **www.richterstudios.com**

CINEMATOGRAPHERS / DOPs / CAM-OPs

Saro Varjabedian
Director of Photography
www.sarodp.com

AUDIO / POST

EDITORS

FESTIVALS & CONTESTS

Call-for-Entries: NextFrame - UFVA's Touring Festival of International Student Film & Video. www.temple.edu/nextframe/

Submissions accepted now for 2009 Short Film Competition. www.dcshorts.com

MOFILM, the world's biggest global mobile short film festival. Enter Your film, register now at www.mofilm.com.

Dogma Mobile - Make a cell phone movie and win cash! www.dogmamobile.com

ENTER THE #1 HORROR SCREENPLAY CONTEST.www.HorrorScreenplayContest.com. 600 Entry Limit!

10th Sacramento Film & Music Festival: Now accepting Withoutabox submissions. www.sacfilm.com

Submit now to the 2009 Bluecat Screenplay Competition. Visit www.bluecatscreenplay.com.

Come join the Latin American and Caribbean Film Festival 2009, www.lacfilmfest.org.

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Make great 'how-to' shorts for Howcast.com and build your reel. Visit www.howcastemerging.com to become Howcast's next Emerging Filmmaker.

Submit your films to Gigantic Digital, representing the future of independent film distribution. Go to: www.giganticdigital.com.

Create a successful and targeted festival strategy with Reel Plan. reelplan.com

FILMS ON DVD

DVD/CD DUPLICATION/ REPLICATION AND MEDIA SERVICES

Jackson Media: Specializing in DVD/CD duplication, DVD/CD replication, DVD authoring, and video production services. www.jacksonmedia.com

CONTINUING EDUCATION & TRAINING

Compass Film Academy is now accepting applications for 2009. Apply today at www.compassfilmacademy.com/the-academy/admissions/apply-now.

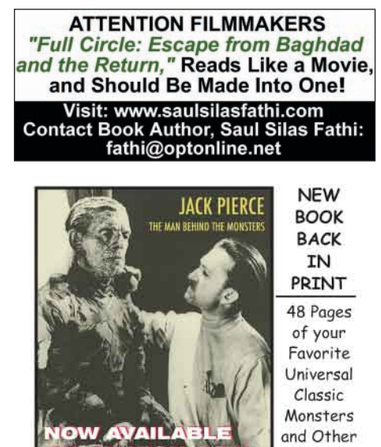
LEARN SCREENWRITING with Award-Winning Writer Jacob Krueger. Sign up for Ten Week Workshops, Master Classes, and Private Coaching. www.NYCwritingclasses.com

STREAMING VIDEO & MEDIA DISTRIBUTION

VerticalStreaming.com offers creative ways to successfully distribute films digitally. 888-635-6888

ALBUMS / CDs

BOOKS



NEW BOOK BACK IN PRINT

48 Pages of your Favorite Universal Classic Monsters and Other Horrors

The Writing Solution simplifies writing so anyone can write a compelling screenplay. Sample pages: www.thewritingsolutiononline.com

Go from idea to screenplay to sale - HOLLYWOOD SCRIPTWRITING www.storyandscriptdevelopment.com.

INTERNET BROADCASTS

OnTheSet.biz: Learn how to produce movies. Register online now for Live Internet Broadcasts at www.ontheset.biz.

continued on page 47

Philip Anthony Wrencher

Profile: pwrencher12
Job: Actor/Filmmaker
Location: Virginia, United States
http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/pwrencher12

Currently, Philip is an actor pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Cinema Television with a minor in Theater at Regent University.

Biggest Challenge: "'Glory Man' by Dennis J. Hassell. It's the story of Clarence Jordan and Koinonia Farm. At first, I thought memorizing lines will be the hardest part. Nope, it's your blocking and learning cues, especially have a six-foot theatre rake, which we move around the entire play. Theatre is as much a collaborative art as film."

Solution for Challenge: "Build strong relationships with your fellow cast members and all of the crew. Everyone has an importance in making the play a success, and you have to have the ability to put trust into others to fulfill their duties, which will give you the best opportunity to have a great performance which, in turn, will allow them to, also."

Favorite Technique: "Having an uplifting attitude. This helps others to keep focused on the prize, and having a great journey to the finished product."

Current Projects: "I will be location manager for a semi-biographical film that some of my classmates will be shooting. Then, probably looking for, and writing, a few short scripts for a Directing class I have. Always looking for ways to improve my acting resume."

Background/Past Work: "I have been a producer, a DP, 2nd AD, cam op, 2nd AC, boom operator, gaffer, key/dolly grip, grip, and PA. Acting-wise, I have been an extra on the set of the John Adams HBO mini-series which was a blessing. Have done few a commercials, industrials, and student films. I have only been pursuing acting for two years and filmmaking for a year. I believe I have gotten off to a great start."

Derek-Jon Flagge

Profile: DerekFlagge
Job: Student; Writer / Director
Location: Florida, United States
http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/DerekFlagge

Derek-Jon Flagge's film crew / production is Stacked Plates Productions. They make skits and short films. "I couldn't do this without my best friend Armand Bolourian because he is the one I do almost everything filmed with."

Work: "I am a student, and I work for a local home-owned restaurant, Pepperoni Grill. I love directing and writing movies, and that is what I do when I'm not working, which is a lot recently because of the amount of ideas I have. So you could say my line of work is writing and directing right now…"

Current Projects: "I am working on a zombie/ 'infected' short which is self explainable. Also, another short which we labeled as a 'bromantic comedy.' It's about two guys who are best friends, and they *don't* fall in love, they just are best friends and aren't afraid to show that they are straight but hang out all the time, like going on 'man-dates' [laughs]."

Biggest Challenge: "The biggest challenge while working on a short film is actually dealing with the cast. Sometimes they can give you a hard time while directing when they feel they are tired, bored, and every other excuse they can think of [kidding]."

Solution: "The solution for this challenge is nothing except humor. You can't get to people and tell them what to do by being mean and pushy. If you want to get somewhere I think it comes from hard work and having humor in every single thing you do, which I do."

Favorite Technique: "A technique I love to use while making movies is jokes. I know it's an odd technique, but I love to joke around and make people laugh while filming any genre of movie. It's something that works so well for me because it puts everyone in such a good mood and brings the atmosphere of the project to a great level."

Favorite Tool: "My favorite tool would actually be my brain. Thank you, brain, for being there and letting me think of ideas, film, and concentrate on more than one thing at a time. But seriously, my favorite tool would just be my camera. It lets me do what I want to do and that's all that matters to me."

Stephen Michael Neal

Profile: Steve_Neal
Job: Sound Designer, Screenwriter
Location: California, United States
http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/Steve_Neal

Work: "Sound in film is like many other things in film. If it goes unnoticed, you have done your job right. If it stands out, it draws the audience out of the moment, and becomes a distraction. My favorite part of the job is designing the backgrounds and ambiances. I love to be able to create a space for the characters. You can do anything with this if you do it right. You can add to the overall feeling of a scene with things that are so subtle that the audience will never know they are there, but they will react to them. So that is what I do. I try to create the feeling of space and design everything else around that."

Biggest Challenge: "…Lack of communication between film composer and sound designer. This usually ends up always being an argument that I think can be avoided if certain budgetary or time constraints can be worked around. In the indie field, I think that this should just be easier because of the way people work. It is not hard at all to sit in an edit bay and make a game plan. The result will always be better because in the moments where the music is more dominant, the design can compliment this and vice versa. In the end, it's much more cost efficient. As long as the director is on board with the plan, the mix will go much smoother."

Solution for Challenge: "Good communication and some knowledge of music as a sound designer. With the technology we have today, we have the ability to adapt to anything as long as we have the right mind set. Everyone can have the sound and feel of a Hollywood budget for their indie feature or short, it just requires proper execution."

Favorite Tool: "A good mic. Recording what you need yourself is really the best way."

Current Projects: "I just finished a movie called *December Heat* (www.detsembrikuumus.ruut.com/?lang=en). It is a great film from Estonia, and turned out to be one of the best experiences I have had so far."

Background/Past Work: "…*Sveener and the Schmeil* (www.sveener.com). This was a true test of the quality of sound that you get to produce for an indie. The screening for this film was in the Cary Grant Theatre at Sony. The room is amazing, and will not hide any of your mistakes. And the film was so visually 'insane' that we had our work cut out for us."

Many Thanks

David Kaminski

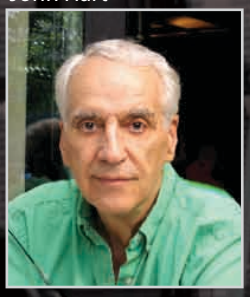
Carl Filoreto

Jack Anderson

Scott Essman

Bryant Falk

John Hart



AD Index