

StudentFilmmakers

BE BOLD

in unconventional visual ways



The Making of "The ARK"
by Benjamin South



A Conversation with
Craig Wroblewski csc



The Power of Camera
Movement

PUBLISHER'S DESK



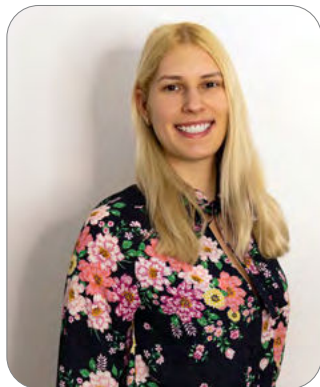
Welcome to another exciting issue of *Student Filmmakers Magazine*. I hope you enjoy this edition and learn things that will take your craft to a higher level. We, like many companies, are dealing with COVID-19 changes

on top of the emerging technologies and workflow changes that have come with technological advancements across all industries. We have repositioned ourselves, cut costs, streamlined tasks, and we have become more focused on the things that matter most to us. I think we all have had time to sort through our lives and find what is most important to us. I want to thank our writers who, as always, have delivered the best educational content in the industry, for which I am eternally grateful, and say a big thank you to Jody, Lien, and Maura; and a special thank you and shout out to all of the members participating in our interactive online Filmmakers Forums Community and Filmmakers Global Network Community. Please enjoy the magazine, and let us know what you think!

Regards,
Kim Edward Welch



Jody Michelle Solis
Associate Publisher and Editor



Maura Nicolăiță
Community Marketing Director



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StudentFilmmakers

StudentFilmmakers Magazine www.studentfilmmakers.com

Publisher and Editor

Kim Edward Welch

Associate Publisher and Editor

Jody Michelle Solis

Community Marketing Director

Maura Nicolăiță

Contributing Writers

Thomas Ackerman, ASC, David Appleby, John Badham, Kristen Baum DeBeasi, Martie Cook, Giuseppe Cristiano, JC Cummings, Amy DeLouise, Kevin Del Principe, Mark Dobrescu csc, William Donaruma, Pamela Douglas, Bryant Falk, Fred Ginsburg, CAS, Ph.D., Michael Goi, ASC, ISC, Dean Goldberg, Michael Halperin, Christina Hamlett, Courtney Hermann, David K. Irving, Jared Isham, Oscar Jasso, Dr. Rajeev Kamineni, Michael Karp, SOC, John Klein, Tamar Kummel, Justin Matley, Richard La Motte, David Landau, Lee Lanier, Kaine Levy, Peter Markham, Scott A. McConnell, Monty Hayes McMillan, Dustin Morrow, M. David Mullen, ASC, Hiro Narita, ASC, Snehal Patel, Howard A. Phillips, Michael Rabiger, Peter John Ross, Brad Rushing csc, Robert Scarborough csc, Marco Schleicher, Dr. Linda Seger, Sherri Sheridan, Mark Simon, Michael Skolnik, Pamela Jaye Smith, Johnny Lee Solis, Benjamin South, Scott Spears, Shane Stanley, Tony Stark, Peter Stein, ASC, Anthony Straeger, Jim Strain, Eddie Tapp, Michael Tierno, Dave Trottier, Sara Sue Vallée, Lloyd Walton, Peter Warren csc, Bart Weiss, David Worth

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StudentFilmmakers Magazine, established in 2006, is published in New York, 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.

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Send address change to:

StudentFilmmakers Magazine

42 West 24th Street

New York, NY 10010

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Caring for Every Frame/Word

Kevin Del Principe

In his book, *Making Movies*, director Sidney Lumet wrote, “My job is to care about and be responsible for every frame of every movie I make.” This is the near religious, high calling for filmmakers and writers. It’s the work. Period. It’s also what I have come to learn in my own filmmaking and literary writing experiences.

Recently, I had the opportunity to complete my first feature film that I co-wrote, directed and produced, *Up on the Glass*, and have my debut novel published, *I Animal*. The film was independently produced but has since been distributed by Gravitas Ventures in North America, and the novel was published by a small press. For context concerning scale, the film is in the Ultra Low Budget category for the Screen Actors Guild; (this covers films made under \$250,000). In other words, I was very involved in every aspect of the filmmaking process. Likewise, working with a small press meant that I played an active role in the publishing and marketing of the book. Making this sort of indie, creative work in film and literature gives me a unique vantage point. Father Richard Rohr, a Franciscan friar, describes individuals who operate on the institutional margins as being “on the edge of the inside.” In a creative context, I relate to Rohr’s idea of being “on the edge of the inside.” I have exposure to the business end of things, but mostly operate outside the traditional industry as

an independently minded artist. Furthermore, going through both processes for the film and novel, around the same time, has also given me new perspectives on both making films and literary writing. Below are a few elements I’ve found helpful to keep in mind for both my filmmaking and literary writing work.

Vision

Film people are good at appreciating vision when making movies. My friend and former colleague Marilyn Beker makes the point in her book, *Screenwriting with a Conscience: Ethics for Screenwriters*, that “...screenwriters who’ve studied their craft know that dialogue supports picture, picture doesn’t support dialogue.” Though it is certainly true that what people see on the screen is paramount, the sort of vision I’d like to discuss here is the kind that is from up on high—the eagle’s perspective, and with her wisdom too, that is so important in making a film. In terms of the big picture when making a movie, one has to know where one is going in order to get there. This is especially true when pointing a team, however small or massive, in the same direction. Without vision, you’re cooked; with vision, there’s hope. Having a clear vision for one’s project is vital in filmmaking and literary writing too. It

may seem simple, but we must know what we want to convey before attempting to express it.

The Team

Independent films are not made by an individual. Instead, they are made by teams and are supported by communities. Of course, there is the writer (or writers), the director, etc. But where does the funding come from? Actual people give their money. The word *give* here is used precisely rather than invest because many independent films are not really investments in the traditional sense, given the precariousness of monetizing these sorts of projects. Prior to shooting, a director will need the assistance of many people from producers to a casting director, etc. When on set, beyond the director, there is the entire crew—from director of photography to costume designer to assistant director to sound mixer to boom operator to gaffer to production assistant, etc. All are vital. Don't forget the caterers. Quality food on set is necessary to keep everyone healthy and happy. Many people volunteer in the community as well. They may offer to provide meals, let the film use a location for free, act as extras, and house cast/crew. Without actors, there's no film. Actors care about character and story. Though they sometimes get a bad reputation concerning elevated egos, actors are the director's ally when it comes down to it—and it will come down to it. When nothing seems to be working, actors can get a director out of a jam. Then, there is the post-production team: the editor, composer, sound designer, sound re-recording mixer, colorist, visual effects artist, etc.

Having an effective, supportive team is imperative. Finding a good team is the challenge. It's important to lay out clear terms and boundaries as much as possible before the work begins. Intuition is helpful when building a team and then, at some point, the only thing left is to take the plunge. In truth, one can't know in advance if someone is going to

be constructive when faced with the intensity of the work. Trust is built in the process as the work is being done. This is where people reveal themselves, for better or worse. My friend/former professor, Mark Shepherd, described it to me this way—there are *yes* people and *no* people on a set, and *yes* people are the ones you want. He reminded me that, if anything, you have to protect the *yes* people from themselves in terms of caring for their well-being.

Producing a novel also takes a great team. There is the publisher, editors, and, hopefully people who will help with marketing. No writer can do everything himself or herself. The team sees the work through.

Communication

A director must be able to communicate his or her vision to all team members from pre-production to production to post-production. Certainly, this is just as true for producing a novel with one's publisher, etc. But how does one communicate vision effectively? The answer director Elia Kazan gives us is





the “spine.” In his essay, “Style and Spine,” Kazan explains the spine accordingly:

The study of the script should result in a simple formulation that sums up the play in one phrase, a phrase that will be a guide for everything the director does. He begins with the simple words: “For me, this play is about...” The phrase should delineate the essence of the action that transpires on stage; it should reflect what is happening, what the characters are doing. It must imply effort, progression, transition, MOVEMENT.

Where a theme feels more static, the spine is a singular, active phrase. For example, in a story about a romantic relationship, one might offer that the theme is *love*. But the spine could be anything from “loss of self leads to destruction” to “lose oneself in another; find the truth.” This phrase can then be shared with all co-creators to allow for creative unity. Whether in a film or in a novel, each scene, each image, every line, every word, every utterance, must speak to the spine. If they do not, they must be adjusted to do so or be discarded. In this process, the ego must be subverted in order to serve the work.

Another aspect of communication is what I call the art of *listening and not listening*. When working on a complex, time-sensitive project, it’s essential to have trusted people that can be listened to for guidance who have different perspectives. As a director on set, these people are life-

savers. There are so many decisions to be made that a person cannot see everything by himself or herself in the moment. Of course, this works best when team members are offering advice within the boundaries of their roles. Things can get out of hand quickly when people do not respect boundaries. Even if communication is working well, there is also a time to stop listening. After considering all relevant perspectives, a decision must be made. This is the balancing act that directors face. It is similar when writing and publishing a novel. Be open and listen; then, make a decision and act on it.

Every Frame/Word

In film, it’s said that you write the film three times—as a screenplay, while shooting, and when editing. This is true but does not account for all the rewrites and revisions that happen during all three stages. When making a film, the goal is to sustain intense focus throughout every aspect of the process. It is to care about everything always.

The screenwriter, or screenwriters, trim heads and tails of scenes and discard entire scenes or sequences when necessary. They struggle over every word. As rewrites deepen, writers must fight to see characters and the story in new ways to continue the refining process. A director works like mad in order to block and visualize every scene prior to the shoot. On set, the director blocks the scenes with actors.

The blocking evolves and the director of photography and the gaffer (responsible for lighting) adjust. Then the director stares at what is being captured in a monitor while listening to live audio. He or she must have absolute focus to ensure that everything is being recorded. The director re-shoots until he or she has what's needed. In the editing room, the director and editor look at every frame over and over in order to refine the work. Much like a screenwriter, the director and editor will sharpen character, restructure story, and discard scenes/sequences if the work requires it.

The same is true in writing and publishing a novel. There are big revisions and smaller ones. Character and story are refined. Repetitious words and phrases are deleted unless they serve a purpose. Every sentence and word are poured over time and time again. Though nothing is perfect, striving for the ideal is the goal. The only way to get near perfection is to care deeply.

Resiliency

In *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity*, director David Lynch talks about feeling like he was dead, at times, while making his first feature film, *Eraserhead*, because of the great struggle to complete the project.

Making a feature film or writing and publishing a novel is a tremendous grind. Personal life, ego, health, money, and other people can all get in the way of the goal—completing the project and accomplishing nearest to the ideal version of the work. As a director, I've felt some of what Lynch describes, but I've learned that this is a feeling and feelings are temporary. At times, nothing makes sense, but the trick is to keep getting back up after every knock to the ground. It's hard at first but keep doing it. Remember that this process of falling and getting up is true for everyone else in the world too. Life and work are difficult, but many, many people get up each day regardless of whatever trials they are facing, put their work clothes on, and do their jobs.

Though feeling like one is dying during the creative process can be troubling, sometimes it is helpful to play dead when creating. Central American cichlid fish pretend they are dead in order to lure in their prey. As a director with vision who is totally focused on the work's spine, at times it is best to let co-creators nibble and explore their artistry and then assert

oneself when necessary. Though a constructive process is important, making a film or a novel, to a certain extent, is about achieving a final product that can hold up over time. Within reason, it's allowable to accept the imperfections of others and their processes to serve the project because no person nor process is perfect. Certainly, the director or novelist and his or her process is not perfect either. There are exceptions when a leader must act, however. Asserting

boundaries is required to care for one's mental and physical health, the well-being of others, and to honor the work.

The Long Good Journey

My feature film took approximately five years to make from an idea to a final product. Almost a couple of years beyond its completion, I am still in the middle of the distribution process. The novel took about four years to write and publish. Now, the marketing push for the book will be as long as I can sustain it. These processes have been long journeys. The reality is the trek stretches much further back to all my experiences that shaped the visions, to all the people who have supported me along the way, to my educational opportunities, and to all the smaller creative works I made previously that became the foundation.

Hopefully, having an understanding of the length of these journeys can help the next filmmaker/writer walking his or her path. The path is difficult and can be perilous. Good friends and creative partners help. It is a long journey but can be a good one. For filmmakers and writers, it's the work. ➔



Kevin Del Principe

Kevin Del Principe is a writer and film director. Kevin grew up outside of Buffalo but now makes his home in Memphis. He directed and co-wrote the feature film, *Up on the Glass*, available in North America through Gravitas Ventures. *I Animal* is Kevin's debut novel, published by Tumbleweed Books. He earned his MFA in Writing for Screen and Television at the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts.

kevindelprincipe.com



Benjamin South (left), Shaq B. Grant (middle), and Laura Hanna (right) as they block the scene in the middle of the night.

The Making of “The ARK”

From Concept to Festival Premiere

By Benjamin South



Parked outside a remote hotel in England, Herbert and Jacinda are meeting for the first time. Both of them know what the mission is: Kill the woman in Room 29. But are they about to administer justice or commit cold blooded murder? Only one of them knows the truth.

COVID-fatigue is a real thing in the creative industries. But what we can never get enough of is a happy story that transpired during this godforsaken pandemic. *Hello!* My name is Benjamin South, I’m the director and producer of “*The ARK*,” a sci-fi short film officially selected to premiere at LA Shorts International Film Festival.

Like everyone else, I am sick and tired of hearing how COVID ruin someone’s ambitions, dreams, or plans. I choose to see the silver lining in every challenge, including how my career as a filmmaker kicked off.

My story starts back in 2019, on a flight back from London where I am

from to Los Angeles, where I was studying film, I stumbled upon “Virus,” a science fiction short story by A.M. Khalifa, a thriller writer based in Rome, Italy. On a whim, and not a lot of money, on my next trip to the UK, I flew to Rome to discuss his short story. The First Act felt like a cohesive story on its own that fit a Three Act Structure while leaving audiences wanting more. He agreed to partner with me on this film. I was thrilled and a long journey of friendship and creative partnership kicked off.

I began my thesis film pre-production the summer of 2019. So, I called Scotty Schwartz-Owen, my co-producer, work partner and most importantly valued friend. The first thing we changed was the title of the project “Virus” to “The ARK”. We felt that when you received an email and the subject said, “Virus,” people would be less inclined to open it. And given how the pandemic played out, I have to say we were quite prescient in canning Virus.

We worked tirelessly to construct the pre-production of “The ARK”. The first mission was a crowd funding campaign. But how do you raise money in an oversaturated market, where *everyone* is asking for your dollar? As a filmmaker, I thought the best way to do that was to shoot the very best appeal video. If a filmmaker is asking for your support, well, they may as well be able to show you, even a few minutes, of what they can do. And it worked. We raised over \$15,000 from friends, families and fools (as the saying goes).

But \$15,000 wasn’t nearly enough. Especially for the vision of the production that we had in mind. To tell the story in the way it needed to be told without cutting corners. So, I hit up every wealthy person I knew, and was able after a lot of blood, sweat and tears to raise another \$15,000 from private investors.

Next came the location. Scotty and I scouted over twenty hotel locations in Los Angeles and further afield. Some of them quoted \$10K a night. It wasn’t until we found the Airtel Hotel in Van Nuys just six weeks out from production that our location was settled.



Pictures on the left from top down:

- Shaq B. Grant (left) with Benjamin South (right) as they discuss notes for the scene.
- Exterior light set-up in the rain.
- DoP Tom Gass operates from the car.

PRODUCTION



Shaq B. Grant shoots a VFX bullet designed by VFX Supervisor, Jonathan Alvord and VFX Artist, Joey Lawson.



We were set to shoot in Los Angeles from March 21 through March 25, 2020. On March 12th, we finished casting late, and murmurs started to emerge of my NYFA, my school, shutting down. I was constantly reassured that wouldn't happen, and we should continue to prep the shoot. Around March 13th, it started to reek of a meltdown as lockdowns began to simmer. Within a few days, my DP who was supposed to fly in from London was hit by the travel ban, and not much later, our entire production was shut down.

There is nothing more painful than making that call to your cast and crew of forty that your production is shut down and will be postponed. Deep down inside, I knew this was highly optimistic. Rather than postponed, it felt like we were cancelled indefinitely. Devastated, I go back to England to wait out the lockdown with my family in Surrey as opposed to sitting in a small apartment in Los Angeles. For three months, I pondered what I would do with "The ARK" and whether it will ever see the light of day.

Then July came, and for better or worse, the UK reopened. Rapidly. I saw a sliver of an opportunity and grabbed it with all my might. Rather

than wait for Los Angeles to reopen, I would shift the entire production to the UK. Including casting, crew, locations, everything. I called Scotty and A.M. Khalifa, and they were both as insane as I was and agreed to the decision to shoot in London.

We scrambled six months of pre-production into six weeks. Remember that \$15,000 I managed to get through

blood, sweat and tears? Well, that fizzled faster than you can blink your eyes, due to COVID-19. But when one door closes, another one opens. We recouped our lost funding by finding a beautiful hotel in Surrey. Wotton House. Due to the pandemic, the hotel was closed, so the hotel's management was eager to generate any sort of income. It was a perfect marriage. We needed



Director Ben South (left) with Gaffer, George Smith (center), and 2nd AC, Kristien Alexandersen (right). All smiles at 3am.



The ARK Scientists (from L-R), Peter South, Caroline South, Tom South, Jayne Jones, and Vince Jones.

unrestricted access to the hotel, and they really came through for us.

Another silver lining was due to lockdown we could elicit the help of some industry pros on the crew whose credits include *“Mission: Impossible - Fallout”*, *“Fast and Furious”*, *“Bridgerton”*, and the *“Harry Potter”* franchise to name a few. It felt like a once-in-a-hundred-years opportunity. Help is out there if you’re willing to pick up the phone and guarantee a friendly, exciting work setting and of course: *amazing food*, which we most certainly did, thanks to The Corporate Chef catering company.

Our casting process was limited, as we needed to find actors in and around London and the South of England who would be happy to travel to Surrey and stay in the hotel for five whole nights. We landed Shaq B. Grant (*“Gangs of London”*) to lead the film as Herbert and Laura Hanna to star alongside as Jacinda with Carlotta Banat supporting as Gurjeet.

With a global organization at the forefront of the film, it was critical that we had a diverse cast, which we were able to achieve. My Mother always said she wanted a role in one of my films, the same way the director of *“When Harry Met Sally”* gave his mother the all-important line, “I’ll have whatever she’s having”. My Mum, Caroline stole the show on the rooftops of Guildford.

When it came to working with Tom Gass my DP and George Smith (Gaffer) the references were clear, we looked at *“Black Mirror”*, *“Inception”*, *“Jason Bourne”*, *“Skyfall”*, *“Blade Runner”* and *“Ex Machina”*. It was crucial for me to base a sci-film in realism. Of course, it can help keep your VFX costs modest, but I struggle to relate to epic sci-fi when they don’t have tangible assets you can latch onto.

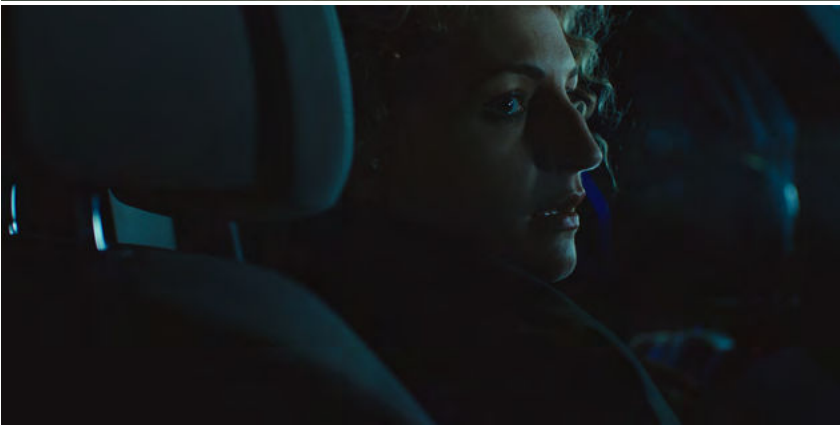
The script called for the story to be told through Herbert’s eyes for the first half of the film, thus all the flash forwards that you’ll see are from his perspective. We shift halfway through to bring *“The ARK”* into play which creates a strong mid-point twist in the story.

With the help of Jo Winter and Sean Swaby, we shot the film over four nights in cold, wet, bleak, dreary, depressing, rainy (I’m running out of adjectives to describe how the crew, cast and I felt) conditions. It was an ambitious schedule considering how many set ups were needed each night. One night that pushed me to my limit is the scene where Herbert and Jacinda get out of the car to talk at the front, then move to the back, and then, back to the front of the car again for the climax of the film.

If there’s one thing I learned in the editing process which happened in Los Angeles, you never have enough variety in performance, or inserts. Shaq, Laura, Carlotta, and Vas did a fantastic job with the acting. I wish I’d given myself more variety in the edit at times and asked for the opposite on a take, just to have it so I know I’m safe.

Now it wouldn’t be a short film without the tremendous generosity of many, many people. Thank you to Scott Owen, A.M. Khalifa, Jenna-Mae White, Laura Donaghue, Wayne Fitzsimmons, Martine Jones, Sean Swaby, Haydon Downing, Tom Gass, Kristien Alexandersen, India Edwards and Kat Shields. They all gave up their time and helped us out when they didn’t have to. Also, the Wotton House, Guildford Borough Council, Hurtwood House, CSA, and most of all, to my family who really pulled out all the stops to make sure this film could come to life.

PRODUCTION

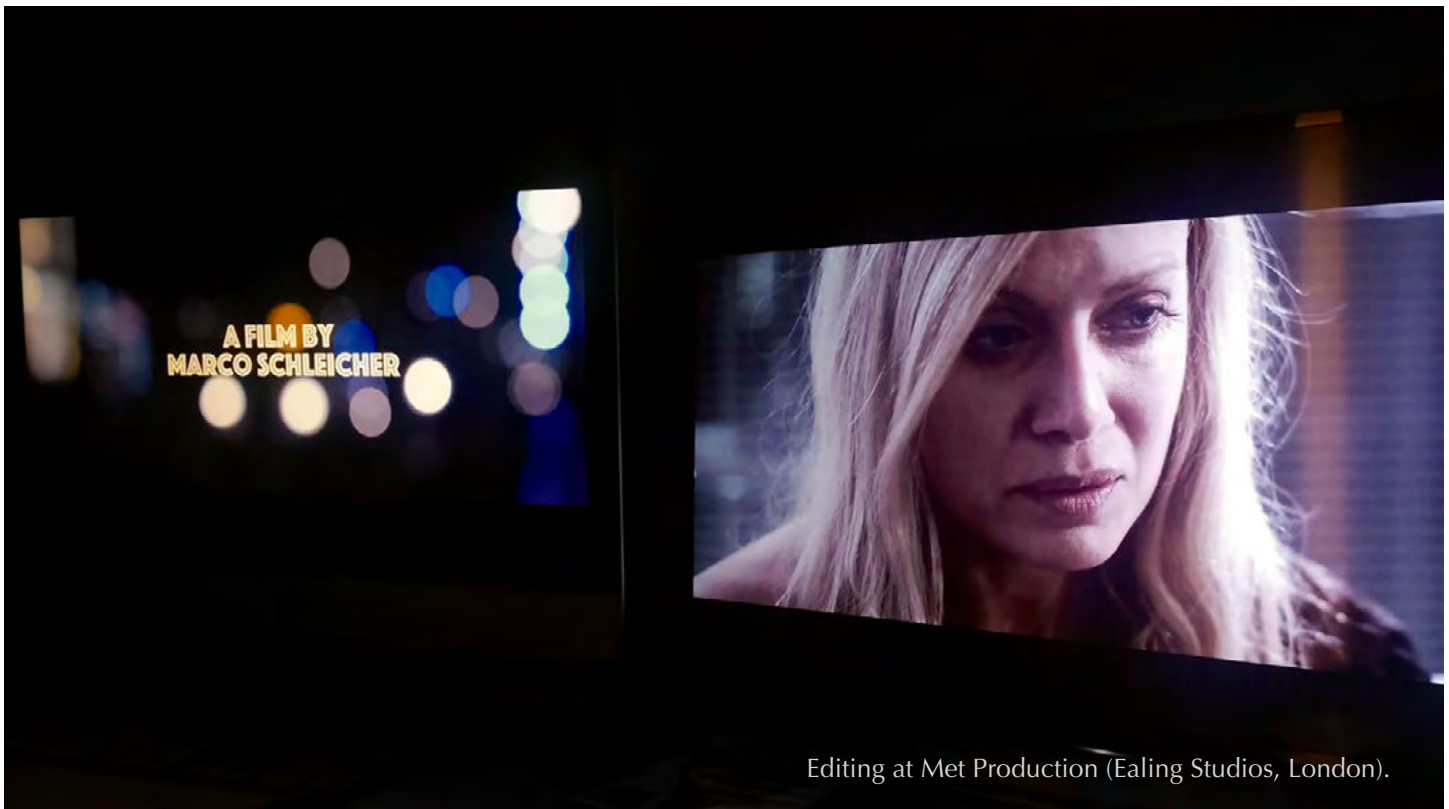


Finally, it was time for post-production. Jonathan Alvord, VFX supervised from 6,000 miles away, trusting me to get all the correct plates and walked me through the process with Tom and his camera team ahead of time. We mixed and sound designed the film with Chris Smith in Santa Monica. If there is one truism I'll take from film school, it's that *sound is over half of your movie*. Chris' work paired with Christof Unterberger's breathtaking score elevated our film to new heights. Mitch Martin's editing was phenomenal, as was Jake Keller's grading. All of that fused to ensure that the production value was anything but a "student film".

"*The ARK*" premiered at the LA Shorts Film Festival this summer. Nightpiece in Edinburgh will follow in the fall. We hope more festivals will follow in 2021. 🍷

Benjamin South is a writer, director and producer based in Los Angeles, California. He graduated from New York Film Academy, Los Angeles, and currently works at Electric Entertainment. In 2021, Ben landed himself a spot in the Lionsgate mentorship program, along with directing Michael Cimino's debut music video, "Love Addict". His latest short film, "*The ARK*", made its world premiere at the OSCAR qualifying, LA Shorts in July 2021.

Caroline South (left) and Shaq B. Grant (right) on the rooftops of Guildford.



Editing at Met Production (Ealing Studios, London).

Post-Production Tips & Tricks for a Director

By Marco Schleicher, MA

The post-production stage is a highly important stage of filmmaking, and I have the feeling that it is still underestimated by some young filmmakers. In my opinion, you should plan the post-production right from the beginning of your project and budget enough money for it. It is also necessary to set clear deadlines. I recommend working with people that you know and whom you can trust.

In general, it is good to get the post-production crew on board as early as possible. The editor, the composer, the sound mixer, the color grader, etc., should know the project right from the beginning. Andy Serkis, who supported

my MA research project, said that even VFX companies should be brought on board as early as possible. It is also good to put the post-production crew in contact before they start to work on your project, so that they know what they need from each other (especially which file formats).

In this article, I want to share some experiences I've made during the post-production of my MA graduation film, *"The Talent Agent"*.

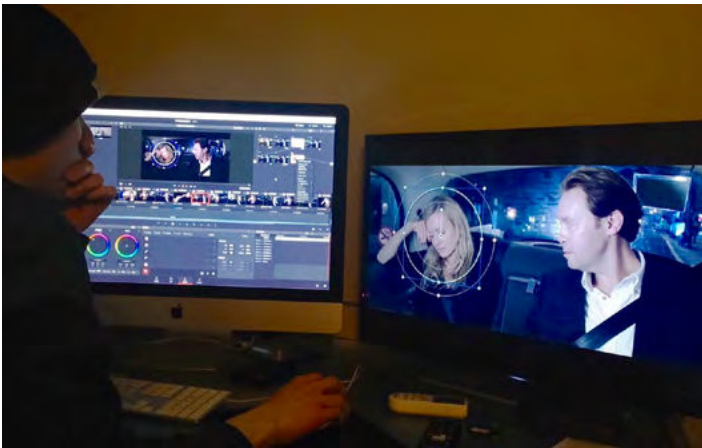
Resolution: 4K

If you shoot your film in 4K, you have to deal with way bigger files in post-production. Even on set you

need a good and reliable DIT (digital imaging technician) since you have to change the CF cards more often and it takes longer to save the material on multiple hard drives. Since 4K files are normally too big to edit, you have to create compressed files ("proxies") and edit with them. In the end of the post-production, you exchange the proxies with the original files.

We edited my MA film at Met Production, a production company based at Ealing Studios, London (the oldest continuously working film studio in the world). I had a technician there who checked the files and then compressed them. Even we had some

POST-PRODUCTION



Editing at Met Production (Ealing Studios, London).



Goldcrest Sound Studio (Soho, London).

powerful computers at Met Production, it took a few days to create the proxies. So, if you shoot in 4K, you need to calculate a bit more time for the setup of your post-production.

Editing

I worked with a great editor from Latvia on my MA film. I gave her my storyboard, all the notes from the continuity person, and I wrote down which takes I prefer. I think especially my storyboard was quite helpful for the editor, since I storyboard the shots in the order we see them in the film. Like my former professor Michael Haneke, I already try to edit the entire film inside my head in pre-production.

However, it is good if the editor does the assembly cut alone, since he or she has a fresh look on the material. There is a danger that some directors want to keep shots, just because it was a lot of effort on set to get them. Even if the editor sticks close to your storyboard, he or she might have good ideas, especially for fast sequences. I remember that it was exciting, when my producer and I came in and watched the assembly cut for the first time.

In general, it is good to cut on movement and to make sure that each shot has a beginning and an end. Timing is very important to me and that the speed of the film changes at certain points. To create a smooth montage, you shouldn't cut too similar shots

together. For example, you can cut from a close-up to a medium shot of the same person, but you shouldn't cut from a close-up to a medium close-up.

There is also a slight difference between editing German and English dialog. Due to the syntax, in German, the most important words usually come at the end of the sentence. Therefore, you have to wait until the end of a line before you can cut to show the other person's reaction. In English, the most important words normally come earlier, so you can cut quicker to the reaction.

I'm a big fan of slightly reframing the shots in post-production. Therefore, you have to shoot everything a bit looser and then work with a letterbox (black bars) in post-production. It is important to discuss the exact aspect ratio with your producer and your director of photography in pre-production. On set, you need lines which mark the black bars on your monitor to compose the shots for the right format.

Color Grading

Three MA cinematography students worked on the color grade of my MA film. One did the basic grade, one worked on the details, and one took care of the noise reduction (since the film mainly takes place at night).

There are so many possibilities in color grading. Therefore, it is important to focus on the main things first before

you start to work on the details. In my opinion, you shouldn't fight too much against the light, especially when you have to deal with limited capacities and time. Get the lighting right on set and decide in pre-production if you want to light the scenes with warm or cold light.

For the trailer, you can grade a bit bolder. It is also good to slightly adjust the grade of all shots in the trailer, so that they really fit together. You can also push one color to create an atmosphere quickly. For the trailer of my MA film, we pushed the color blue to create the feeling of a cold and economic world.

Composer

I worked with a great young composer from Vienna on this project, who has worked for me before. First, I have sent him my temp tracks. Temp tracks are good for the composer to see which style of music you want for the film. The composer should get inspired by the temp tracks, but he or she shouldn't copy them. For my MA film, I wanted some electro music which sounds like a thriller and creates a universal feeling.

If you and your composer live in different places, it is good to meet when you mix the instruments. In case you use some pre-existing music, it might be expensive, and you have to make sure that it fits to the dimension of your film.



Marco Schleicher and composer, Flying Hawkeye(left) at the Festival de Cannes.

My composer is also very good for trailer music. The music for trailers is a bit different than the score for films, since it needs to be even catchier, and it has to be on point much faster. The trailer music can also refer to the main theme of the film score.

Sound Mixing

I worked with a young sound mixer from Goldcrest on my MA film. Goldcrest is one of the biggest post-production companies in the UK. We mixed my MA film in a large sound studio in Central London. Normally, films like “James Bond” and “Murder on the Orient Express” are mixed there.

The sound mixer and I really went into details, and it is amazing how much you can tell with sound. You can create and expand spaces and guide the audience’s attention with good sound design.

If you mix your film in such a big sound studio, you have to keep in mind that most likely you won’t ever hear it in that quality again. Therefore, you should be careful not to mix things too quietly. The sound mixer also made a mix of my MA film for TV. For TV as well as for mobile devices, you have to mix all sounds on a more similar level.

Promotion

I worked with a young designer on this project. She created the poster and helped me with the promotion for the film. In general, it is good to keep the same colors and font for all promotion pictures and clips, so that they are recognizable and have a common look.

In my opinion, the poster should give you an idea for the tone of the film and the genre. If you can get a well-known actor/actress for your project, the poster should feature him or her. For my MA film, we decided to focus on the two leading actors (Christian McKay and Stephanie Vogt). We also wanted the promotion material to represent the cold atmosphere of the film, since it is about the dark side of show business.

You can also put a question on the poster to give some hints about the story or the theme of your film. On the poster of my MA film, we’ve put the question: “How far would you go for success?”

Release

At the end of my MA program, all our graduation films were screened at the VUE Cinema, Leicester Square, London. It was great to see our films at a big West End cinema, and I was happy that my film was chosen as the opening film.

If you introduce your film at a cinema, it is good to give some hints about the topic and what interested you about it. In my opinion, you shouldn’t tell too much about the story, so that the audience isn’t ahead of the game.

Next, my film became part of the Short Film Corner at the Festival de Cannes. It was great to be part of such a big festival and to meet many people from all around the world there. For me, every day in Cannes felt like three days. You attend lots of screenings, you join workshops and masterclasses, and you go to parties in the evening.

At large festivals, it is useful to have flyers to promote your film. It is also good to know what you want to learn more about. I wanted to learn more about funding and distribution in Cannes, so I’ve talked to many representatives from different countries and to sales agents at the festival market.

Conclusion

I want to thank the post-production crew of my MA film: Rūta Sile(editor), Andrei Lionachescu, Aljoša Zovko, Sebastian Benalcazar (color graders), Flying Hawkeye (composer), Finlay Reid (sound mixer), James Harding (technical support), and Juliana Matsubara (promotion).

I think it is important to plan the post-production right from the beginning and to get the people for it involved as early as possible. It is necessary to set clear deadlines and to budget enough money for it. I like to have a precise plan, but I try to stay open to new ideas at the same time. I hope my article was helpful to you. Enjoy this phase where all elements of your film finally come together! ➔

Marco Schleicher is an Austrian filmmaker and a former student from Michael Haneke. In London, he completed his MA in Directing. Besides writing and directing his own projects, Marco works in the Assistant Director and Casting department. He worked on Blockbuster movies, including “Terminator” and “Hellboy”, as well as on TV series for Netflix and Amazon. Further information can be found on his website, www.marco-schleicher.at.

A Lesson from Michael Bay

By David Worth, MA

Most critics and filmmakers find Michael Bay's over-the-top directing style too flamboyant for feature films and more suitable for the small-screen, audience-grabbing, 60-second commercials.

That being said, I've found some of Mr. Bay's films both entertaining and emotionally rewarding. One of my personal favorites is *The Rock*, starring Nick Cage and Sean Connery. And on one of my viewings of that film, I made an amazing discovery and learned an important filmmaking lesson from Mr. Bay. It was during the Hummer vs. Ferrari chase.

As I was watching it for the fourth or tenth time, something caught my eye. I quickly paused my DVD to analyze what I thought I'd seen... *Yes!* There it was! In one of the close ups of Sean Connery, I could see an out of focus building out the rear window, and I spotted it reoccurring several more times during the chase!

That meant that Michael Bay, the mega-million-dollar movie director was utilizing one of the oldest, time and money-saving tricks in the book. **The Poor Man's Process:** shooting the close ups of the actors for a chase scene, while their vehicles are sitting by the side of the road!

I was astounded that Mr. Bay, with all the money that was lavished on his productions, would still utilize this simple, cost-effective technique. And, *how had he been able to fool me with it for so long?* That question led me to a careful analysis of the chase scene in *The Rock*, and then, to *list* exactly what Mr. Bay had done to trick us into accepting this low budget technique so seamlessly.



David Worth

First: He had done his usual flamboyant 2nd unit with vehicles flipping and flying in all directions, this one even included a San Francisco cable car.

Second: He had also captured shots inside both Mr. Cage's Ferrari and Mr. Connery's Hummer, from the passenger seat, showing them actually driving through the San Francisco streets.

Third: For the all-important close ups, their vehicles were stationary. This way, they did not have to worry about driving, or being towed and having to wait to get back to the beginning of the shot to do their acting.

Here are Michael Bay's Foolproof, Poor Man's Process Techniques:

1. **Frame the Actor's Close Up** directly from the front and from a low angle against the roof of the vehicle so as *not to see* anything outside.
2. **Have Several Grips Moving the Stationary Vehicle** by jostling it up and down, and from side to side.

3. **Have Additional Grips Use Hand-Held Mirrors** on both sides of the vehicle, moving from front to back, flashing daylight past the actor's face... (If you're doing a chase at night, the gaffers and grips can utilize small, hand-held lights with various colored gels moving those lights from front to back, past the actor's face.)

4. **Most Important: Camera and Zoom Lens Movement.**

- (A.) **Jerk the camera** up and down, and from side to side, like you're trying to hold the actor's close up from a fast-moving camera car.
- (B.) **Move the zoom lens** radically IN and OUT from a CU (Close Up) to an ECU (Extreme Close Up) as much as possible.

Now, can you grasp the huge amount of **movement** that has been created in every close up?

1. The Vehicle is *moving*.
2. The Lighting is *moving*.

Safety on Set

By JC Cummings

3. The Camera is *moving*.
4. The Zoom Lens is *moving*.

That close up is so amazingly busy, that it can be edited into absolutely any 2nd unit chase!

Try it for yourself. Then, whenever you utilize this outstanding actor-friendly and production-friendly, time and money-saving technique, always be sure to whisper a silent, “Thank you...”

To Michael Bay... 🐉

David Worth has a resume of over forty feature films as a Cinematographer or, Director of Photography (DP) and Director, including two as the DP for the iconic Director Clint Eastwood: BRONCO BILLY & ANY WHICH WAY YOU CAN. He was also DP on the original BLOODSPORT, before he directed the original KICKBOXER, launching the career of Jean-Claude Van Damme. DW has taught Filmmaking at Chapman University, USC, Chapman's New Campus in Singapore, as well as at his Alma Mater UCLA, and from 2011 to the present at The Academy of Art University in San Francisco. His three textbooks, including the latest pricy coffee table version of *MILESTONES IN CINEMA, 50 Visionary Films & Filmmakers*, are available at www.amazon.com. His entire body of work can be found at: IMDb: “David Worth Kickboxer” or, on his website at www.davidworthfilm.com.

Finally, we can get back to work!

I was reading through the recently published production guides, regarding new rules we'll all experience as we get back to the sets. From attitudes, operations and set procedure – **Filmmakers**, will be facing new challenges I've would have never considered.

Example: On any “stunt day,” we would always have a medic or emergency crew on standby near the set, should an unforeseen incident occur. But now, we need medical personnel at the door greeting us before we ever get to set. Of course, we want to be safe... We can't afford to spread any type of virus around... We need to make pictures! As **Independent Filmmakers**, we'll have to follow the same rules as all the ‘big studios’ are required to do. For independents, it will be a bit harder. We'll need to increase “Ye ‘ole budget” reflecting the new health procedures on the set while organizing the way testing will flow dealing with additional time.

I approached the issue from two sides, i.e., hard cost, cost associated with liability or additional insurance coverage and the more humanitarian, healthy and productive suggestion was safety. Hands down safety is most important an absolute priority for the entire team and crew. A healthy crew and on-set teams can get the production finished on time and on budget, with a healthy team.



The new procedures will be around for a while, so get to know them. Check out the free production procedure guides from your favorite guild or union (if you haven't already). Another tip I've learned, when hiring medical personnel, check out their credentials. Recently, I found out while bidding new projects some insurance companies and/or your investor may require additional clauses and/or skills from the *medical staff*.

Disinfect the set often (at least for the next few months), keep masks around just in case people feel they would like one, and hand sanitizer at the exits. We as producers must produce.

...Now let's get back on set! 🐉

www.motionpicturecompany.com

A Conversation with Craig Wrobleski csc

Creating Characters, Ambiances and Emotion with Light

In more than 30 years behind the camera, **Craig Wrobleski csc** has had the opportunity to photograph projects of most every description. After getting his start as a cinematographer shooting documentaries, sports and corporate films, Craig transitioned into music video and commercial work before taking on Second Unit Director of Photography duties on features and television movies. The next step in his evolution was to take on the main unit Director of Photography role on feature films, TV movies and, most recently, television series.

Craig's credits include two seasons of the acclaimed FX series, *Fargo*, *Season One of Legion for FX*, the 10-part event series of *The X-Files*, *The Twilight Zone* limited series, two seasons of the hit Netflix series, *Umbrella Academy*, and an episode of the groundbreaking Amazon series, *Tales from the Loop*. His feature film credits include *The Unholy* for Sony/Screen Gems and *In the Tall Grass* for Netflix - based on a Stephen King short story.

Craig is the recipient of two CSC Awards in addition to his 16 Alberta Film and Television Award wins. He has also been nominated six times at the CSC Awards and his "*Blurryman*" episode of

Twilight Zone received an ASC Award nomination in 2020.

Your work on *The Twilight Zone*, Season 1, Episode 10, "Blurryman," starring Zazie Beetz, Seth Rogen, and Betty Gabriel, was nominated in 2020 for an ASC Award in Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography. Can you tell us about the lighting for this episode, and how you used visual storytelling techniques to explore the characters, create mood, and build emotion into scenes? What are some examples?

Craig Wrobleski csc: The lighting and camerawork for "Blurryman" was intended to follow the same trajectory as Zazie's character, Sophie's, descent into paranoia, confusion and apparent insanity. Early in the episode, we wanted to create as natural an environment as possible, and we had a great time creating the backstage world of a film set with all of its random light sources and organized chaos. As Sophie's world starts to shift under her feet, the lighting and camerawork shift into a more surreal and heightened feel as she travels through this strange new world - the lighting becomes more expressionistic, and the camerawork shifts from an objective perspective to a



combination of subjective and objective lensing.

We wanted to create the feeling that the familiar environments around her were becoming a horror movie that she was being forced to live in. She is in constant motion throughout the episode, and we enjoyed creating these increasingly strange spaces for her journey.

Camera movement was another powerful tool we used with the handheld camera switching gears from a documentary style to becoming more



Zazie Beetz in "The Twilight Zone" episode, 'Blurryman'.

frenetic - echoing Sophie's mindset as she is pursued by the Blurryman.

We also decided that the Blurryman could control the light sources around him as another way to unnerve Sophie, and we enjoyed creating the light cues you see throughout the episode.

All of the techniques mentioned above culminated in the episode shifting to black and white in one shot that rotates around Sophie as the set empties out and transforms while the colour slowly bleeds out of the image until it is just a monochrome image. The set transformation was all done practically through a motorized set wall that could be dropped in to close off the set, actors scattering off-set on cue and an army of off-camera crew clearing and re-dressing the set just in time for the rotating camera to bring it back into view. Bleeding the colour out of the image was accomplished by our brilliant

colourist, Pankaj Bajpai, who did so slowly and selectively, colour by colour, until the last remaining colour was red which then also disappeared.

The Blurryman was an element we wanted to be practical as much as possible so we could keep him feeling real as a presence and not relying overly on visual effects. To this end, we dressed the Blurryman in a black velvet suit, so he absorbed as much light as possible so that he seemed to be defying the laws of physics as he moved through set - remaining a mystery to Sophie and the audience. We would have loved to have made his suit out of Vantablack but that proved a bit too costly. VFX stepped in when necessary to blur out the Blurryman, and we had many discussions about that effect not feeling like an electronic effect but more like an optical effect echoing how objects appear when out of focus.

In the Tall Grass was nominated in 2020 for a CSC Award in the non-theatrical feature cinematography category. Can you talk a little bit about lighting for mood, and how you created different characters and ambiances with light for particular scenes? How did you light the characters and scenes?

Craig Wrobleski csc: *In the Tall Grass* was challenging in that we shot the field as a real environment and were at the mercy of weather and natural light for the day scenes. Luckily, both cooperated, and we had a very successful shoot outdoors. Being able to move that camera through the narrow passageways made the field feel alive and oppressive - surrounding and sometimes overwhelming our characters. We shot on the Alexa LF camera and the wider field of view provided by the larger sensor, along with the 2.39 aspect ratio, played



an important role in capturing the immersive quality we were looking for.

To add to the sense of disorientation, we planned and staged most of the exterior portion of the film to play in backlight, so the viewer was never aware of direction - in tune with the sense of being lost that the characters were experiencing. We wanted to feel there was a timeless quality to what was happening in the field, with day sliding into night and back into day again without any real sense of what time it is.

For the night scenes, we shot the grass field on a soundstage but essentially transplanted a portion of the field into the studio. This gave us more control over the lighting and took weather and bugs out of the mix, somewhat reducing the already substantial discomfort the cast and crew were experiencing on this very tough shoot.

The moonlight look for the night scenes had a heightened quality - much like what a full moon feels like when your eyes have adjusted and there is no other light source around. The grass environment was very difficult to light

but our lighting and grip team created ingenious solutions to put beautiful soft moonlight into the environment. I live in the country and sent our director, Vincenzo Natali, an iPhone image of a full moon night that was bright enough to be captured by an iPhone and that became one of the jumping off points for our conversations about the night look.

I loved the way the blades of grass reflected large soft light sources and we test many LUT, light source and gel combinations until we found the one that felt right. Our fantastic gaffer, Bob Davidson, suggested we shoot gelled tungsten light for our moonlight, and he was so right. The beautiful quality of the tungsten light combined with our gel, LUT and filter combination created a pearlescent quality to the moonlight that I had been seeking for years. The sweat treatment the make-up team applied to the characters also reflected our moonlight beautifully. As with the day scenes, we wanted the moonlight to add to the sense of disorientation, and we worked hard to create pockets of darkness while still lighting in such

a way that accentuated the depth and layers of the field. The director, Vincenzo and I had many discussions about darkness and exactly, “*How dark is dark?*” He was adamant that we create mood but never wanted the darkness to obscure the story unless that was our intent. Much of the film takes place at night, and we had to be constantly vigilant that the look wasn’t getting in the way of the storytelling.

How do you light dark scenes as it pertains to creating and filming dark, horror film style ambiances? What are ways to light a scene so that it feels dark? Can you give some examples?

Craig Wroblewski csc: The question, “*How dark is dark?*” is one of the most common questions when projects are being prepped and also one of the most difficult to answer. The best way to answer the question is to test looks and treatments to create a common language everyone can understand that explains how dark the dark will be. Digital cameras are certainly liberating in the pursuit of creating darkness in that the “*what you see is what you get*”



Scenes from "In the Tall Grass".



Vincenzo Natali directs supernatural horror drama film, "In the Tall Grass", based on the story by Stephen King and Joe Hill.

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aspect of the medium allows us to push boundaries, and everyone with a properly calibrated monitor can get a sense of what the final image will look like.

It is important when creating darkness that you are also protecting your digital negative so that when you get into the grading suite you have a robust image that, while dark, still has enough information in the lower end of the curve to keep your shadows clean and free of digital noise. One technique is to shoot at a lower ISO than you normally would [for example, 400 instead of 800] to feed the sensor while still retaining the look you desire on the monitor. Your waveform monitor, false colour and histogram information can help guide you to ensure you are protecting your negative. This was a technique our DIT on *In the Tall Grass*, Gautam Pinto, used to create effects to deliver a pristine negative to Deluxe that made the final grade significantly easier. One side effect of shooting on a lower ISO is that the set can feel substantially brighter than one might feel it should be, but that concern can generally be put to rest by sharing the monitor images to explain how the image is being processed to create the desired effect.

Once those technical realities are put into place, the lighting itself largely revolves around the classic horror film lighting techniques of concealing certain elements and revealing others using light and shadow. Horror film lighting opens up many techniques and styles that might seem out of place in other genres of filmmaking. It frees you up to be very expressionistic and bold in your choices. It is a lot of fun. *The Unholy* is an example of a film that afforded us opportunities to make

Vincenzo Natali directs supernatural horror drama film, "In the Tall Grass", based on the story by Stephen King and Joe Hill.

unconventional choices when we wanted the narrative to shift into the supernatural.

What are your *Top 3 Lighting Tips* for students and new filmmakers?

Craig Wroblewski csc: That's a good question. It's difficult to narrow it down to three, but here we go.

1. Consider all the tools at your disposal. Filmmaking is a diverse and infinite art form, and there are many choices to be made when putting a film together. It is important to consider all the options and experiment with new tools and techniques to find the right ones for the project. There is a risk of doing "that thing you do" and having the work all start to look the same. Bringing fresh eyes to every project and finding the best way to tell the story is so important. That applies to the choice of lighting instruments, cameras, lenses, filters, gels, dollies, gimbals, cranes and every other aspect of image creation. And remember - what you choose *not to do* is as important as what you choose to do.

2. Be aware of the seduction of beauty. The technical quality of the tools we are able to use these days make it comparatively easy to create beautiful images. The risk is that the images are beautiful but have no soul. There is nothing sublime beneath the beauty. I see a lot of photography that is beautiful, moody and dramatic but doesn't fulfill its purpose of serving the story. The camera is such a powerful instrument and when any specific technique is used all the time, it loses some of its power as a storytelling tool. Sometimes images need to be bright, sometimes they need to be dark, sometimes they need to be imperfect and rough, sometimes they need to be smooth and sleek, sometimes they need to be "ugly" and, yes, sometimes they need to be beautiful. I see a trend toward cinematography that is more photographic than cinematic - shallow depth of field, portrait style soft lighting, etc. I fear the art and possibilities of lighting is being lost in the pursuit of beautiful, dramatic, eye-catching images. Learn how to use the tools of lighting and how infinitely flexible those tools are to create myriad looks that can tell your story.

3. Find your own voice. When you are starting out, mentors and influences are invaluable, but those resources should only be used to assist you in finding your own voice as a storyteller. If you only seek to emulate others' work, you will be an impersonator, and the work will never have the

personal touch that the audience will feel and respond to. Shooting is the only way to find your voice - putting your ego aside, sticking your neck out, making mistakes and learning from them. It is a process that will last your entire career. This is not a job we get good at; we just get better. Putting all of yourself and who you are into your work enables you to work from a place of instinct and heart and is one of the most fulfilling aspects of the job, in my experience. ➔

www.craigwroblewski.com

Exclusive interview conducted by **Jody Michelle Solis**, Associate Publisher for *StudentFilmmakers Magazine*, *HD Pro Guide Magazine* and *Sports Video Tech Magazine*.

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BE BOLD

in unconventional visual ways

A Conversation with **Kenneth Zunder, ASC**

Since earning his first cinematographer credit on the television series *thirtysomething*, Kenneth Zunder, ASC has worked on many features, television movies, and series such as *Brooklyn Bridge*, *seaQuest*, *Chicago Hope*, *Lois and Clark*, *Judging Amy*, *The Starter Wife*, *The Closer* and *Major Crimes*. He has also sampled runaway catering on two series and several features in rebate states across the country and Canada. He worked his way up through the camera ranks on such varied television projects as *Wonder Woman* and *Lou Grant*, and such theatricals as *Rocky* and *Rain Man*. Along the way, he received six ASC and Primetime Emmy nominations. He credits his studies in Art History and his experience in documentary films with helping to shape his cinematography style. He has served two terms as Cinematography Governor of the Television Academy. He is also a member of the Directors Guild of America, The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and The American Society of Cinematographers where he served as an alternate on the Board of Governors. He is currently an Adjunct Professor of Cinematography at University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts and loves making woodworking projects with the Grandkids.



In this exclusive interview, Kenneth Zunder, ASC talks about his work on *thirtysomething* and *The Closer*. He talks about working with ensemble casts and the differences between workflows when shooting features versus episodic television. Ken also shares his advice and insights for student filmmakers around the world.

You are the cinematographer of iconic television series spanning over three decades, television shows that helped reflect and shape society in each era. Looking back at a groundbreaking

'80s series like *thirtysomething* and a slick modern crime set like *THE CLOSER*, did fashion, music and production teams influence your cinematography? When collaborating with a director, how do you like to discuss aesthetics and styling cues of a specific project? Can you discuss certain looks you were striving for? How has your visual style changed or stayed the same?

Kenneth Zunder, ASC: I moved up to Director of Photography on *thirtysomething*, which was a unique

groundbreaking show at the time. The producers, Ed Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz, didn't want it to look like your typical television show. It started with the directors they hired. Most had experience in Theater, Independent Feature Films, Commercials or were writers and actors. It was an extremely collaborative effort in deciding how to tell the story in a non-conventional visual way.

That style was evidenced in the staging and the lighting. We didn't subscribe to the standard blocking of the day. There was no preconceived notion of a master and coverage. We did an unusual, for the time, amount of "oners." The actors were free to move about as their characters saw fit.

The director and I would, then, determine what part of the action was "telling the story" and figure out how to present that to the audience. It wasn't important that the person talking always be in frame. *Who did we want the audience to see at any given time, and how did we want the audience to feel about the characters and the scene?*

The lighting was very naturalistic. We abandoned the notion of backlights for interiors and went with large single soft directional sources. This was quite a departure at the time. I remember getting in trouble with one of the actresses at the time, when I mentioned in an article that we didn't want our actresses to look glamorous.

The goal of the camerawork was to always reflect the intent of the scene. We were trying to tell the story in camera as much as possible. It was an ensemble show in which actors flowed in and out of each other's shots captured by a constantly moving camera. We did 7 to 8 pages a day but often, because of our oners, only needed maybe 15 setups. Our oners involved complicated

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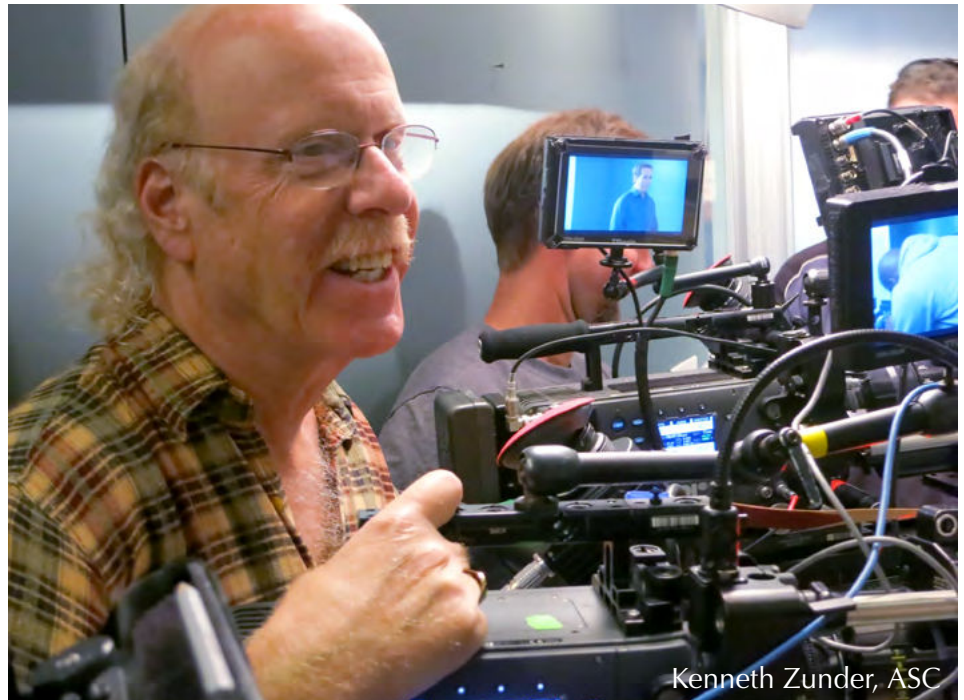
choreography that required rehearsals and often took 5 to 10 takes to get the acting and the camera just right and give the editors a choice of takes in post. We shot on film and had maybe 30 to 40 minutes of dailies.

Do you specifically look for projects with ensemble casts? Is that something you particularly enjoy? Are there any challenges with a large cast?

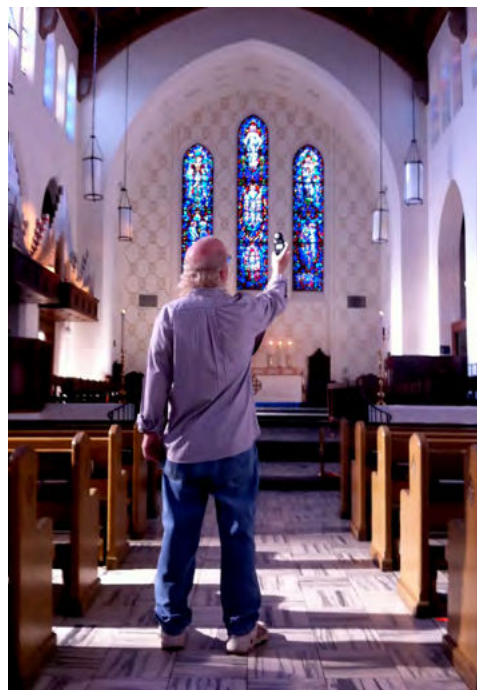
Kenneth Zunder, ASC: Today we shoot digitally and maybe have 4 hours of dailies. A show like *THE CLOSER/MAJOR CRIMES*, was an ensemble show that had a very fast paced editorial feel. The average shot lasted 2.1 seconds on screen. We often did multiple masters and a variety of coverage from many angles on scenes that often had 6 to 9 principals with dialogue. The cameras were very active, following dialogue from actor to actor, panning off for a reaction and “tagging” actions and objects that helped tell the story. Whereas *thirtysomething* was a single camera show, *THE CLOSER* almost always had 2 to 3 cameras covering the action and the actors. Instead of 15 setups a day, we had 15 setups per scene resulting in 60 or so setups a day. Each take was often different in that the cameras were often picking out different elements of the story. Because each take from each camera was different, there was always something worth printing resulting in the 4 plus hours of dailies.

Could you talk about the differences in your workflow when you're shooting features versus episodic television?

Kenneth Zunder, ASC: *What is the writer trying to convey, and what is the director's take on presenting it to the audience?* Once I get a picture of the forest, I can start picking out the trees. I like to get a feel for the director's aesthetic so I can present them with choices, all of which I think they'll like, all of which work for the story, all of which I think are appropriate for the show, and all of which are doable in terms of making our day. While the



Kenneth Zunder, ASC



Behind the scenes production stills from Kenneth Zunder, ASC's amazing body of work.



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director is the one making the decisions, I am also mindful of the fact that I'm working for the producers as well.

If you could share your advice and insights for student filmmakers around the world, what are *three important things* that you would share?

Kenneth Zunder, ASC: My biggest recommendation for students, is to **think like you're shooting film while being bold because you're shooting digitally.** What I mean by that is in the days of film, we were always told "a dollar a foot". Film is expensive. The more prep time you spend with the director, the more time you have on set to refine your choices. Think before you turn the camera on. Make sure you are shooting what you want. *Is the camera exactly where you want it? Is the quality and placement of the lights giving the right mood and feel? Do the crew members need a rehearsal? Are make-up, hair, and wardrobe ready? Are there any microphone shadows in the shot?* There is a long list of elements that result in a great take. You don't want the actor to give a terrific performance that won't make it into the show, because of a technical or aesthetic reason that could have been avoided with a little more prep and careful planning.

High quality digital monitors let the DP take chances and see if they're on the right track. In the days of film, I used to think I did my best work when I lost sleep because I didn't know till dailies if I made the right choice. Now, in the days of WYSIWYG, you can try things and sleep well at night. Be bold. Take a chance. It's OK to have a point of view.

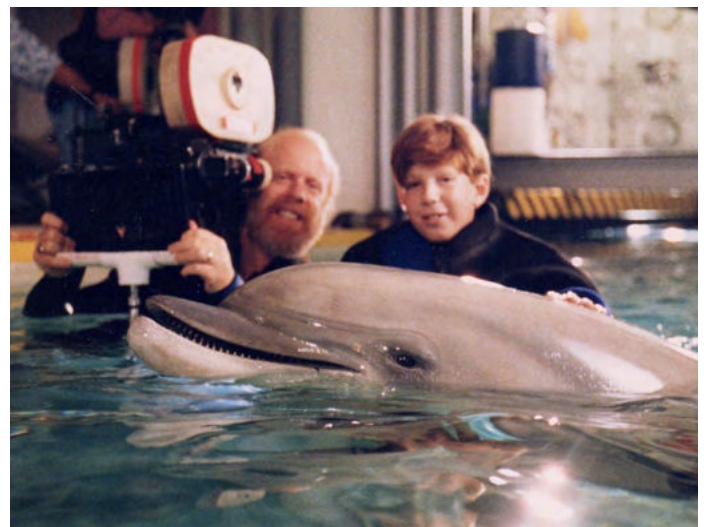
Another piece of advice for students is, **don't think about making a great movie, think about having a great career.** It's possible to do great work, but to have a great career, people need to want to work with you. It's about character, relationships and communication. Be respectful of everyone's job, and you'll be amazed at how much better it makes yours. 🍷

Exclusive interview conducted by Johnny Lee Solis, NJ/NY based musician, composer and writer.

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Behind the scenes production stills from Kenneth Zunder, ASC's amazing body of work.



A Conversation with Tony Westman csc

Exclusive interview conducted by Jody Michelle Solis



Tony Westman csc has been making films and taking photographs for over forty years both as Director and Director of Photography. His film projects include drama, documentaries, television, features and corporate productions made on film and high-definition video. His roster of clients include Castle Rock, Warner Brothers, 20th Century Fox, NBC, ABC, CBS, CBC, and National Film Board of Canada. Film projects have provided a rich exposure to diverse locations and peoples, from the Canadian Arctic, deserts of Egypt, jungles of Peru, China, Japan, Australia and the South Seas.

Recipient of two Canada Council grants, one for film and one for still photography, he has had numerous photographic exhibitions in Vancouver and Montreal. His photographs are in collections of the National Gallery of Canada, National Film Board and private collections. His film awards include Canadian Society of Cinematographers, Yorkton Film Festival, Leo Awards, and O Globo Awards of Rio de Janeiro. He photographed the 1985 Academy Award nominated documentary, *"Children of Soon Ching Ling"*.

"Air India 182", Directed by Sturla Gunnarsson, CBC.
Tony Westman, DoP.



“The daunting task is not to imitate the great works of cinema, but to advance the traditions in imaginative ways.”



Your career as a Director of Photography and Director embraces a rich body of work that includes still photography, television, and film. What are some of the differences between filming styles for feature films, TV movies, episodics, and documentaries?

Tony Westman csc: Regarding questions of style, so much of what you see on the big or small screen are prescribed by story, budget and visual language. As filmmaking is such a team effort on an industrial scale, you quickly realize the necessity of a skill set that will engage with the myriad dynamics of production yet still allow for your own creativity that must survive all the pressures, conflicts and compromises that somehow combine to make a successful film. The key to this is visual imagination with narrative and technical skills combined with an engaging personality. Certainly, a good sense of film history, art history, etc., are important sources of inspiration, but the daunting task is not to imitate the great works of cinema, but to advance the traditions in imaginative ways. Yes, there are continuing advancements in technologies of capture, but the real challenge is to apply the tools in a way that become invisible as they serve as the glue that binds all the elements that make a motion picture great. As for a career choice, it is like running away to the circus... where I spent over forty years living the dream.

What I enjoy about *still photography* is that I am in control of story, visual language and budget [or the lack of]... Of course, making a living as a commercial enterprise is a whole different adventure... So, I do it for love and preserve this arena as an

enjoyable hobby. You can do anything you want, only limited by your imagination... No pressure...

Documentary filmmaking is a step into the filmmaking labyrinth where it is still possible to be an auteur, that is, of course, if you have passion for the subject, clever storytelling, acute producing skills with a creative, technical skillset and personal bravado for adventure to capture the magic of your idea that will propel your film to fame and fortune. Documentary is a verb, not a noun. It is not a series of interviews but a compelling representation of what is being described by those telling their stories. Confronting reality and finding truth and beauty is one of life's great pleasures. Imagine making a career of it?

As for *feature films*, especially major studio productions that are singularly unique in story, director's vision, style and scope where the idea often determines the budget, in my experience, the biggest challenge as a DP was how to think big enough to fulfill the director's story vision... And to find the confidence to actually achieve or surpass expectations. You can imagine the fun and challenging egos that unfold when every department is thinking like this... Except for the producer who has to find the money.

TV movies want to do the same things as feature films without all the resources. Such productions are a team effort to conspire to envision what is possible within the scope of time and budget. The magic here is how to make the story look big: the plane crash... that happens off camera, the

CINEMATOGRAPHY

"She Stood Alone: The Tailhook Scandal",
TV film, directed by Larry Shaw ABC.
F-16 fighter jet with crew at work.



survivors trudge through the snow in the remote mountains...dodging ski lifts and snowboarders... Yet these modest efforts although different, are but equal to challenges of big budget features: to maximize the dramatic and visual qualities of the story, usually more character-based than sprawling epic in scope, but they must fit into a budget and schedule.

Episodic television series often have feature envy yet without time, money and singularity of purpose but have the advantage of allowing the story and characters to wander over time and space for many years. The big difference to the other forms of production is often episodic story telling made by several layers of producers that attempt to provide the necessary Big Idea complexity needed for longevity in a crowded media marketplace. Usually, a team of writers led by a 'show runner' turn out the weekly scripts and hash out the vast array of story complexity with plot twists and turns, character development, surprises and unresolved threads to keep its audience engaged and advertisers happy, week after

week. I have served as writer, director and DP on series and experienced some of the unique challenges of this genre for storytelling, visualization and production value. The good news is that episodic production is like a big family working together in the movie factory. The hard part of episodic is living up to the aspirations of feature quality often with long hours of production on a weekly basis. From a visual language standpoint, once the 'look' of the show has been established in the Pilot, which is where the real fun is, the next many years of production must maintain that look as the formula, and that sometimes can get rather tedious.

What was one of your most favorite or memorable scenes or segments to light, and why? What was occurring in the story, and how did you light it?

Tony Westman csc: I recall one of the biggest and most complicated scenes to light and choreograph was in the feature film, "Needful Things", based on a Stephen King thriller about the Devil coming to town to cause havoc and gather souls of the victims. It was my

first big budget studio film directed by Fraser Heston [son of Charlton Heston]. Most of the film took place at night in the small seacoast town of Castle Rock [Gibson's Landing] where we spent over a month at night, mostly in the rain on the main street blowing things up. If it was not raining, then we made rain with towers with huge overhead trusses and fire hoses. One of the many challenges was keeping the 'look' consistent night after night with multiple cameras, dollies, steady-cam, techno-crane and multiple lighting cranes to provide the 'night look' in the town with all the action in the streets where we would shoot 360' with a large cast that moved from one location to another, then doing the same action multiple times to do individual coverage, stunts, etc. It always amazed me how much lighting we needed to do to make things look dark and creepy. To maintain the mood with rain, you must always use backlight to make the rain show up. This can be tricky if it is supposed to be dark. This project was in the days of film, when you sent the day's work to the lab in Vancouver, then after a long production



day (night), we would collect in the production office and see the 'dailies' with a 35mm film projected by the editor, and we would brace ourselves for a critique about the qualities of our work... and sometimes a list of things to reshoot due to technical and/or creative issues. On the plus side, as a pressure cooker of challenges, this project forced me to develop effective habits, insight, procedures and management skills that allow me to be a 'creative' member of the production, like a musician playing improv... You feel the 'story moment' and have a mystical visual ability to make it all work, day after day, night after night, week in, week out.

Can you tell us a little bit about your experience filming wildlife?

Tony Westman csc: I have never done wildlife photography, per se, as I don't know much about the animal kingdom...and I don't think I have the patience to sit in a blind waiting for a rare sighting. That being said, one of my first professional documentaries with the National Film Board was a film called, "Beluga Baby," that recorded the

birth and death of a beluga whale at the Vancouver Aquarium. I spent many hours a week for a period of 4 months at the aquarium observing and filming a pregnant beluga in a tank with regular consultation with research scientists, so I learned a lot about the social and biological aspect of beluga whales. To be witness to the whales swimming around the tank was a lesson in detailed, creative observation of an extraordinary life form and live birthing event that revealed some of the mysteries of their existence, and I was able to capture just a small but important fragment. The film was a success, and in the course of my time at the aquarium, I met the woman who became my wife, we are still together after 43 years. The best advice I can offer is to follow your heart... film what excites you... but immerse yourself in all aspects of your subject, do research and ask informed questions... And it is also good to have a scientist as your partner and have a *wild life* together.

What are your Top 3 Directing Tips for new filmmakers?

Tony Westman csc:

- 1. Make your dramatic films** feel real and your documentary films dramatic.
- 2. Filmmaking is both an art form and commercial enterprise.** More importantly, it is dream machine that is sustained by ideas that reflect stories of the human condition that stitch together our diverse populations. The more aware you are of the mysteries of life, love and destiny, the easier it is to surround yourself with like-minded creative souls to make films that will please an audience and be recognized for its contribution to a better society.
- 3. Directing a film is like cooking,** you need the right ingredients [script, cast, crew, locations, budget, etc.], but like good cooking, you need inspiration, talent, tenacity, vision, and finally, you must deliver the culinary/cinematic masterpiece the audience is expecting which must satisfy their wildest expectations and leave them wanting more. →

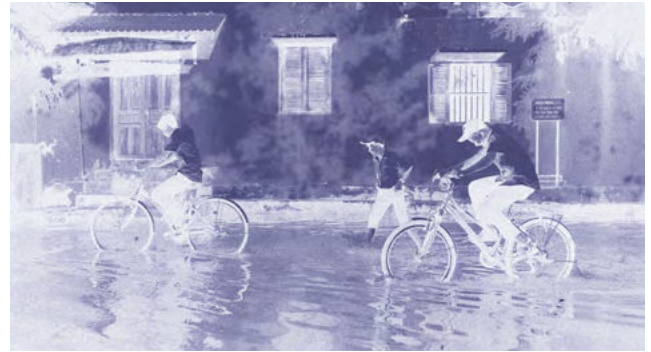
www.tonywestman.com



"The Sentinel: Poachers".
Written and directed by Tony Westman.
Producer, Danny Bilson.
Tony speaks with series star Richard Burgi to prepare for a boat chase scene.

It's Not Going to Be Shot That Way

By Dave Trottier

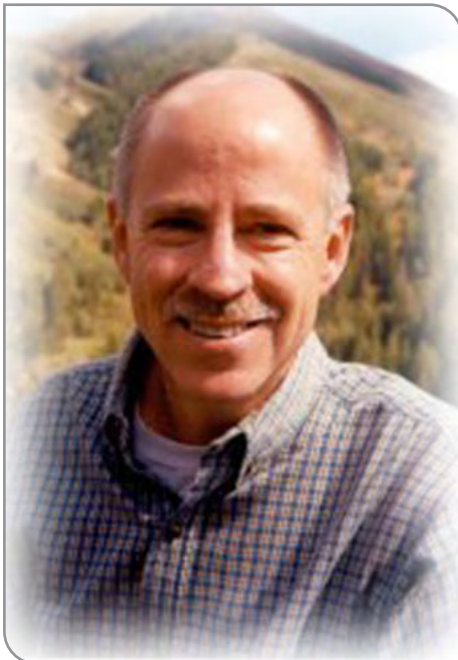


"But Dave, that's the way I want the scene shot!"

I hear this from many screenwriting students and clients. In this case, the scene was loaded with technical directions. The truth is you'll make a better impression on readers and producers if you avoid camera directions and special shots. Only use them if you have an overriding dramatic or comedic purpose for them. But there is another reason:

It's not going to be shot that way.

At least, that's the odds. *Why?* **Here are 6 Reasons:**



1. After your spec script is converted into a shooting script, the production manager or others will try to find locations that fit their budget. The location or set they choose will not likely match exactly what you had in mind, which could result in some changes to the scene.
2. The budget may not allow for certain shots or for many "set-ups" that involve changing camera position and lighting.
3. The director will need to block the scene in accordance with the location or sound stage (and set decoration) he or she is using.
4. Actors may add their two cents.
5. Finally, some dialogue may need to be cut or changed. For example, some lines may need to be added to fill out the scene.
6. Sometimes, what is written on paper doesn't translate to the silver screen. May I give you an example?

The thematic pier scene in *Little Miss Sunshine* was originally written for Dwayne and Frank to float on the ocean to add the symbolism of a baptism (new birth) when a wave crashes over them, but it didn't work when they tried to shoot it that way. In fact, with the waves crashing over them became humorous. Thus, in the movie, the scene takes place on a pier overlooking the ocean. The essence of the scene remains unchanged; it still achieves the purpose the writer intended, but not in the way the writer envisioned.

So... What do you do?

Your goal is to make sure the narrative description and dialogue are written wonderfully so that the scene's purpose, emotion, and thrust are not lost. After all, movie-making is a collaborative effort.

It's true that many movie scenes are shot the way they are written, but in reality, the spec script is not a blueprint for the eventual movie, but a guide to it. Its main purpose is to emotionally involve a reader who can recommend it.

Present enough specific detail in your scene that the reader can "see" the action, "feel" the emotion, and "get" the scene, but don't try to direct the scene with camera directions or through other means which are not acceptable anyway. *And keep writing!* ➔

Dave Trottier, author of seven books including, "The Screenwriter's Bible," has sold or optioned ten screenplays (three produced) and helped hundreds of writers sell their work and break into the biz. He is an award-winning teacher, in-demand script consultant, and friendly host of www.keepwriting.com.

7 Dramatic Techniques Every Writer Must Know and Use Now

By Scott McConnell

If you are not considering using all these devices in your story, then you are not doing your job as a writer. Writing is not just about your story beats. It's also about how you tell your story. If you do use these dramatic devices, and imaginatively, your story will be much more effective and seductive.

1. Conflict

Every scene must have conflict, and these should express the **central conflict** of the story. The main conflict of the story most often is a back-and-forth escalating struggle between Character A and Character B. The other main form of conflict is *internal conflict*, where a character is faced with a high stakes dilemma. "The essence of drama is conflict," is the great truism of storytelling.

2. Suspense

What will happen next? Develop a **main suspense line** based on the big values, goals and problems of your protagonist.

3. Mystery

What does the audience (and most often a character) *not know* that they are *anxious* to learn, and which is important to the story?

4. Deception

The disguise, lie, secret, con or betrayal of a major character *that the audience often knows*, so it enjoys all the consequent irony and humour.

5. Twists

Big surprises that are *shocking but logical* (set up and believable). Often



employed at the *end of sequences/acts* and which send the story into a *new direction*.

6. Dramatic Irony/Superior Position

When the audience knows more than a major character and so sees irony, humour and danger where the character does not.

7. Implication

The sophisticated but powerful technique of implication. Implication (and suggestion) are when a storyteller writes in a subtle way where the explicit meaning is not stated. Instead, the meaning is implied in the words and actions and their context.

Here are two quick examples of *suggestion* (actions) and *implication* (words):

Action:

Consider in "Lawrence of Arabia" where Lawrence extinguishes a burning match with his fingers. The context of the story helps make this dramatic action clearer than any words could: *I'm a little bit mad ("barmy"), and I can take great pain to succeed*. This idea shocks and excites us.

Dialog:

Consider the climax of the 1958 classic film, "Separate Tables". Sybil says to her domineering mother these simple words: "No, Mummy. I'm going to stay here in the dining room and finish my breakfast." Because we know the whole story context leading up to these words, we understand that these words are the very first time Sybil has disagreed with her evil mother, and they are her liberation from her mother. Knowing this context and understanding the meaning in Sybil's words, we feel great emotion.

To make the point explicit: Implication and suggestion *force an audience to work out the exact meaning* of specific words and actions and so the audience is more mentally involved in the story and more emotionally moved by it. 🐾

Scott McConnell is a script editor/consultant. Read more of his work here: www.linkedin.com/in/scottamcconnell. Write to Scott at scottm100@gmail.com.

Spotting Music for Your Project

By Kristen Baum DeBeasi



What is The Music Spotting Session?

With music for film projects, the spotting session is one of the earliest points of contact between the director and composer. It's a time when the director and composer sit down together to go through the project and have a detailed conversation about a variety of considerations, including where music will come in and go out, what it will do, the overall impact on individual scenes and on the arc of story, and the type of score desired. Potentially, this can also include sharing concepts about the score-to-be, including examples of similar scores that the director likes. If there is a temp (temporary) score, there could be a discussion of what's working in it and what's not.

Why is The Spotting Session Crucial?

The spotting session is the time when a mass of information is shared. Oftentimes, this meeting is about much more than where music will be in the film. The director and composer will converse about what role music will play, or what it will seek to accomplish in the storytelling. Because a film composer's primary objective is to serve the story, this session is critical, as it is the time when details of the director's desires about that are conveyed. It serves as the beginning of the collaborative process, and as a result, a lot hinges on the open conversation and discussion of details, hopes and desires for the score.

Some things to keep in mind to include in the discussion:

- Emotional elements of a scene and the supporting role the music will play.
- In some scenes, rather than supporting the emotional aspects of the scene, the music will comment on the on-screen emotions.
- The impact of music. Do you want to start music on the cut or after the cut? Why? What's the result? Is there a jump scare, a gunshot or car accident that music can help by accenting the moment of impact? Can the story benefit by pushes to cuts (where music will crescendo to the cut)? Optimally, all these things will be talked about at the spotting session.
- The size and type of ensemble (or electronic or hybrid score) that will best support the story.

At the spotting session, the director shares specific thoughts and desires for each cue, and the composer asks clarifying questions to foster mutual understanding of what is desired in the score. Reel by reel, the music department (the composer, a music editor, or potentially a composer's assistant) will take detailed notes, including the timecode INs and OUTs for each cue and any notes about the nature of each scene and the style of the music.

Once the spotting session is finished, the composer will have a detailed record (often documented in a program like Cue Chronicle or an Excel spreadsheet) of the director's desires, including total number of minutes of music, the number of cues, and the specific thoughts for individual cues. The composer will use this information as their roadmap for score completion. ➔

Kristen Baum DeBeasi is a Sundance Fellow and LA-based film composer. She works on a broad range of projects, frequently creating hybrid scores that incorporate computer-based sounds with live instruments. Her music is on soundcloud.com/kristen-baum, her website is kristenbaum.com, and her film credits are at imdb.me/kristenbaum.

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Don't Look Down

The Art of Production Sound Mixing

By Fred Ginsburg, CAS, Ph.D.

When you drive a car, do you fixate mainly on the speedometer? Or do you devote most of your attention to watching your surroundings through the windshield?

Recording live dialogue on a set is a similar activity. You are at the helm of sophisticated recording and mixing equipment, but your focus needs to be on what is physically in front of you – namely, the actors and their relationship to each other and to your microphones.

Beginners worry too much about meters and hand positions. Instead of watching how the scene plays out, they lock their gaze on their fingers and all of the little numbers that adorn the myriad meters, faders, and knobs. These novice sound people become oblivious to the world around them.

It is often said that actors rarely do the same thing twice. It is crucial, as a mixer, to be ready to adjust and modify what we did on the last take in order to correct for the changes in timing, performance, and set geography on successive takes.

But if you wait until you hear the changes in your headset, it is too late. You cannot just *react* to the soundtrack; you must *anticipate* what is about to happen.

You have to *watch* the actors! Pay attention to subtle clues in their body language so that you can be poised for whispers or loud outbursts, noises, ad libs, and changes in blocking.

Keep your eyes mainly on the set in front of you. It is okay to quickly glance down at your meters for verification, just as you occasionally dart your eyes to your dashboard while driving. But return your eyes to the set as quickly as possible.

Don't worry about the numbers on your meters. They really are not all that important. Dialogue is fluid; the meter will always be in motion. Your only concern should be that

the meter movement does not get bogged down in the low end (not enough volume) or jammed up at the high end (way too much volume). Keep it within the middle range, hovering close to 0 VU or -20 dB, depending on what scale your meter or recorder uses. Most mixers still use the analog VU scale, where 0 VU represents strong dialogue, and audio distortion begins around +8. Digital audio uses an absolute scale, where 0 dB represents distortion, and -20 dB provides ample headroom for normal dialogue.

Think in terms of photographic light meters. Averaging meters look at 17% gray as the average brightness and allow for an estimate for bright and dark in the composition. A spot meter concerns itself with the bright highlights in the frame since that is the point of overexposure.

VU and dB metering is similar. VU looks at middle gray levels (aka dialogue) and uses that as a center point. Hence, if conversation is -6 VU to 0 VU, then louder sounds can go to +8 VU or so (the increasing distortion is gradual). But the dB scale looks at the point of distortion, which is 0 dB. It wants conversation to be down around -20 dB, so as to allow 20 decibels for louder outbursts without distortion.

Rather than stare blindly at your meters, rely upon your hearing to monitor the recording levels. Learn to calibrate your headphones to the meters.

Although it seems complicated, the process is really very simple. Have someone speak normally into a mic, and

visually set the volume level so that your meter is in the “ballpark”, namely in the -6 VU to 0 VU range on an analog or averaging meter; or hovering close to or slightly below -20 dB on a digital absolute or peak reading meter.

Now adjust your physical headphone listening level so that the dialogue is in the comfy zone in your head. Comfortable listening level, as if you are on your favorite couch enjoying your favorite TV show or streamed movie.

Ignore the little numbers around the headphone volume control; they are meaningless. Close your eyes and just find your comfy zone. That’s all there is to it.

Your physical volume settings for your headphones are going to change throughout the day, so don’t memorize a number on the dial. In the mornings when you are fresh and alert – you will use less volume. As the day wears on, your ears and attention will tire – so more physical volume will be required. Ditto, interior sets will take less headphone volume than noisy exteriors. Your meters will show you the actual recording levels; so just calibrate your headphones to keep your comfy zone synchronized.

Don’t watch your fingers. When you drive, you don’t watch your foot travel from gas to brake.

Due to the differences in actors’ performances and miking, all of your inputs are going to be at different starting levels. If you just used tape and a Sharpie to mark off the fader or knob positions, it would be difficult to rapidly adjust each input during the take.

What you want to do is to slide each fader exactly half-way up the slot (or a comfortable twist for each knob). Then dial in the trim/gain pre-amps for

each input so that your levels are in the “ballpark”. Let the trim/gain controls correct for differences in performance and miking for each input.

When it comes time to actually mix/record the scene, your hand will only have to adjust from the OFF position (faders closed) to the half-way position (open for dialogue). Most of the time, you can just pre-position your hands on the faders that you will need – in the same way that you can rest your hands on a computer keyboard, ready to type.

Your hands and fingers can move up and down without you having to watch them! The only time that you might need to quickly glance down is when you need to move your hand to other faders not adjacent.

With very little practice, you will find that your ears can monitor the levels without the help of your eyes, and that your fingers can slide up and down your

mixing panel on their own. You won’t even have to think about it.

Keep your eyes on the road, so you don’t hit a tree. ➔

Fred Ginsburg, CAS, Ph.D. is a highly experienced and award-winning professional sound mixer (retired) whose decades of work included features, episodic TV series, national TV commercials, corporate, and government. A member of the Cinema Audio Society and the University Film & Video Association, Fred holds doctorate, graduate, and undergraduate degrees in filmmaking; has published more than 250 technical articles along with textbooks, instruction manuals, and hosts an educational website. Fred, recently retired, is professor emeritus at California State University Northridge.





Get Your Student Films Accepted into Festivals Now

By Bart Weiss

10 Things You Can Do to Increase Your Chances of Selection

I am taking a break from watching films for the Dallas VideoFest's Docufest+ and thought I should let you in on some tips on things you can do to better your chances of getting into festivals.

Tip #1. Entering. Before you get in, you have to enter. Almost every festival takes entries through filmfreeway.com. You can and should set up an account like *now*. Next, you upload your film (check to make sure it is the correct version) and give basic info. Have a compelling description and some good pictures from the film. Take this writing seriously. This will be your first impression with a juror.

Tip #2. Select festivals to enter. Your first instinct is to just apply to festivals with no fee. But you should have a festival strategy. *Where do you want your film to premiere? Where have films liked yours done well?* Do some homework. Before entering any fest, go to the festival website and look at the work they like to screen. Be honest with yourself. *Is this a good match? Are there festivals where you know some people there? Are there festivals where someone from your production lives?* If so, in the notes, tell the programmer that if your film gets in, you will have someone there.

Tip #3. Waivers. Every filmmaker wants a waiver, but hey, festivals need to survive as well (*you do want professional people handing your material, right?*). If you just say, *hey, I spent all my money on the film, can you give me a waiver?* I might not give it to you. But if you do one of two things, I might. One look at our festival and see

if a film is somewhat like yours that we showed, and say, *I think you will like our film because* (and fill in something honest, not hype, here). The other, and perhaps you should do both, is to say, *if you give a waiver, I will post on social media that I am excited to send my film to the festival.*

Tip #4. Your film. Let us get back to the film itself. Start strong. In the first few minutes, visually and aurally, make your case, don't just tell me.

Tip #5. Music. In those first few moments and throughout, select your music wisely. You cannot recover from lousy music disease. If I don't like your taste in music, there is not much chance I will appreciate your film. Often student filmmakers wait until the end of the semester to figure out what they will do for music.

Tip #6. Opening sequence. Often, after a montage in the beginning sequence, the music fades out, and the natural sound comes in; it is here that your film lives or dies. It is not hard to make a great opening sequence, but *is your subject as compelling as the intro suggests?* So, find a great nugget at that moment.

Tip #7. The ideal duration of a short film. Make it short. No, make it shorter than that. There are two reasons for this. The first is pure math. There are only so many minutes in a short compilation. If your film is 25 minutes, it is harder to fit in. If it is 10 minutes, I can fit it into more places. If it is 7 minutes, your chances are even better. The other reason is that shorts are usually in a compilation;

(sometimes you can have one before a feature, but they have to be very short). It takes more energy to watch a collection of shorts than a feature, and if yours is near the end, the audience will have less patience.

Tip #8. Credit Sequence. Make your credit sequence shorter. I know you need to thank lots of people. Finishing a great film takes great luck, and many people need to be thanked, but roll them quickly. My suggestion is to have a version with everyone at a slower pace, and show that one time, when all those folks are there, then never show that version again.

Tip #9. Marketing. Have good photos, a poster, and a good trailer. Share these items with the festival staff and PR team.

Tip #10. Be nice. Or conversely, don't be a jerk. The people on the other side of the phone or email are often overworked, and many are volunteers. When a festival

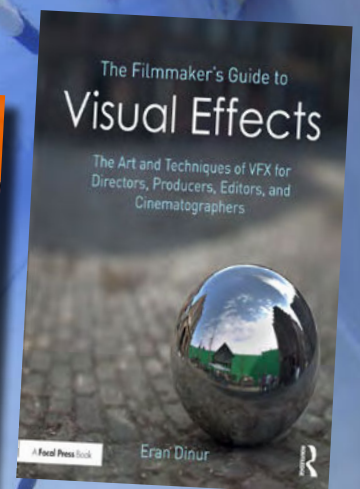
accepts your film, it is like we are welcoming you into our family.

If your film gets into the festival, *go to the festival*. Do whatever it takes to get there. Meet people, go to screenings, promote your screening, and have fun. That experience just might change the trajectory of your career and life. ➔

Bart Weiss is an award-winning filmmaker, educator and director/founder of the Dallas VideoFest and produces "Frame of Mind" on KERA TV. He was President of AIVF and was a video columnist for "The Dallas Morning News" and "United Features Syndicate". Bart received an MFA in Film Directing from Columbia University.

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You can't put a limit on anything.
The more you dream,
the farther you get. — Michael Phelps

So, You've Got Guns in Your Story

Make Smart Choices Around Prop Firearms

By Kevin Inouye

Given my specialties, at least once a year someone forwards me an article about indie filmmakers almost getting someone shot... or sometimes 'not almost.' No story you want to tell is worth the life of a crew member or your talent, so please, take the time to consider how to go about shooting these scenes right. I'm content to use precautionary examples like Brandon Lee, Jon-Erik Hexum, and Johann Ofner, and have no desire for more recent deadly anecdotes.

You should have qualified gun wranglers on set. This isn't just 'someone who knows guns,' but someone who knows specifically about using them on set, about prop options, and how to safely get the shots you need. But I know from those news stories many of you will probably ignore that advice, so for those folks, or people who just want to be able to participate more intelligently in the process, here are some guidelines that might still save a life - and, much less importantly, your production:

1. Always notify locals.

Most of the articles I'm sent involve police almost shooting someone because they don't know it's a set. Even while shooting on private property, if you're publicly visible (or audible, with blanks), there's still risk. Find ways to make it clear you're making a movie, and notify local residents, businesses, and authorities.

2. Learn local laws.

For example, New Jersey defines non-gunpowder guns as still being firearms, requiring a permit, and an actor was arrested in 2016, when an indie production had him waving an airsoft out a car window while driving around. Every state and municipality

has different regulations on both real and fake guns.

3. Use the safest option.

If rubber dummy guns suffice, use those. Often gas blowback airsoft works instead of blank guns. Usually quarter-load blanks in blank revolvers work as well as full-load blanks in real revolvers. Don't load props if they don't need to be loaded. Blanks are not harmless, and live ammo never belongs on set. Plan your shots. Have different options ready. Think carefully about what you really need to see in-camera each take; and explore your options.

4. They aren't toys.

Even if you bought toy guns, they're not toys anymore. Don't let people wave them around for fun, go out back for a smoke break while wearing or carrying one, dry-fire them when waiting around, and everyone, follow basic safety rules unless the shot specifically calls for breaking one or more of them. The whole cast and crew gets a safety briefing. We'll have to break some of the standard rules, because the characters do, but it should always be a carefully considered choice to violate ANY of these:

A.) Assume it's dangerous until proven otherwise. Actors and crew members always have the right to ask and be shown how a prop is going to be safe to use. Check before breaking ANY of the other rules.

B.) Finger off the trigger unless actively pulling it. Directors might want to see fingers on triggers sometimes, but by default, extend that index finger along the frame.

C.) Never point it at something you don't want to shoot. Most of the time,



even if we see both shooter and target in the same frame, you can cheat a bit off to one side or another.

Treat firearm props with respect and have a coordinator/gun wrangler/armorer on set who knows how to choose and handle them. Not only will your set be safer, but your footage will look much better! ➔

Kevin Inouye is a SAG-AFTRA stunt performer and actor, a fight coordinator, and an armorer/gun wrangler through Fight Designer, LLC, which also provides prop weapon rentals. He's Assistant Professor of Movement, Acting, & Stage Combat at Case Western Reserve University, a Certified Teacher and Theatrical Firearms Instructor with the Society of American Fight Directors, and a Certified Teacher with the National Michael Chekhov Association. He offers workshops and training both online and in-person and has two books in print: "The Theatrical Firearms Handbook" (which also covers screen use), and "The Screen Combat Handbook".

www.fightdesigner.com

www.uwyo.edu/thd/faculty-and-staff/inouye.html

<https://studentfilmmakersstore.com/products/the-screen-combat-handbook>

Tips for Selecting Your Cinematographer

By Shane Stanley



Camera is key not only to the look and feel of your project but also has a bigger impact on the temperament of your set than many realize. Think I'm kidding? Just ask McG about the ripple effects Christian Bale's meltdown toward cinematographer Shane Hurlbut effected the rest of the shoot on *Terminator Salvation*. Yes, Mr. Bale was at fault and has vehemently apologized, but it was a buildup to other issues. As we're looking for new camera folk to interpret our vision through *their* perspective, too often newer filmmakers make their choices solely by looking at someone's reel - which yes, is important, but there are other crucial ways to see if you've found the right DP for the job.

One thing to keep in mind: this project is about seeing *your* vision, as the director, come to fruition. This isn't about the cinematographer's reel. I always appreciate cinematographers who have worked as a producer at any level (and especially as editors), because they have more respect and sensibility for time, money and the need to get the most they can within a small window. When you work in tight budgets, you don't have time to be waiting on your camera department. In fact, you should never be waiting on *any* department, but you can see on several sets there are often a lot of people waiting around for camera to tweak, adjust or maneuver their lights before every shot over and over again - and that's not going to work with a tight schedule.

When searching for a cinematographer, don't just look at their reel. Everyone includes their best shots with the best lighting, composition and framing to show off their work. Ask to see either raw, uncut footage, or if that's not available, since so many shoot on reusable media cards, talk to directors and editors the cinematographer your considering has worked with. Find out if they consistently nailed it or paralyzed production by needing countless retakes because they couldn't get a shot right. Ask the editor if they tore their hair out and struggled to piece together whatever useable

frames they could find or if their job cutting the project was a seamless and pleasant experience. These are very important elements to learn when searching for both your cinematographer and camera operators, particularly since anyone in possession of a DSLR they bought at COSTCO accompanied with a bounce-board laying in the back of their Prius considers themselves a cinematographer.

Additionally, you need someone who is confident with a good demeanor and will not only challenge or stretch your thinking as a filmmaker, but at the same time, contribute to mood, blocking and the entire execution as efficiently as possible. I am a proponent of shooting with two cameras because you can get through setups faster, and when you get that great take, you have it in two different angles and don't have to worry about continuity. Things can move along faster, making it easier to make your days... But, God forbid one camera takes a dive, you're not all sitting around with nothing to do but peruse Instagram until a replacement shows up.

Until next time... ➔

Shane Stanley, filmmaker and author of the popular new book, "What You Don't Learn in Film School," is a lifelong entertainment industry insider, who has worked in every aspect of the business, covering a multitude of movies, television shows and other successful projects. At 49 years old, Stanley has been a steady earner in film and television since he was in diapers with a career that started in front of the camera at 9 months old and grew into a life of a multi-E Emmy Award-winning filmmaker spanning more than three decades. To order a copy of Shane's book and for his seminar schedule, please visit www.whatyoudontlearninfilmschool.com.

Hyunsoo Nam's winning production still.



The Power of Camera Movement

Hyunsoo Nam

2021 Production Stills Photo Contest Award Recipient

Congratulations to winning photographer, **Hyunsoo Nam**, one of the three award recipients of the **2021 Production Stills Photo Contest** hosted by the StudentFilmmakers.com Filmmakers Community Forums Online at www.studentfilmmakers.com/forums. Hyunsoo Nam is from Seoul, South Korea. The winning production still was shot during the filming of a music video.

What brought you to this production set?

Hyunsoo Nam: I was approached by a DOP with whom I had been working with and really building a chemistry with, regarding trying a familiar camera movement but to another level.

Spinning the model 360 as you see in the photo from the warped like looking background was complicated in a sense that camera has to stay exactly aligned to the center point or us (the camera angle). Falling off the center would be very noticeably in the frame.



So, the process of rigging and setting the camera angle was carefully measured and timed. It also required the performance of the actor in order for the shot to work as the director wished, so worry was also within us while we were working on this particular shot.



Can you tell us more about what's happening in the production still?

Hyunsoo Nam: The basic idea of the grip rig is set up to show the actor as if he is floating in a sitting down manner, so a chair is rigged up within the metal pipes and as we needed to go through when the warped background opened up, tracks were used to give us the forward movement.

What's one of the most important things you've learned working on a film set?

Hyunsoo Nam: One of the things that I've learned while I was starting out as a Key Grip, was actually from a great Korean DOP who taught me and would often talk to me about the approach and the attitude that we should all take



when filming. He would tell me of the great impact and the power a camera movement can carry and raised my awareness to this concept.

This helped me tremendously to not achieve a camera movement just for the sake of it or because it looks beautiful but to think about why a certain angle or frame needs that movement. Keeping this concept in mind and after years of being in the grip department, this has helped me and is still helping me on how to adapt the most appropriate grip elements for certain shots or scenarios. ➡



Community Spotlight

Erik Schilke

Composer

<https://studentfilmmakers.network/profile/erikschilke>

Erik Schilke is an electronic music producer, composer, and sound designer from New England. Raised in a musical family, Erik grew up playing the piano, trumpet, guitar, drums and bass, and singing in choirs. He moved to Montreal for university, where he studied as a classically trained upright bass player at the prestigious Schulich School of Music. In Montreal, Erik discovered his voice as an electronic solo artist, becoming fascinated with the endless, uninhibited opportunities for innovation and creation that the medium offers. Erik's passion for music and music production has pushed him to use music as a tool to study, explore and reflect upon the realities and nuances of life. Today his work draws from the narrative patterns in the natural world around us to both engage with the soundscape of our existence and escape from it at the same time.

Can you share with us your creative process for composing music?

Erik Schilke: My creative process is quite lengthy but always begins with one very small and minimal idea. Whether it be on an acoustic instrument, usually the piano, or DAW native plugin, it's often as simple as one note, sound or texture. Once I have that base, I allow that one idea to morph very slightly which then typically leads to another very similar small idea. These short, sometimes even dull, starting points lead to other small ideas that lead to other more substantial ideas and so on until ultimately it feels like the music is writing itself. It's very compulsive and relies on pure instinct, as opposed to critical thinking. I try to do this for as long and as fast as I can.

I then spend a significant amount of time dismantling the music through experimentation and sound design exploration. I find that exploring the music even further with various effects, reverbs, delays, and filters can generate really interesting musical nuances and textures that when properly placed, adjusted and appropriated can really enhance the musicality of what you're working on or even suggest an entirely new musical idea or instrumentation all on its own. I, then, piece it all back together. All in all, my creative process involves a lot of free expression and constant experimentation. At the end of a session, I always end up with a very messy screen, have maxed out my DAW CPU requiring loads of renders, and have a very long wide and unorganized project session which I then spend hours trimming and editing down later.

What was one of the most important things you learned in the studio?

Erik Schilke: Probably learning to embrace and appreciate mistakes, obstacles or any kind of technical restrictions. Things can seemingly go wrong, or not go as planned in so many ways. Sometimes you can't record something live, sometimes you don't have the right sound or synth, or the right software or tools to most effectively achieve a desired sound. Don't let that slow you down. Keep working. I've found that instead of getting bogged down by heavily relying on certain methods or techniques and "the best tools", it can be useful to have a handle on how to find alternative routes or work arounds to keep the work flowing. In my experience, I've found being adaptable, can turn challenges into really interesting and unexpected new ideas. With a bit of patience, what may at first seem like an artistic restriction or limitation may actually be an opportunity or blessing in disguise.

If you could share your "Top 3 Tips for Young Filmmakers on Collaborating with Composers", what would they be?

Erik Schilke:

- #1. **Pick a composer whose work you really admire.** This will mean you are more likely operating from a place of creative engagement and respect, leading to a more positive collaboration.
- #2. **Be as clear as you can about what it is you are looking for,** even if you're not one hundred percent sure. Effective communication early on can eliminate the number of revisions and save time for everyone. So can acknowledging if you're not sure what you want, opening the process up to more collective exploration on what something might be.
- #3. **Be conscious of what you are asking of your composer** and be clear with them from the beginning as to what the terms of the contract and collaboration will be, so

they know what to expect. Composers put in a significant amount of time, sometimes even for just a single moment of video.

How did you navigate and keep active and creative during the Covid pandemic months of social distancing, and times of quarantine and self-quarantine? Can you share some inspirational words with fellow creatives?

Erik Schilke: I'm an introvert, so I've actually navigated being creative during the pandemic months fairly well. But being on the computer constantly has made me have to set new parameters for not burning myself out on work, since it's harder to remind myself to take a break or switch between projects. I missed being able to go to shows and the theatre, and other events that offer creative inspiration. But with all these new limitations, it's really important to still find sources of inspiration, which we do have access to at home. My remedy has included watching more movies, documentaries, short films, Netflix, attending virtual shows and performances, and discovering new artists online. Similarly, I think it's an amazing time to take advantage of creating and collaborating virtually since so many people are stuck at home and looking for entertainment in a digital space where we are all connected.

Erik's debut album, "Synthesis", was released February 2021 with Hymen Records.

"Synthesis" is greatly inspired by the interconnected patterns and pathways of nature, and how they help create meaning out of the chaotic process of grief. It explores the search for reason we are sent on when confronted with losing a loved one. "Synthesis" captures the struggle toward finding peace, amidst the waves of encroaching anguish and disarray. It mirrors the process of becoming one with what is lost. It's an encounter with the end of the world. A journey from the chaotic senselessness of grief to the strange and simple knowing or reckoning that nothing is ever lost, but constantly reappearing and integrating into the patterns of the universe all around us.

<https://soundcloud.com/erikschilke/sets/synthesis>

Erik is also scoring and doing the sound design for a hybrid play and film production with Woolly Mammoth in D.C.

Photos by Landon Speers.

YOU JUST CAN'T BEAT THE PERSON WHO NEVER GIVES UP. —Babe Ruth



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