australian cinematographer

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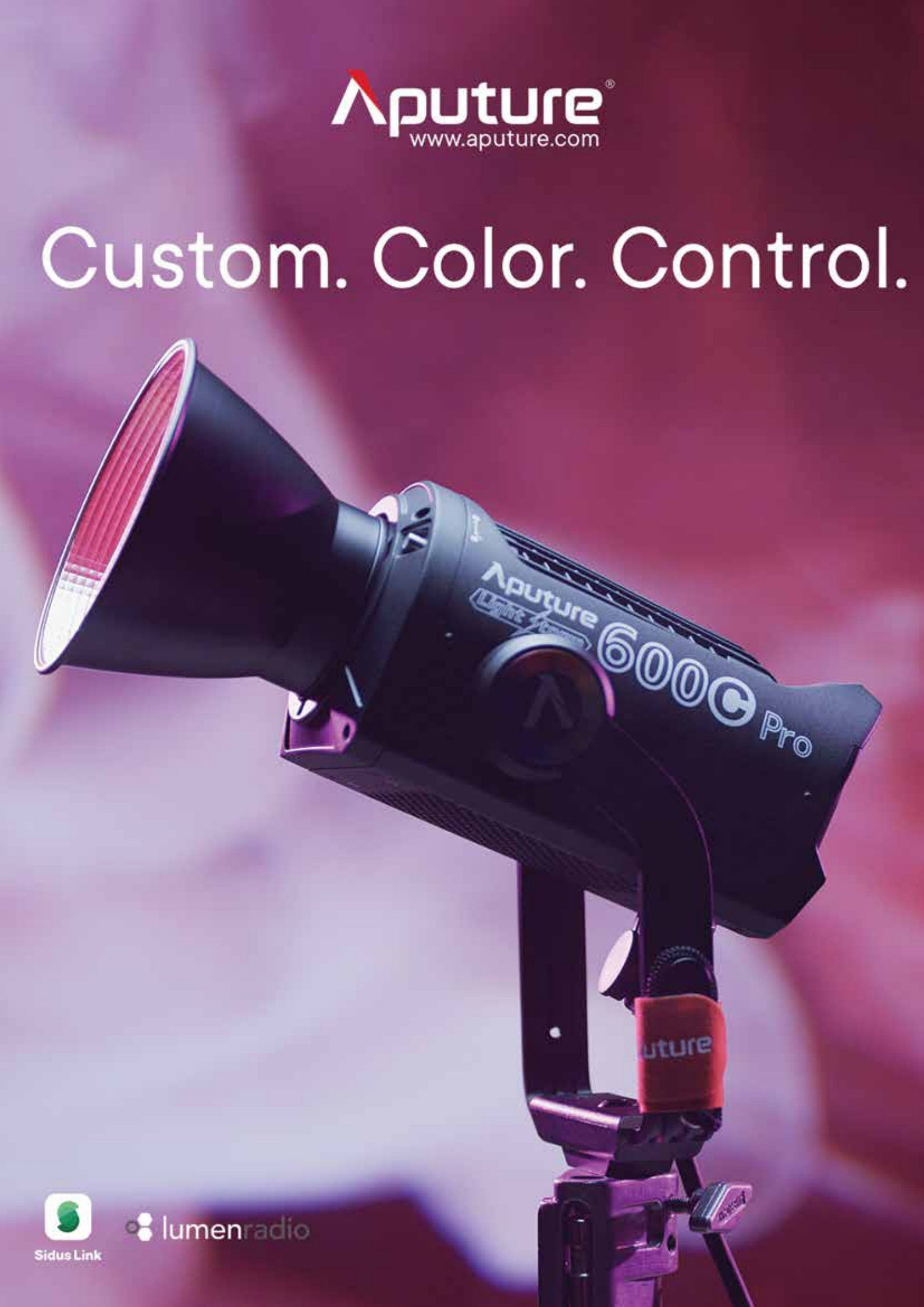
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BY DEFINITION A cinematographer is the author of the moving image, using technical and artistic expertise to create moving images that tell the story through light, shadow and composition.

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FEATURES...

DEPARTMENTS...

Cover Image: *DOP Warwick Thornton ACS - 'The New Boy'* - PHOTO Ben King

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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to Issue 99, a bumper read for you to catch up on over the holiday period.

We congratulate Warwick Thornton ACS for both his accreditation and well-deserved Golden Frog win at Camerimage for *The New Boy*. Susan Lumsdon sheds light on working in the UAE, Maxx Corkingdale presents us with a tribute to retiring gaffer, Graeme Shelton. If you're into tech, check out the article on desirable disasters in spherical cinema glass.

Harrison Upfold writes about two launches he attended recently in Sydney, IMAX Sydney, and Sony Burano. Find out more about the role of editor when Angela Cerasi interview Charlotte Cutting. Angela also treats us with an article on Texture. Peter Marsden discusses life as an expat, living and working in the UK.

From LA, two of our ACS members, Zachary Peel-Mcgregor and Judd Overton took the opportunity to get together in person to discuss Judd's latest film, *Totally Killer.*

Matt Samperi zoomed with cinematographer Sherwin Akabarzadeh ACS about shooting the timely and poignant film, *Shayda*.

Love shorts and specs Michael Steel discusses *Soles* shot in the Blue Mountains and Queensland member Anton Trivic talks about his spec project *Earth and Alchemy.*

The team on the second credit maker project share their insights on working together on anthology series *Erotic Stories,* meet credit making cinematographer Kate Cornish, supervising cinematographer Tania Lambert ACS, mentoring cinematographer Martin McGrath ACS and producer Liam Heyen.

Last, but not least Maxx Corkingdale shares a second article about slaying micro budgets - this time with young filmmaker Alice Maio Mackay and her well-oiled camera team including Aaron Schuppan and Astra Vadoulis.

I hope you all enjoy this issue and some much-needed downtime. Stay safe,

Lizz Vernon
Editor
Australian Cinematographer Magazine

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear members, sponsors and friends,

It's been another big year. The Branch awards really were bigger than ever with entries up by approximately 20% across almost all branches. This put a lot of pressure on the judges and all the volunteers running the judging events. My heartfelt thanks to everyone who gave so generously of their time to do this vital work. The awards are a crucial part of the ACS's remit – to benchmark members' work and promote and celebrate the great work being done. And the awards nights are special opportunities to catch up with far flung friends and meet many of our amazing sponsors, who make it possible for the ACS to do so much.

Application numbers for accreditation were also significantly greater, and fifteen members were successful this year. Massive congratulations to all the award winners and all the newly accredited.

Huge thanks to all those who give their time to serve on the branch committees and the National Executive Board – your contribution is phenomenal, and you are the engine room of the ACS.

As we draw near to celebrating the milestone publication of 100 issues of Australian Cinematographer in 2024, sincere thanks to Carolyn Constantine ACS (NSW) who has stepped in to act as AC Magazine Chair. Carolyn has already renewed engagement by advertisers and is revamping everything in preparation for the position to be filled long term.

I want to acknowledge and pay tribute to our new editor, Lizz Vernon (NSW), who has decided to take up the role ongoing after doing a sterling job under great pressure on the previous issue. We warmly welcome you aboard Lizz and wish you every success with the much loved and valued AC Magazine.

Lastly, please make time to check in with friends and colleagues around you who may be doing it tough over the Christmas-New Year period. I wish you all a wonderful holiday season, and hope that you can spend time with family and friends to rest and recharge your batteries.

Best wishes to you all,

Erika Addis
National President, Australian Cinematographers Society

SOLES

by Michael Steel

The night shoot at Wentworth Falls Grammar School. Michael Steel in black jacket talking to Director Kalani Gacon - PHOTO Adam Scarf

In 2013, I shot a pilot TV series entitled '*Cul-De-Sac'*; nine years later, fellow crew member and talented writer/director Kalani Gacon reached out to me about his new Blue Mountains project. After living in Nepal for six years, Kalani had returned to Australia with the view to establishing a not-for-profit twelve-week annual filmmaking workshop called Mountain Of Youth for aspiring teenage filmmakers. The result of the workshop was the short film 'Soles', shot entirely around the Mountains area and then screening to delighted workshop participants and locals at The Edge Cinema.

The workshop offered an opportunity to be involved with all elements of the filmmaking process from script writing through to post-production. All the participants were crew members and got the chance to work in a different department each day under the guidance of a professional head of department. My role was to provide support and mentorship regarding Director of Photography and camera operation. Although the workshop was fast paced and included a lot of technical information, the participants took up the task with gusto and handled it like absolute champions. I've no doubt some will pursue careers in filmmaking and remember the experience very fondly.

The workshop and *Soles* were made possible through fundraising. Many Blue Mountains businesses supported the workshop and provided help in any way they could, including goods and services, locations, discounted equipment and hire rates. Warren Day at Video Australasia gave us an amazing deal on an ARRI Mini LF camera package and a set of six Canon Sumire Full Frame prime lenses.

The film follows two teenagers, Jude (Dylan Scott-Terrie) and Ez (Eden Pierson), as they try to delay their inevitable transition to adulthood and uncertainty. In the pursuit of extending their last days together, they try to evoke a local myth involving a pair of shoes, a powerline, and a train. Change can threaten the most enduring of friendships, but a granted wish might at least buy some time.

For the films look, Kalani wanted a cool colour pallet encapsulating as much mountain atmosphere (rain, mist, wind) as possible. Of course, the weather had other ideas and we got bright sunny cloudless days instead. My amazing gaffer, Lucky Chen, and I were able to work with the participants in meeting this creative challenge. Save one scene on a moving train, the whole film was shot exterior, and our approach was to cut as much direct sunlight in frame as we could. Otherwise, lighting was designed to create a diffuse and sombre atmosphere – no easy task when the largest silks we had were 6x6's.

To give us a fighting chance, the schedule was tweaked so we only filmed the most expansive exterior daylight scenes very early or late in the day. We also planned to shoot one long exterior night scene situated in a cave deep in a forest, but aborted as we had neither the equipment nor manpower to do it justice. Instead, we shot it as a day-for-night scene (over a three-hour period), which came out amazingly well. The ARRI Mini LF's ability to dig into the shadows and provide clean details really came into its own here and gave us peace of mind.

We chose to shoot the whole film handheld in that it gave our first-time actors a sense of freedom to move. The unsteady nature of handheld also reflected the character's sense of uncertainty about the future. Although we had a six-lens set, the whole film was eventually shot with only the 50mm. Of course, our 50mm full frame Sumire lens became roughly equivalent in field of view to a 35mm lens on a Super 35 sensor, which was perfect for singles and two shots as we could operate physically further away from our first-time actors, giving them some space and yet retaining the immediacy of a wider lens closer in.

Initially, I was concerned that the Large Format camera may prove too big and heavy for such a project. However, once

A scene from 'Soles' - Dylan Scott-Terrie (Jude) and Eden Pierson (Ez), sunset at Mt. Victoria - DOP Michael Steel

on the shoulder, the ARRI Mini LF's weight and balance felt good. I really came to love using the ARRI LF sensor as we had to lean on it heavily to get through some tricky situations. When you combine its' limited compression in combination with its naturalistic colour capture and low light capabilities, (two shots filmed at 3200 ISO), it was the best choice for the job.

One of the biggest challenges was to shoot most of our scenes entirely in one continuous shot, especially when dialogue and movement was often ad-lib. I must praise my two 1st AC's, James Campbell & James Bartlett, who were fantastic in handling a constantly moving handheld camera with a 1.3 aperture, often without rehearsal. To enhance the feeling that the world is closing in on our heroes, we chose a narrow aspect ratio of 1.66:1, even though we also chose to shoot Open Gate on a large format sensor. That combination gave us our canvas and it worked perfectly for our story. The result of the approach was very rewarding, and in the end, made for a better film and a more truthful feeling edit.

All the participants brought a wonderful energy to set each day, enjoyed learning new skills and making their story come to life. Witnessing this enthusiasm and passion each day was hugely rewarding and the results are easy to see on screen. I believe that Kalani achieved the objective of his brainchild - to foster and cultivate a love of filmmaking amongst young locals. Good job!

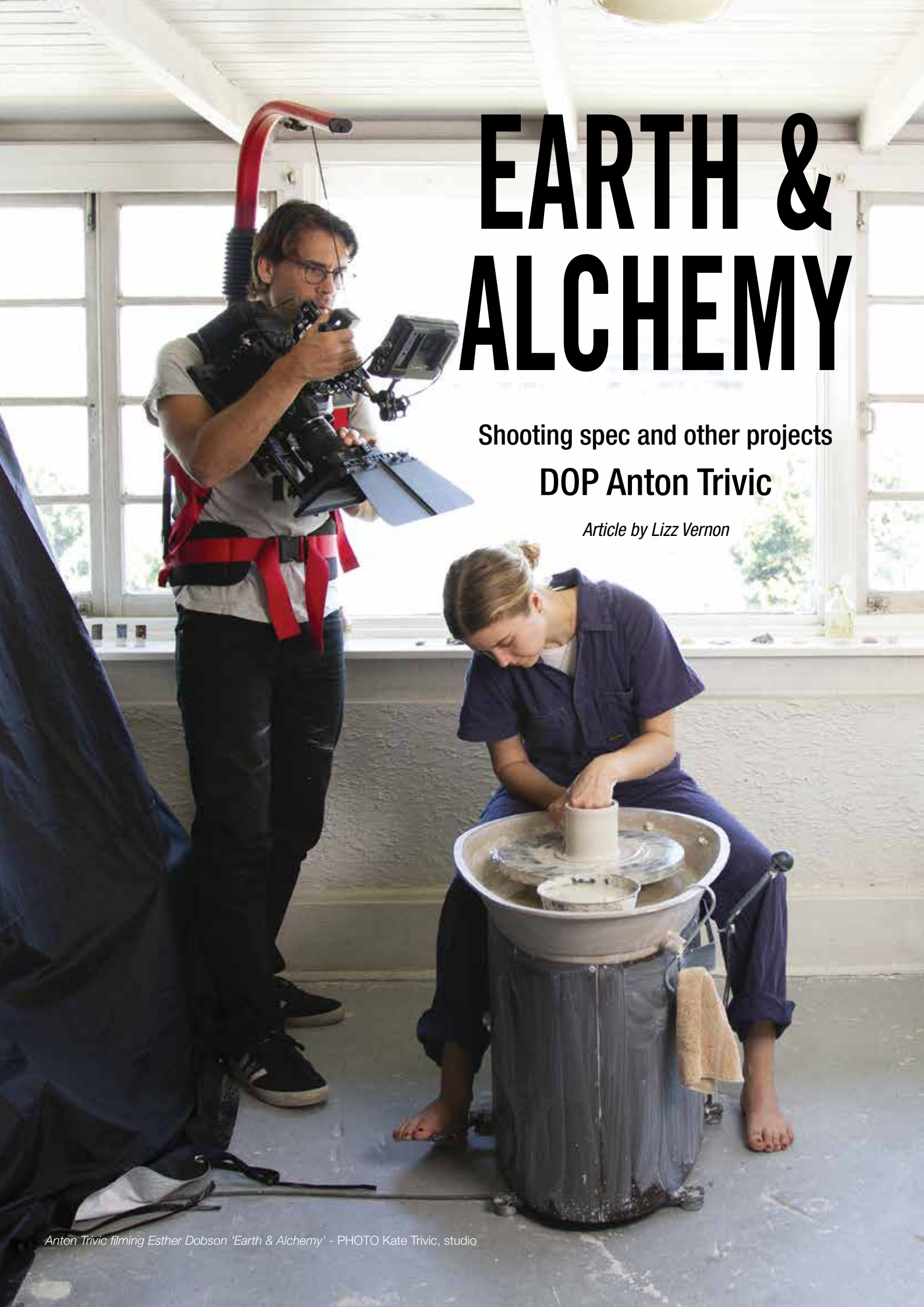
Crew of 'Soles' - PHOTO Adam Scarf

EARTH & ALCHEMY

Shooting spec and other projects

DOP Anton Trivic

Article by Lizz Vernon



Anton Trivic filming Esther Dobson 'Earth & Alchemy' - PHOTO Kate Trivic, studio

Anton Trivic filming 'Pleasure of the Damned' - PHOTO Qianhui Zhou

On my way home from the NT, making the most of a Brisbane layover, I took the opportunity to catch up with Brisbane based cinematographer Anton Trivic for a chat about his work and journey into cinematography. In a twist of fate, he was also waiting for a flight—off to Melbourne for filming work. So, to the backdrop of airport announcements and for me a much-needed coffee the following is a little of what I found out.

Anton Trivic is an up-and-coming freelance cinematographer worth keeping your eyes on. His captured imagery is beautiful to watch, and I'd encourage readers to look him up. On a recent lay-over at Brisbane airport, we met at a bustling café each awaiting interstate flights. Making the most of our respective layovers, we discussed Anton journey into working as a cinematographer.

What I gleaned is Anton Trivic is a gentle visionary, seeing and seizing every opportunity to capture beauty in motion. His journey towards film accidental, the byproduct of an active childhood, one not free from injury.

Born into an active family, all keen on outdoor sports, he and his brothers began using a Sony Vx2000 to capture each other's skateboard tricks, or out surfing or snowboarding. Though an all too often painful twist left the camera in Anton's hands, ***'I got hurt, a lot, like a lot. I've done my ACL and broke my leg and broken hands - I was very accident prone…*** Or in other words if he's the one brother that couldn't skate, surf or snowboard at the time: ***'…then it's going to be me on the tripod, or me cruising behind with a cast on my arm. That's essentially how I got into it.'***

While Anton pushed himself to find all the best angles never settling for just filming, he began to notice some of his favourite shots were lifestyle and nature shots. ***'I got right into landscape photography, because I was snowboarding, in Canada on some of the most beautiful mountains in the world and this inspired a shift in me.'***

Trivic began pumping out videos for online sites like BOARDRIDER, burning the midnight oil and mastering the art of the tight turnaround. ***'They were getting a video from me, every week, if not more. I would stay up all night editing, burning my thighs as the laptop got really hot.'*** The sheer volume of work led to his work ethic and an irresistible paid opportunity to test a Logitech UE BOOM filming an advert about snowboarding.

To the backdrop of continual boarding announcements our conversation turned to **Earth & Alchemy**, a spec shoot, featuring a pottery studio of the same name. Building rapport with clients is a huge part of what we do, and for Trivic that's a good thing, he's very approachable with demonstrable polished skills and an underlying puppy-dog-excitement, it's hard not to be drawn in.

Anton reveals the pottery class itself was an anniversary present for his wife and when she came back showing him

Anton Trivic's preferred lighting set up is through the window
- PHOTOS Anton Trivic

what she'd made and the photos of the space, he was hooked. ***'I just thought, oh, wow, from the perspective of a cinematographer, this is a good-looking space. it's really, beautiful.'*** Trivic could see the raw elements of the room, and what he would be able to capture and spoke with the studio owner, Ester, who agreed to a shoot. The studio's beauty created an opportunity for Trivic to create something beautiful himself.

'The room was already naturally set-dressed and there were lots of little elements to the room to create depth and visual interest.' Shooting off-speed in 50 fps was an easy choice to enhance the piece, using his trusty Blackmagic URSA Mini Pro GI, and a set of Sigma Art stills lenses, known for their super sharpness.

To date, Trivic has spent hours honing his craft with laser focus and oozes technical skills… I was interested in his learning curves, not just technical but any as he entered the film industry. Anton began to tell me, before stopping to qualify one point, to say he's in the middle of that learning curve now. ***'This profession is not just about making content and creating work that looks good, it's also about marketing yourself.'*** For him, it's been the biggest learning curve so far.

It's not that he minds working long hours, or putting time into researching equipment, staying up late positioning lamps or just reading about lenses. ***'I have got to the point where I can disassemble whole photography lenses and [put them] back together, refurbish them.'*** But, when it comes to selling yourself and reaching out to directors and producers and agencies, knowing how to orchestrate that is probably his toughest learning curve. ***'Yeah, that's probably what I would say is the trickiest part. I'm still trying to work it out.'***

We discussed, to my joy at the arrival of a much-needed coffee, just how much the business side of the industry is kind of foreign to many creatives. Needing to be seen to do the business side is a clash of the almost blissful invisibly a cinematographer or operator has behind the camera as they capture footage. Trivic feels the trickiest part is understanding the workings of the whole machine and that's only one part of the equation.

Even with an impressive showreel, skills and a great idea, coming across a producer with a hundred thousand to make a commercial they are still more likely to go with someone they know, even if their showreel doesn't look better than his own showreel. So, it's more about relationships, and producers and directors are all trying to satisfy the requirements of the project's brief and clients desires, so they often stick with someone they've worked with before.

When asked what he's looking for his answer may surprise some. 'I guess, to be completely honest, it's a director's vision.' He expands that concept to include having a clear vision of what they want to do coupled with an understanding of the limitations of what's achievable with a certain budget. Untimely it's, ***'finding the right people to collaborate with.'*** I jest, ***'he could quote the old, good, fast, cheap – pick two as a starting approach.'***

Trivic recently shot the short film, *Pleasure of the Dammed,* with his friend and director, James Lawler. ***'We had months in pre-production, and that's something that I actually produced as well. believe it or not. It's nice to have that***

Scenes from 'Earth & Alchemy' - DOP Anton Trivic

level of control.' Anton smiles before adding, ***'I'm very, detailed, and I like everything planned out perfectly. When I can create the schedule and the call sheets, I know that my team and everyone is going to perform their best on the day … then I can just focus on the camera.***

From a communication standpoint Trivic likes to have conversations with the directors and 1st AD early, where they each understand what's been agreed on. This allows them all to be on the same page on set, so he can keep things moving along. Not one to stress out or be loud on set, having worked in bars and restaurants has taught him a valuable set of people skills. ***'It's just like managing teams of people and knowing that society starts as a point, and it all flows down from there. There's always a range of personalities and always people that have things to say but it's just about remaining calm and making everyone feel like they've been heard.'***

Anton discusses that different trades and parts of the industry have their own style or way of communicating. ***'You can either let it overwhelm you, or you can just be like, cool, no worries, and stay positive and keep working through it.'*** At the same time, he's worked in very fast-paced video production companies, where they were flat out with the number of projects shot in a day, ***'It was insane, you just worked so hard, and I was an editor as well so, I would go and shoot and then come back and edit on the same day.'***

He's no stranger to being put into uncomfortable positions either, not enough information, or challenging clients. ***'I feel like now that I've gone through so many of those situations, it just rolls off me. Even with the pressure I'll just ask nicely what it is that we need to get through, and we can work it out.'*** Which prompts me to share a gem I heard from John Seale AM ACS ASC when he's waiting to button on, ***"Do you want it higher, lower, more to the left, or more to the right?"*** Anton doesn't mind tweaking down to the last ten seconds, but when it's time he's ready, ***'As soon as it's "GO," I'll be there to press the button, and that's something I pride myself on.'***

Aware that there are different measurements, a client expectation and his own. Trivic knows he is able to reach his own standard. With a background in electrics on some big productions and working with Motion Picture Lighting (MPL), Trivic had a realistic idea of what is really possible. ***'I've been in the lighting team, holding and lifting all of that gear. When I did season three of Jack Irish, that was the fastest paced production I've ever experienced in my life. We had so many setups in a day, with a very small and young team. It gives you perspective and understanding of how many team members you actually need, and what's required.'***

We discussed goals, people he'd like to work with, or different genres that he'd like to work on. He admits that he always thought that if you make incredible work, and you make your work look as good as possible and you put the work out there, that eventually someone would find you. This has meant that so far, his goal has been honing his craft — that 'laser focus,' I mentioned before. ***'I need to understand all the qualities of the light. I need to understand how the different lamps work in different scenarios, what it's like in cloud … at sunset.'***

He's even downloaded movies to watch them in false colour and then rewatched in waveform to analyze exactly where

Scenes from 'Earth & Alchemy' - DOP Anton Trivic

the cinematographer was placing all the levels. He's spent plenty of time making sure he is able to make amazing images. Now he feels he's ready to shift his focus differently. ***'I want to focus on finding all the directors out there so I can have a look at their work and find out; what's this director's style, what kind of stuff have they done in the past? Does their work and my work align? Then I want to reach out and make a connection.'***

He sees this approach as different to selling himself, it's about cultivating relationships with people. He knows that with like-minded people, they can build a friendship and create great projects together. Though confidence is something that can get supported or trounced in this industry, making it hard to approach new contacts. I'm glad to say, Anton's proud of his work and rightly so. ***'I do have confidence in my work like the pottery video which I've shown you. I do look at that and I'm proud of that, that is a nice piece of work.'***

A self-described, "very technical," kind of person. We discuss the BMPCC6K he still owns, and the G1 and the four years he's spent playing in DaVinci Resolve. ***'I love to pull things apart, I'll shoot stuff and then grade it and then say okay, well this is where this is how (i know) how I exposed my levels, and I can see exactly what the IRE levels are. Now I can work out exactly how far I can pull back the highlights of the sky without destroying the quality of my image. I love the confidence knowing all this gives me when I'm working on the day. Working out all of that sort of stuff is probably boring to most people, but I love it!'***

It's this strong understanding of the dynamic range of the camera he's working with that played a large role in the *Earth & Alchemy* project. ***'A huge part of this project was balancing to the levels that were out of his control and protecting the negative with his knowledge of the camera's limitations.'*** The environment took care of so much, and he spent his time taking away light that was there, using neg fill.

I was curious what Trivic would pick with no limitations on a lighting budget, or if

he had a go to light — But, his starting point depends on the environment.

'Obviously you need big lamps from outside pushing light in if there's windows and that's the nicest way, to light everything from outside, and then when you're inside the light is just wrapped a little bit.'

Trivic expands to include adding grids to control the spill and softness of the lights, and ideally having all the lights on CRMX Lumen Radio with a control panel and gaffer standing right next to him to make very precise adjustments with no delay. ***'LED panels, like Litemates are probably my favourite units because they are so versatile and can be easily rigged. I really enjoy using them to create a 180 degree wrap of light around my subject.'*** Anton would slowly grade the light and meticulously control the fall off across a gradient.

Our discussion moves from lights to lenses, from the Leica R's and the Sumicron C's and beyond to the classics. Trivic admits, ***'It's hard with lenses sometimes, because of marketing and the fact that a budget on a production can quickly limit the lenses that are available to use or even test.***

'It's easy to become a bit of a fanboy, because of the marketing of them.' The Cooke Look™ — a sharp, subtle, smooth rendering that provides dimensionality, high contrast, and pleases the eye – I'm quoting from Cooke for the sake of the article of course, ***'Yeah, and that's exactly what I was about to say. I think I like the Cooke's, but I don't know if I've just been brainwashed into it.'*** We did agree the Cooke Look™ is beautiful and I'm confident many readers will have picked up these lenses for a shoot given the chance, I know I have. While Trivic likes them, he feels anamorphic lenses can be restricting, making too many choices for him. ***'Anything that makes you aware of the camera and its distinctions like flare and aberration, or anything like that, pulls the viewer out of the experience of the film.'*** He wants to see what he's seeing.

He has been known to pull apart lenses and put them back together perfectly, or I suspect a little differently if he wanted to experiment. He admits he has. 'I really enjoyed it. And it's kind of therapeutic.' He references *At Eternity's Gate,* directed by Julian Schnabel, Cinematography by Benoit Delhomme, with a star-studded cast including, Willem Dafoe as Vincent van Gogh. 'In my opinion, that's the perfect time to be doing something different with the lensing because you're directly representing the look of van Gogh's paintings.' This is in contrast to the familiar, beautiful cliché dream scene where it's kind of hazy. Anton's a big believer in letting the story do its thing, not getting caught up in the need to create clear distinctions in things. He likes to read, and I'm not surprised at all that his favourite author is Hemmingway. 'It's just no fuss. Just give me the information I need to know.'

Anton likes the European natural style although he admits he can go a little bit Hollywood and make things a bit more polished. That it could be a result of having too much fun with toys. He's quick with a reference to films he loves, *Roma,* or *A Portrait of a Lady on fire,* an incredible French film, with simple elegant camera movement and a directness that could not have been improved with extravagance or Spielberg. ***'He's amazing, don't get me wrong.'*** It's not that Trivic doesn't like gigantic films, but that everything has a time and place.

With the talk of Spielberg, we moved our conversation to toys, and extravagance, and I find out Anton has a favourite camera movement. ***'If you can incorporate all of the tech and all of the toys into a move that looks like it's a pan, or just something really, really simple. But really, you're tracking with a dolly and there's so much more going on. You are actually making something really technical look as simple as possible.'***

There are others moves in his bag of tricks, ***'One that I love is with a push in, then moving up at the same time, ever so slightly. So, it just stays with you, but you shouldn't be able to feel it.'*** By the time he gets close, as long as it's motivated, its' powerful and doesn't take you out of the story.

Trivic is inspired by Jeff Cronenweth ASC, 'I think he is just insane *The Tales from the Loop,* Ep 1 — I think that's the thing that I've seen most recently that amazes me.'

The way Trivic learns is inspired, he will play back a film though his little Black Magic monitor, and scrub though slowly. He takes note of what Cronenweth does with camera movements, lighting, and lamp placements. ***'His work is so amazingly well controlled. if you look at it, it just looks really simply. But if you pause it and scrub through it you can see the details and there is so much more going on than you would think.'*** It's then that Trivic deconstructs the lighting setups and camera movements, creating his own personalized film school.

We chatted about LUTs and Lens, he has customisded his own LUT, ***'It's just the ARRI Rec 709 LUT with a little bit of contrast taken out and the exposure dropped slightly. This is just a safety precaution because you'll probably see from my work, I tend to go dark.'***

My time is up, and I need to make a dash to board my aircraft… In the short time I've had to get to know Anton, I'd say this gentle natured cinematographer is one to keep your eye on. With an eye for detail, skills, and curiosity, coupled with a drive to push the envelope… I dare you to look up Anton Trivic's work or reach out to him for your next project.

DOP Susan Lumsdon on set shooting 'Dreams Drawn By Dust' - DIRECTOR Abdul Bari abu El-Kheir PHOTO Gaffer Kyle Stephens

DAWN OF DESERT FRONTIER

Dreams Drawn by Dust, Scattered Barriers, House of Life

All filmed in the United Arab Emirates by DOP Susan Lumsdon

Article by Susan Lumsdon, foreword by Lizz Vernon

Susan Lumsdon is a Sydney based Director of Photography, but you're just as likely to find her filming far from home and across the globe. She was about to head back to the United Arab Emirates when we were going over the final draft of this article. From the hallowed halls of North Sydney TAFE followed by a sought-after ABC Traineeship, Susan has honed her skills on the camera. Those early years at the ABC paid dividends, winning awards for feature films, *Bloodshot Heart* for Director Parish Malfitano, and *Risen* for Director Eddie Arya - filmed in a chilly Canadian winter with an ARRI Alexa and a set of Panavision Anamorphic lenses. Award winning documentary, John Farrow Hollywood's *Man in the Shadows* for Directors Claude Gonzalez and Frans Vandenburg is a 'must see' for all you Aussie filmmakers. She's shot plenty of short films, including the recently nominated *Round Trip* for director Ren Thackham, as well as a load of Aussie gems like *The New Adventures of Blinky Bill, The Wiggles: Lights, Camera, Action,* Wiggles through to *The Chaser's War on Everything,* and *Kitchen Cabinet.*

She has also recently scored an awards win for the first season of drama series, *Dreams Drawn by Dust* shot for director Abdul Bari Abu El-Kheir in the United Arab Emirates (Best Cinematography London Independent film awards 2022). It appears there's nothing like working in a range of temperatures to bring those awards rolling in. You get the picture: Susan's great at what she does. Let's find out all about her latest projects.

Being based in Sydney throughout my career has given me opportunities to work on a great range of material, including feature films, television dramas, comedies, and international documentaries. One of my recent projects was three television series shot on the ARRI Alexa Mini with ARRI Master Primes for Netflix, which allowed me to use my extensive previous international experience while filming for the first time in the United Arab Emirates.

The UAE is becoming an increasingly popular production location because it offers a broad span of architectural styles which can stand in for many other countries and cultures in the region. It also has stable, often cloudless lighting conditions from one day to the next. This is a big plus while working outdoors in the back-lots of large and well-resourced studios boasting all the latest gear.

And away from the ultra-modern urban areas, there is the spectacular ancient desert landscape which has a soul of its own, highly reminiscent of the aura of our own Outback.

However, as anyone who has shot in the Outback will tell you, such locations are a double-edged sword. One of the most gratifying, but also challenging aspects of making these three series was shooting in these parched remote regions. The harsh desert conditions meant we had to take extra precautions to protect the camera and lenses from the elements, specifically the sand and dust. Contending with the high temperatures affected the Teradek's performance, resulting in unique cooling hacks: we often resorted to air cooling them with water saturated cloths draped over the units to keep it humming.

Working in the mountains of Al Ain added an extra twist with warm temperatures in the day dropping to near zero at night. The remote and difficult terrain meant we couldn't source three cherry pickers locally, but resourceful camera team made the scene work with our large light stands.

Despite these tough conditions, the ARRI Alexa Mini and ARRI Master Primes proved reliable and durable, allowing us to capture stunning visuals that breathed fresh life into each story. Our excellent team of camera assistants lead by first AC Anthony Mannion and consisting of four other ACs, a video split operator and DIT, all did an outstanding job of keeping the cameras and monitoring equipment running smoothly despite the heat, on top of the special protocols of production demanded during Covid-19.

The first series, *Dreams Drawn by Dust* is about a young man Younis, who is accused of killing a colleague. He flees to Beirut, chased by authorities and the dead man's father. Meanwhile, we discover more about Younis through flashbacks of his life as a decorated war hero, conflicted son, and tortured lover. Consisting of six 35-minute episodes set in Syria and Lebanon, filmed on location in Abu Dhabi and the TWOFOUR54 Backlot KIZAD (Khalifa Industrial Zone Abu Dhabi), the series premiered on Netflix in December 2022. *Dreams Drawn by Dust* was shot mostly on two cameras with some single camera second unit work.

The second series, *Scattered Barriers*, follows the Naser family's confronting experiences and challenges to their understanding of life as they navigate through the Covid pandemic. The story centres on family and the fraught personal impact and relationship complications of an overwhelming and life-threatening disease. Consisting of six 35-minute episodes set in Oman, it was filmed on location in Al Ain, UAE. Its broadcast premiere in January 2022 made it the first Omani TV series to ever screen on Netflix.

Series three, *House of Life,* about a family being torn apart by deceit and betrayal, is a psychological drama consisting of eight 35-minute episodes set in Syria, shot in Abu Dhabi. *Scattered Barriers* and *House of Life* were mostly shot single camera.

Another key challenge for these three streaming series was the need for versatility in lighting and shooting. We were

On the set of TV Series 'Scattered Barriers'- DOP Susan Lumsdon, DIRECTOR Abdul Bari abu El-Kheir, PHOTO 1st AC Anthony Mannion

working with a mix of spherical zoom and prime lenses and traditional HMIs, with Tungsten lights as well as new LED lights, and dealing with large night shoots and car camera rigs. To ensure the capture of the best possible images, we made use of the ARRI Alexa Mini's high dynamic range and the ARRI Master Primes' sharpness and bokeh. All three series were shot on ARRI Alexa minis, with three used in total A Cam on the Panther dolly, B Cam on sticks and C Cam mostly on Steadicam, gimbal and some second unit. Paired with the ARRI Master Primes and ARRI Alura zooms: These were needed to ensure speed in setting up shots as we were on a very tight schedule which demanded coverage of seventeen minutes screentime a day. We also used Glimmer Glass on the first two series and Classic Soft FX on the third series. For flashbacks adding Black Pro-Mist filters on top of the Glimmer Glass or Classic Soft FX filters.

An added scheduling challenge was having to start the third series, *House of Life* while finishing the second series, *Scattered Barriers* whose completion was delayed when the lead actress got sick. This meant we had to keep switching back and forth each day between the different series looks. My camera team of AC's Kezia Holland, Jasmine Suivi and Kavinda Sasindu were fantastic at keeping on top of the different filters and camera settings, ensuring we stayed on track with the right look.

I aim for a unique look when lighting a television drama series, which means trying to get in as much prep time as possible. My first step is to analyse the script in depth and detail, scene by scene to understand the mood and tone that the director

On the set of TV Series 'Scattered Barriers'- DOP Susan Lumsdon, DIRECTOR Abdul Bari abu El-Kheir, PHOTO Buddhika Serasinghe

is trying to convey. It's a crucial task to complete before I start work with the director and the production designer to create a visual concept that will support the story and bring it to life on screen.

One of the essentials when shooting a series is maintaining consistency in the look of the show from episode to episode, which is a big challenge while keeping to a very tight schedule. To achieve this, I use a lighting palette that is specific to the series, with a consistent use of colour and light placement. As we were shooting out all the locations like a feature film, it made keeping a consistent lighting look across the episodes much easier.

During all three series, there were large night shoots with soft boxes made up from a dozen ARRI Sky Panels built in cherry pickers which needed to be planed, put together, and moved into position on time, with precision. Moving them around the back lot set was not particularly easy — they had to be partially derigged and rerigged due to the unstable nature of the sand on which the back lot was built. We discovered just how tricky manoeuvring vehicles in the sand was on the first day, while filming a night shoot: Our two generators were mounted on trailers, and one of them snapped its chassis, leaving it bogged in the sand. This meant it had to be lifted onto a flatbed truck for the rest of the shoot.

The schedule left no room for error or changing of positions. There were large green screen VFX setups requiring coordination with the VFX team and the use of multiple HMIs including M90 HMIs. Lights were controlled by an Exalux lighting panel which gaffer Kyle Stephens brought with him from Australia. I had the same great lighting team for all three series made up of two Australians, including Kyle and best, Lulu Cheung, along with best Muhammad Adnan, from Pakistan, running a lighting team of up to fifteen UAE crew members. Another great gaffer, Rami Murad, from Jordan, joined us on series two and three.

We were tasked by the producer Hasan Majed with trying to create a look that would appeal to both Arabic and International Netflix audiences. With *Scattered Barriers* we filmed in an old historic fort, being used as the family's old, abandoned home, which posed many challenges. One of them was filming at night and using oil lamps as our practical lighting sources, whose illumination was supplemented with small Aputure MC lights hidden in shot to supplement illumination from the oil lamps.

Throughout the three productions typical HMI and tungsten lighting fixtures were used along with modern Astera tubes

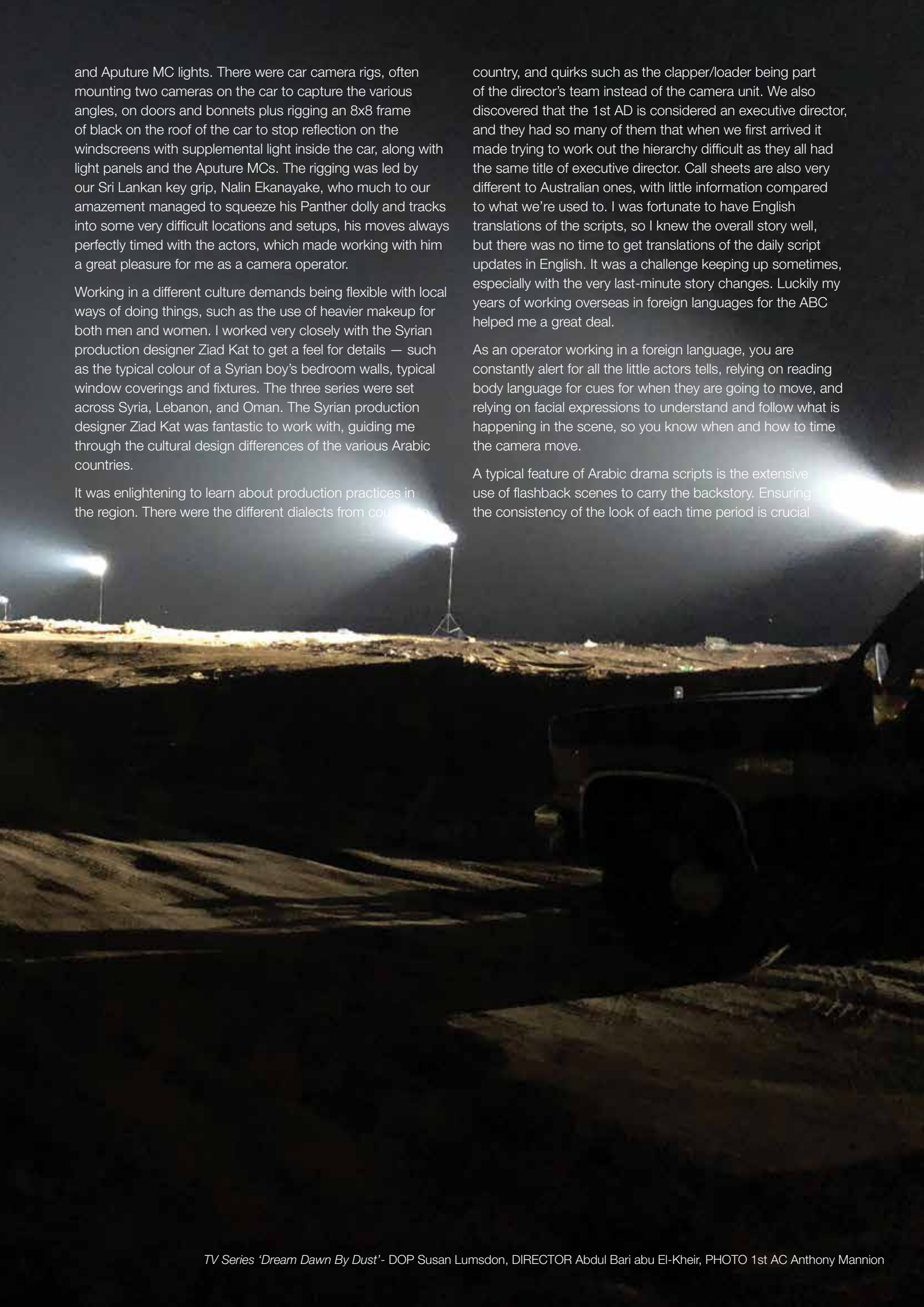
and Aputure MC lights. There were car camera rigs, often mounting two cameras on the car to capture the various angles, on doors and bonnets plus rigging an 8x8 frame of black on the roof of the car to stop reflection on the windscreens with supplemental light inside the car, along with light panels and the Aputure MCs. The rigging was led by our Sri Lankan key grip, Nalin Ekanayake, who much to our amazement managed to squeeze his Panther dolly and tracks into some very difficult locations and setups, his moves always perfectly timed with the actors, which made working with him a great pleasure for me as a camera operator.

Working in a different culture demands being flexible with local ways of doing things, such as the use of heavier makeup for both men and women. I worked very closely with the Syrian production designer Ziad Kat to get a feel for details — such as the typical colour of a Syrian boy's bedroom walls, typical window coverings and fixtures. The three series were set across Syria, Lebanon, and Oman. The Syrian production designer Ziad Kat was fantastic to work with, guiding me through the cultural design differences of the various Arabic countries.

It was enlightening to learn about production practices in the region. There were the different dialects from countries, country, and quirks such as the clapper/loader being part of the director's team instead of the camera unit. We also discovered that the 1st AD is considered an executive director, and they had so many of them that when we first arrived it made trying to work out the hierarchy difficult as they all had the same title of executive director. Call sheets are also very different to Australian ones, with little information compared to what we're used to. I was fortunate to have English translations of the scripts, so I knew the overall story well, but there was no time to get translations of the daily script updates in English. It was a challenge keeping up sometimes, especially with the very last-minute story changes. Luckily my years of working overseas in foreign languages for the ABC helped me a great deal.

As an operator working in a foreign language, you are constantly alert for all the little actors tells, relying on reading body language for cues for when they are going to move, and relying on facial expressions to understand and follow what is happening in the scene, so you know when and how to time the camera move.

A typical feature of Arabic drama scripts is the extensive use of flashback scenes to carry the backstory. Ensuring the consistency of the look of each time period is crucial



TV Series 'Dream Dawn By Dust'- DOP Susan Lumsdon, DIRECTOR Abdul Bari abu El-Kheir, PHOTO 1st AC Anthony Mannion

TV Series 'Dream Dawn By Dust' - DIRECTOR Abdul Bari abu El-Kheir, PHOTO DOP Susan Lumsdon

and made it challenging for the whole camera and lighting team. We had to keep a careful eye on the late story changes, especially as our scene numbers from the English scripts often did not match the numbers nor descriptions on the Arabic call sheet. UAE sets are usually run in English as that is often the only common language of the crew. However ours was largely in Arabic as the director did not speak English. As he had some French, my high school lessons kicked in, so we ended up learning and working with the French film terms such as 'chariot' for the dolly.

Naturally, all sorts of challenges arise when you are working with a large and diverse crew, all with multiple languages, and even disabilities, all trying to work on a backlot, filming large night and day shoots — with Ronin 2 gimbal, Steadicam Trinity and Panther Easy Rider dolly being used for special setups. One beautiful and memorable experience was seeing crew members learn some sign language to be inclusive on set. Something I think we should see happen more often.

Shooting these three-drama series on the Alexa Mini and ARRI Master Primes in the UAE was tremendously challenging and rewarding experience. However, the combination of the camera and lenses gave us the flexibility and quality to capture the beautiful images we needed, despite the testing conditions.

The depth and range of my experience has given me strong technical skills and flexibility in adapting to working in different cultural contexts. I relished working in the UAE, so much so that I jumped at a chance to do it all again, so that's where I am spending this summer, in the beautiful UAE, using my new skills in what may become in another award-winning production.

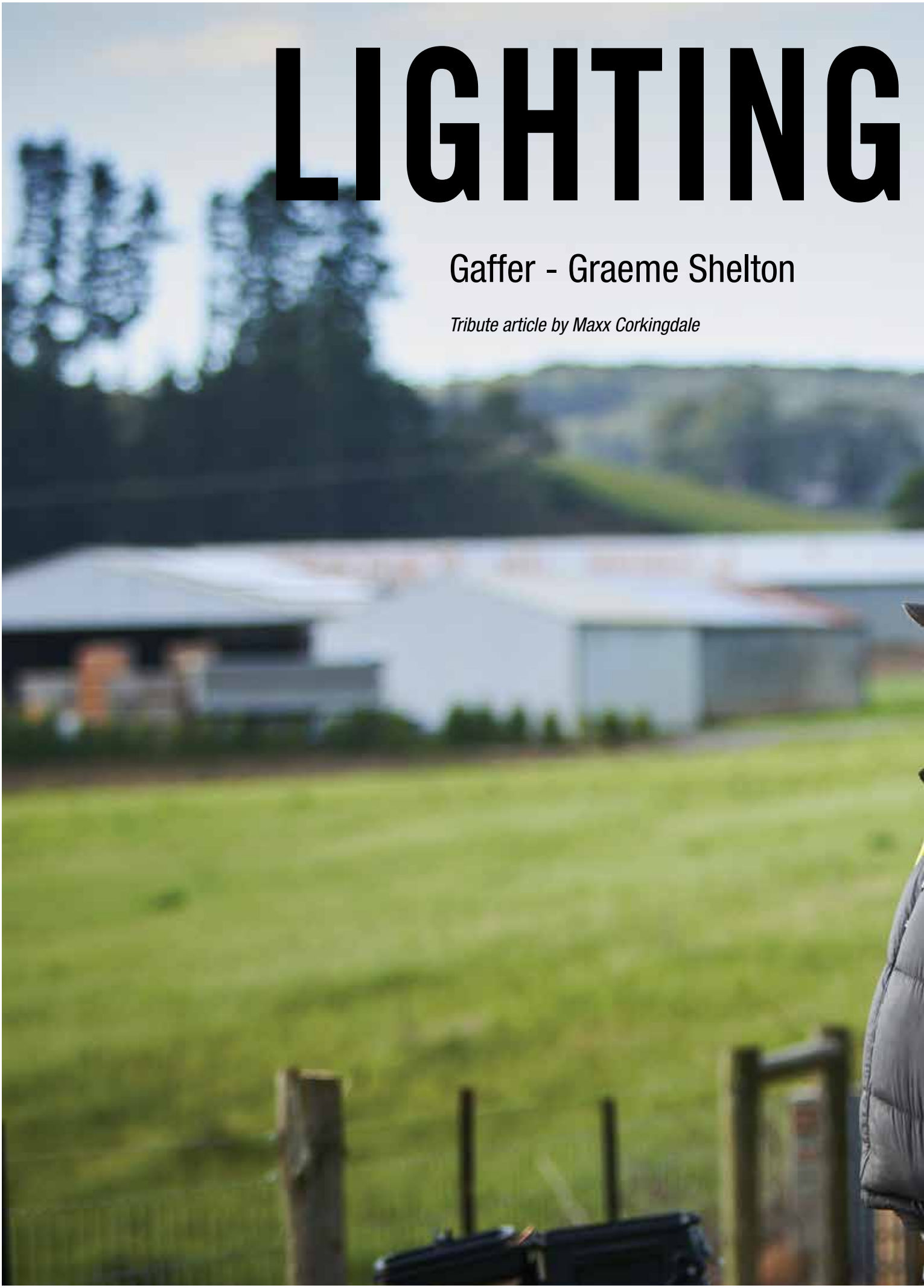
Naser (Ibrahim Al-Zedjali) in TV Series 'Scattered Barriers'
- DOP Susan Lumsdon, DIRECTOR Abdul Bari abu El-Kheir. PHOTO Film Gate/NETFLIX

Filming TV Series 'Dreams Drawn By Dust' in the UAE for DIRECTOR Abdul Bari abu El-Kheir - PHOTO DOP Susan Lumsdon

LIGHTING

Gaffer - Graeme Shelton

Tribute article by Maxx Corkingdale



THE WAY

Graeme with long time 'Best Boy' Dave Smith - Aftertaste S1 - PHOTO Ian Routledge

Graeme with Anna Howard ACS - Aftertaste S1 - PHOTO Ian Routledge

Graeme Shelton, the loveable South Australian Gaffer who has worked in the film and TV industry since 1969, has finally decided to retire. His career spans a mix of classic Australian iconic cinema, to the newer golden age of Australian film and television.

Graeme has lit projects for esteemed Australian Cinematographers, Mandy Walker AM ACS ASC, Geoffrey Simpson ACS, Denson Baker ACS NZCS, Aaron Gully ACS, Ernie Clark ACS, David Foreman ACS, just to name a few, as well as supporting the next generation of upcoming DP's.

A highlight over the years was lighting the Milli award-winning *Beautiful Kate,* shot by Andy Commis ACS, and the award-winning ABC series *Stateless* and *The Hunting,* both with Bonnie Elliot ACS.

Graeme started out his life working as a groundwater consultant in in Western Australia in the Hamersley Ranges, wandering around in the desert with a giant cable strapped to his chest, looking for 6 million gallons of water for the iron mines. It seems fitting then, that he would spend an equal amount of time later in life, lugging heavy equipment around the arid Flinders Ranges searching for another source of sustenance, creative art.

In 1969, tired of the Outback, there was a job going over in Griffith, NSW, at the local TV station (MTN-9). ***'I didn't have a clue about filmmaking or any technical knowledge, I had a box brownie as a kid but that was about it. I always loved movies and loved watching TV so thought I'd give it a go.'*** He applied for the job and got it and spent the next few years using a wind-up Bolex 16mm camera to shoot news, commercials – all black and white - and wrote copy and developed film in the darkroom. ***'In the country we didn't get any TV until around 1965 so all of a sudden, I was in this TV station, and it was like stepping into Starship Enterprise! It was very modern and glitzy!'***

That went on for a few of years, during which time Graeme decided to go to Sydney to become a hippie and *'succeeded very well at that'.* The TV station kept ringing up and inviting him to go back to do jobs, including the show commercials and '*things like that,'* and he'd end up staying again.

The mid-70s came along and Graeme decided that Coffs Harbor sounded nice and became a bit of a surf bum for about a year. ***'I didn't really enjoy surfing. I tried it and fell off on numerous occasions, so I ended up just sitting on the beach watching other people. More of a beach bum really…'***

In 1976 – keen to try something else - Graeme heard that Premier Don Dunstan was making Adelaide into a vibrant arts and filmmaking scene, and the place-to-be to work in film. He packed up his boardshorts and moved to Glenelg and started freelancing in the burgeoning South Australian industry.

'It was ground-breaking at the time, as it was the first feature film to be shot in Australia on Super 16mm.'

Graeme got his start in SA working as a camera assistant on documentaries with people like Scott Hicks, that were mainly shot by David Foreman ACS. He then eventually transgressed into working as a Best Boy and Assistant Grip with Rob Morgan on a few feature films interstate and in Adelaide.

He decided not to continue with camera assisting work, as 'scratchy old film was too much responsibility'.

A couple of early projects he worked were *Dawn!* Shot by Russell Boyd AO ACS ASC, and *Blue Fin*, shot by Geoffrey Burton ACS, both with John Seale ACS ASC as the camera operator.

Graeme worked early on under Gaffers Tony Tegg and Trevor Toune and learnt basic lighting from them but credits his Gaffing education to the Cinematographers he worked with. '*What they want is what you get*,' is a phrase that still rings true today.

The first film he is credited as Gaffer on was the arthouse/softcore pornography film *Centrespread,* which was shot by Geoffrey Simpson ACS. It was ground-breaking at the time, as it was the first feature film to be shot in Australia on Super 16mm!

Following that, Graeme worked with David Foreman ACS on

Graeme - PHOTO by Bryan Mason

one of Craig Lahiff's first films *Coda,* and then moved onto Rolf de Heer's cult film, *Incident at Raven's Gate,* shot by Richard Michalak.

Graeme smiles, 'I don't know what happened after that, it's all a blur.'

Ernie Clark ACS has known Graeme for forty years and he shot *Robbery Under Arms* and *Under Capricorn* with Graeme as Best Boy electrics, and then *Peaches* with him as Gaffer. Ernie recalls, ***'A good gaffer is one of a DOPs most valuable assets. They're your second set of eyes, they might be doing a pre-light for you, prepping for the next scene, looking at how the light is working on actors, boom shadows, advising on the best gear for a shot, how long it might take to light a set or just keeping watch on the clouds or weather coming in. Graeme was good at all these things and did them with a quick mind, his wicked, infectious sense of humour and happy disposition. I consider that I was very lucky to have the pleasure to have worked with him together on so many projects over so many years.'***

After collaborating with many DP's over the years, Graeme believes an important part '*is sort of a mutual friendship or admiration for each other. Respect. Friendship. Those sorts of things.'* Sometimes the friendship never developed after the shoot, but just having a great time working with people can really benefit a creative partnership. Also, Graeme espouses pre-production, and strongly believes a good pre-production is always going to make the project better and helps stop problems before they happen.

Working with Geoffrey Simpson ACS on *Black and White,* the Cinematographer had a system where he would have a soft backlight, soft side light, soft front light and sort of neg the other side of the person. ***'So, it can take a little while to get into what the style would be like, but a good Pre can get everyone on the same page.'***

Graeme has a fond memory of working with Cinematographer Richard Michalak on *Incident at Raven's Gate,* as ***'he had a great style because it was all about edge light, through smoke. So that was quite an interesting sort of thing to be able to achieve.'*** Apparently, Richard was always impressed with the fact that Graeme could offer him up a light and it was always the right intensity. ***'So, I never told him how I did that. I don't know how I did it either.'***

All DOPs have different styles, but Graeme believes to a degree the laws are always pretty much the same. ***"If you want to ask a DOP at the start of a job, how do you want it to look? A lot of them will just say, 'I want it to look naturalistic.' But then a lot of that is governed by the situation as well. It's not always necessary to abide by the rules, you know, depending on where and what the atmosphere is of the set. 'Interiors are always much more fun to light than exteriors, because when you're outside it's a constant battle with the elements and you have a lot less control.'*** It does take a team effort by all the crew to keep a project moving, and Graeme notes ***'A lot of the time the measure of how a shoot will go is how I get on with the Grips. The Key Grip should be my best friend - the Gaffer's best friend on set as far as I'm concerned. So, if you upset the Grips, you don't get things done.'***

Before working with Oscar-nominated, Milli-award winning Cinematographer Mandy Walker ACS on *Tracks,* Graeme worked on a project called *Parklands,* which was Cate Blanchett's first film. Mandy always had a good knowledge about how she wanted that to look and together they created some beautiful nightscapes in the botanic gardens of Adelaide.

'It was the mid-90's and that was early days for Mandy, but you could see where she was headed. She had a strong vision for the visuals of the film, and you felt like it was a project well-managed.' Graeme lit *Parklands* for Mandy who then asked him to do *Australian Rules,* but he was working on *McLeod's Daughters* at the time, which he ended up doing for 3 and a half years and was his first full time job since 1976.

So, when *Tracks* was going to be shot in outback SA, Mandy called up Graeme again and they continued their collaboration. ***'Most of that film was desert exteriors, so she just let the ground do the fill, basically. We didn't ever really do much negging really either. It all had to look sort of a little bit***

Graeme light stand - Aftertaste S1 - PHOTO Ian Routledge

washed out. But I think that made the look of the film what it was, what she wanted to achieve.'

Graeme went on to light the debut feature for Andy Commis ACS *Beautiful Kate,* which won the Milli award in 2010. ***'That was an interesting experience because he wasn't really used to having a big crew or anything, I don't think. And he was always surprised that I was standing behind him, you know. I don't think he'd ever worked with a Gaffer where someone was waiting for the whisper – where you know the DP wants to tweak that light or it needs to be barn-doored in a bit or whatever. Andy did an amazing job. I thought he had some great ideas about how to light things.'***

Andy remembers happily, ***'I had the absolute pleasure of [working with] Graeme on my first feature film*** **Beautiful Kate.** ***We shot on 35mm, and Graeme was always by my side at the camera with calm and grace. A rock of wisdom that gave me untold confidence. Coupled with the finest dry humour you could imagine. If only we had the chance to do ten films together!'***

Graeme worked on two back-to-back projects with Bonnie Elliott ACS and enjoyed her naturalistic style. He believed her sense of drama was conjured up by the way she framed things, the way the camera interacted with the cast, and what she put in front of the lens, ***'… a filter, sometimes a little smudge on something, a bit of sparkly glass or something like that." He continues the compliments about Bonnie with, "A lot of the time in TV you just kind of need to be quick on your feet and get the day done rather than get the shots done exactly the way you want them, but Bonnie I think managed to do both pretty well.'***

Bonnie – who refers to Graeme as the '*Buddha of South Australian Lighting'* – started her collaboration with him in the suburbs and high schools of Adelaide with drama series *The Hunting*, then travelled into the world of cults and detention centres with *Stateless*, in the stark landscape around Port Augusta. It was here that she was introduced to his 'Parachilna Bounce', the trusty ultra-bounce of Graeme's that had taken on a warm patina over many years of films out in the red dirt of the Flinders Ranges and beyond. ***'To me it symbolised the wealth of experience that Graeme brought to set, I loved to ask him to bring it out of the truck! It was a true pleasure to collaborate with him on these projects, and I will always be grateful for the fine eye he brought to the images we created together his kindness, wisdom, and wry humour on set.'***

Graeme worked with a third Milli award-winner, in Denson Baker ACS NZCS on *Oranges and Sunshine* and *Chasing Satellites.* Denson remembers Graeme fondly, ***'I was familiar with Graeme's work as he had worked with several DOP friends of mine. When I came to Adelaide to shoot the UK/Australian Co-production*** **Oranges and Sunshine,** ***I jumped at the chance to work with him. With his wealth of experience and keen eye for light, I knew that I was in safe hands with a gaffer who has my back, which is very important when shooting big set-ups on a tight schedule. Even more important to a great working relationship is his dry sense of humour and sharp wit.***

I worked with Graeme several times again since then, and he has been my go-to gaffer for everything that I have shot in Adelaide.'

Graeme noted how Denson was such a good camera operator, as well as being very fond of coloured gels on the projects. ***'He loved dirty white and all these orange bastard ambers and all that sort of stuff to achieve bits and pieces.'*** This type of colour work now is achieved with LED fixtures, which Graeme enjoyed when they were brought into the mainstream of film lighting packages.

'Well, it's just the ease of not having to rattle gels and, you know, being able to conjure up colours on your phone or iPad.'

Graeme liked to embrace new technology throughout his career, sometimes not because he wanted to, but because the DP wanted to. He smirks, ***'Some of the purchases I made over the years for DP's paid off, some of them went into the***

truck at the end of the job and were never seen again.'

He did enjoy the fact that one person could almost control the whole set with Bluetooth, which was obviously a big change. That overall was quite a revolution for those lower budget productions that couldn't afford to DMX every lamp on the set. ***'And then when the powerful LED's came in, and you didn't have to haul out the 12K's anymore, life became a little more enjoyable.'***

Aaron Gully ACS has been working with Graeme (Uncle Graeme to him) for 30 years, ***'From memory, it was with Graeme that I first worked with an LED light source. Though crude at the time, Graeme was convinced that LED's would end up dominating the gaffer's lighting arsenal, C'est la vie…'.*** Aaron was lucky enough to work on Graeme's final job and ***'…it was an arduous day, as a lot of shoots are, and in true Graeme understated style, on wrap, as he loads his truck, he tells me, 'Well that was my last job', I was like "WTF!" I wouldn't have expected any other swansong delivery from Graeme. It was perfect, almost rehearsed. Yet I know, after thirty years of working with the man, it wasn't. It was just Graeme's classic, laidback style when announcing something of a milestone nature.'***

Switching to Graeme's own love of cinema, he opines about the films he enjoys, starting with a classic. ***'Look, it's boring a cliche, but my favourite film is* The Godfather. *It's so nicely lit. And I like the fact that the way it's directed, everyone in it, even though they're all pretty much evil, they're all so elegant and still and quiet. Also, I like a lot of Robert Altman's early films,* McCabe & Mrs. Miller, *and especially* Nashville. *Nashville's not cinematically so great but every shot's a zoom shot so you know, it's visually interesting.'***

Graeme doesn't mind an old film by Roman Polanski either. *Chinatown* or *The Tenant*, which was shot in Europe and has such a grimy, grainy look to it.' ***like working on sets where you had darkness in the frame as well. I always think that makes the images much more cinematic. If you got the excuse to have darkness in the frame of course. Creating darkness was always almost more interesting than creating light.'***

Graeme is lucky because he doesn't have a memory of his worst day on set. There has been no big, horrible day, that some crew members remember for the rest of their career. He's had hot days in the Flinders Ranges where it's teetering on 50°C and the hot wind is howling all day, but in those situations *'you're just waiting for the sun to go down and the bar to open.'*

As some parting wisdom to pass on Graeme reflects on the importance of behaviour on set. ***'A lot of it's about behaviour. No one person is the most important person on set because it's all about being part of the crew and collaborating, just getting on with people.'***

Also, ***'…if you've got the opportunity, watch the rehearsals. Watch how the actors act and how they move and where they go. I mean quite often a lot of times, you don't necessarily get to see rehearsals and the DP might tell you what to do, but I think if you've got the opportunity to be able to just watch how the set gears up to shoot a certain scene, it's invaluable, no matter your job.'***

Graeme Shelton & the Parachilna bounce
- PHOTO Bonnie Elliott ACS

'There's no true retirement in the film industry, you just fade to grey.'

And Graeme has a message about the motivation for a lighting source. ***'As far as lighting is concerned, I guess that would be a circumstantial thing where I'd just say, look, we're going to put a light over there because we are theorising that there's something over there in the corner, you know, and light is kicking of it. Don't suppress your imagination about where the light should or would be coming from. You have my permission to make it up!'***

Graeme's daughter is in the industry but that wasn't always the plan. ***'Rita [Graeme's wife] is a Designer, and I was a Gaffer, and I don't think Olivia was keen on the hours and she was more in love with the theatre. But I think when she started doing a few films, she realised that the money's better and she also liked the ever-changing friendships and crews and things like that. I think she'll do pretty well, she's already sort of clambered up the ladder in the wardrobe department. And she seems to have a fairly strong opinion of leadership, and how things should happen and how people should behave and how they should operate. I can only wish her the best and hope that she one day gets a really big job overseas and invites us to come and stay with her.'***

Graeme isn't sure of his next step in his life right now. He definitely hasn't thrown the interest away. ***'I just hope it's not a downhill slide towards the end,'*** he says jovially. ***'I mean, the reason I sort of retired was due to a little bit of bad health and the fact that I didn't really want to go buying a whole bunch of new gear, update everything and all that. But I keep an interest. I still watch all the new things on YouTube, gear, and updates and all that. So hopefully I can sort of keep my finger in. I saw Geoffrey Simpson ACS a little while ago, and he said he maybe has a film coming up over here, and he said, 'I'll come back and shoot this, and you'll be on it.' And I said, 'But I've retired'. He said, 'No, no, you'll be on it'. So, you know, that could happen. I could just be the executive Gaffer without a truck.'***

THE DESIRABLE DISASTERS IN SPHERICAL CINEMA GLASS

Article by Patrick Van Weeren

Patrick Van Weeren with Zeiss Super Speeds

For most cinematographers, the glass is half full when a thin layer of imperfection is added to their lenses and half empty when we need, let's say, the image to be more 'painterly, cinematic, dreamy, contrasty, cleaner, sharper, organic' and have 'character'.

Describing in words what lenses bring to an image has always been especially difficult as most cinematographers are extremely passionate about lenses. This passion and knowledge of cinema lenses was front and centre during the European lens summit early this year.

Michael Koerner's Pacific Northwest US lens summit was held for the first time at the facilities of CVP in London, UK. The already infamous lens summit pub quiz on the Saturday night was a battle for the attending cinematographers, lens manufacturers and technicians. At stake? To win the first-place prize "The Cine Lens Manual" by Jay Holben and Chris Probst ASC, a must-have for any lens geek. (Honestly, judging the competence of the audience, most people had already read this book cover to cover).

The 2023 Oscar winner, James Friend ASC BSC was present and helped all teams fair and square with some tips to guess the lenses he used on *All Quiet on the Western Front.* His approach was similar to the lens selection Claudio Miranda ASC chose on *Top Gun Maverick* (which Claudio explained gracefully to an enthusiastic crowd from the ACS QLD Branch in a Gold Coast cinema last year).

They didn't shy away from mixing brands and budget range. Claudio combined the Sony Venice and Fujinon Premista's, Canon zooms, Zeiss/ARRI Master Primes, Sigma High Speed FF, Zeiss Loxia and 10, 12 and 15mm Voigtländers etc. James mixed and matched ARRI 65 S lenses: ARRI Prime DNA primes; BLACKWING[7] Tribe[7] and Zeiss CP.3 on the Alexa 65; Mini LF, Sony Venice (night shoots) and Red Weapon (plates). Both expressed a similar freedom of choice and variety of brands and budget.

So how do some cinematographers choose lenses these days?

The lens choice is one of the bigger impacts we can make to distinguish one 'look' from so many others in the growing media landscape. The beauty of the imperfections of 'vintage' glass has been a popular tool for many cinematographers to be different. It has helped to make digital images look more pleasing when the harsh reality of digital ones and zeros leave nothing to the imagination. Funny to note that cinematographers in the analogue film days cried out to lens manufacturers to get rid of aberrations. The opposite has happened in the digital age.

Rainbows and unicorns.

Prime sets such as the Kowa's, (Super) Baltars, Cooke Speed Panchros, Canon K35's (which were low budget lenses in the 70s), Zeiss Super speeds, Leica R lenses are now the equivalent of oysters, white truffle, or Alma's caviar for some.

Some single prime lenses enjoy 'unicorn' status and, if you're lucky, include a rainbow flare. The Master Prime 100mm Macro, the Ultra prime 8mm, the Leica Elmarit 19mm, the Lecia Noctilux, the Canon F/0.95 dream lens and many others haven't been beaten yet. Not to mention the amazing magical world of anamorphic. The lenses that were considered cheap (and worse) in the 60s and 70s are now highly sought after and unaffordable for most.

THE TUNING.

According to some insiders, we've moved to a new phase in this trend.

When Ed Lachman ASC, was asked to shoot Netflix *El Conde* in black and white, he didn't just choose vintage Bausch and Lomb Baltars, (1930). He used mixed glass and completed the set of the self-proclaimed 'Ultra Baltars' to fit the Monochrome Alexa Mini LF. These were designed and rehoused by Zerø Optik / Caldwell.

There seems to be a need for fine-tuning the vintage 'look' due to the new way of consuming the image in HDR with brighter and 'better' screens.

CINEMATOGRAPHERS NOW LOOK TWICE AT THE IMPERFECTIONS FROM VINTAGE LENSES.

A lens which looked pleasingly soft on a face can now look distractingly out of focus due to the close-up effect of image details that full frame, high dynamic range and bigger screens bring. Displays show even more colors and contrast than a few years ago: what looked great on SDR delivery maybe looks 'over-the-top' on a HDR display.

The request hasn't gone unheard. Leading manufacturers seem to have created a new style of modular lenses that can be tuned. Panavision, ARRI rentals and L.A. based rental house Otto Nemenz are the trendsetters when it comes to dedicated lens tuning.

Otto Nemenz (with P+S Technik) created his, rental only, tunable Ottoblad prime lenses (based on vintage Hasselblad). His method is quite unique: you can dial in the adjustment in six steps, which makes it easier to use while on the filmset. The Panavision and ARRI Rentals (only) models make it feel like a Michelin star restaurant with unlimited menu options for the dining DOP. Unfortunately, you must give them back after the meal.

There are inspiring stories of Panavision's Senior Vice President of Optical Engineering Dan Sasaki's team hand-picking and modifying vintage lens designs when working with acclaimed cinematographers such as Mandy Walker AM ACS ASC, Greig Fraser ACS ASC, Robert Richardson ASC, Hoyte van Hoytema ASC FSF NSC, to name a few. With ARRI Rentals, the work has been significant to say the least. They created an incredible range of large format glass for rent only, such as the ARRI DNA series, the 65 S, Vintage 765, the Alfa, Moviecam and Heroes lens series.

P+S rehoused seventies Technovision Anamorphic 1.5 FF 2.2

Several manufacturers have announced multiple 'looks' for their prime lenses. These modular lenses are going beyond the classic coated and 'uncoated' options we've seen before. One challenge their design teams have is to make these changes tunable and reversable throughout a production. Another challenge is that most of the classic vintage look that they try to re-create was affected by discoloration of a component called thorium dioxide, which isn't allowed to be used anymore. This component degraded throughout the years and a set of primes would change colour to warmer amber mostly, and darken to a lower T-stop, and would not be a matching set after a decade or two.

Funnily enough, this was seen as part of the look of the new school of cinematographers in the 60s and 70s who couldn't shoot with studio budgets and ended up with the more mainstream decade-old lenses, which now had a different 'look' than years before. Combined with faster filmstock, handheld usage and shooting on location, these lens artifacts became part of the new signature style without even asking for it. It also means that the 'look' of a certain vintage lens looked different in each past decade. The lens Gordon Willis ASC mostly used for ***The Godfather*** wasn't just that specific 40mm Super Baltar: it had aged like a good wine. When someone used the same lens twenty years later it would have had a different result. Manufacturers had to look at new technologies to battle these inconsistencies between lenses. Manufacturers have been able to get close to this 'look' with modern coatings and materials but there's still a difference. Luckily with more precise manufacturing and modern color correction tools, finding a 'matching' set of primes is less of an issue these days.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CAMERA ON LENS DESIGN.

Film capture is more forgiving for some lens aberrations due to its analogue behavior. Digital cameras are designed with pre-existing optical filters, (blocking

ARRI Signature Prime being explained during the Lens Summit held at the CVP facilities in London

IR, UV and OLPF optical low pass filter to avoid moiré and aliasing) and with photo-sites that capture light in a completely different way than film. The photo-sites on a digital sensor seem to prefer direct light and have a bit more trouble with stray light or indirect light. Lenses which were developed in the film era were not designed with this filter array in mind. A small part of the optical path is now in the hands of the camera manufacturer. The big question is: How to make a lens perform best with different camera manufacturers that have different filter arrays with different thickness and results?

In many modern lenses, the correction for an average optical filter array in front of the sensor is taken into consideration. However, the same lens in front of a different camera might not perform the same, as these optical filter arrays change the optical path differently.

Since digital cameras became the evident majority, lens manufacturers such as Leica/Leitz and Cooke Optics were convinced to step back to the drawing board kicking off a new era for lens design.

In 2018 Zeiss launched the Supreme Primes, ARRI launched their Signature prime series, and shortly after the brand Tribe7 was launched by Neil Fanthom and Bradford Young ASC with their BLACKWING7 series of prime lenses made by IB/E Optics Uwe Eckerl design team.

Both the ARRI Signature Primes and BLACKWING7 lenses from Tribe7 have a modular design, but their approach is completely different.

Tribe7 gives you the chance to choose a base 'look' in advance, such as the B-tuned (early adopters), S-tuned (straight), T-tuned (transient) or X-tuned (expressive). Each of these tuning options have a secondary choice with the so-called skin tone sets, for example: Skins 2000 (amber) or Skins 3000 (blue). These skin tone sets will have to be changed by a trained lens technician. With the BLACKWING7 series most of the choices are mainly made in the buying process but the modularity is absolutely a plus. The rental house and the cinematographer have more options and can tune the 'look' of their film.

ARRI's Signature primes took the tuning of lenses a step closer to the cinematographer. These lenses are based on the 'look' adjustment being reversible by adding a 'signature' texture or glass to the rear of the lens. Eleven magnets in a circle can hold your rear element design in place with a holder, making this a lot easier than trying to stick a 'Dior 10' netting on the back of the lens yourself. Without any tuning the Signature primes are already an interesting look optimized for digital capture. Starting with a good lens gives you the chance to de-tune with more precision.

Zeiss and ARRI collaborated on the famous Master Primes in the early 2000's when film was still the major form of high-end capture. The Master primes were the benchmark in quality for film-based capture. Both manufacturers went their own way into a new design for a replacement in the digital world, Zeiss with the Supreme Primes and ARRI with the Signature Primes.

The look of the Supreme Primes has pleased many and even though Zeiss didn't give the user the chance to tune their lenses, they did create a new set with different aesthetics around the same time ARRI launched their Signature Primes. Some people consider these new Supreme Primes radiance lenses as the 'uncoated' version of the Supreme Primes, but this isn't the case. The coating has been adjusted to flare more but to maintain contrast and more control than a purely 'uncoated' lenses would. Canon would follow up from their CN-E primes with the Sumire Primes in a similar fashion.

Angénieux introduced the Optimo Primes in 2019. Together with the team from IB/E optics they took the modular design a step further. With some basic training for the lens technician, you can now replace the iris from oval shaped (anamorphic style), 3 (triangle), 6 blades to 9 blades, and even replace a lens element in the middle of the optical path, just before the iris. Angénieux

call this the 'internal optical palette', (I.O.P.), giving you the chance to place a diffusion filter, streak filter, clear or uncoated glass, inside the lens instead of in a matte box. Filter manufacturer Tiffen offers some of their mainstream matte box filters now for the Angénieux I.O.P. When filters are placed within the lens, just before the iris, the impact is bigger and more effective throughout the whole image. Rear lens elements can also be added via a screw mount to the back of the prime lenses without the need to open the unit.

Leica, or technically Leitz Cine Lenses and Cooke Optics, have not yet stepped into modular lenses but have updated their ranges with the Leitz Thalia, Elsie and Hugo primes. Cooke has the S7 FF, S8 and Speed Panchro Classic FF for a modern take on the classic look, and the S5 and S35 versions for the Speed Panchro Classics for those who want to balance the vintage look with the modern needs.

THE RE-HOUSING.

Re-housing older glass has been such a good business that you'd have to wait in line at the major brands and bring your own glass most of the time. However, with loads of vintage cinema and stills glass considered interesting for re-housing, there's a lot of work and expertise with companies such as P+S Technik / True lens Services / Duclos / Zerø Optik / GL Optics / Iron Glass etc.

THE HYBRID.

Anamorphic lenses are worth an article by itself, but there is an overlap with spherical. Hawk Hybrids are an example of a mix between both worlds. Vantage Hawk, known for their anamorphic glass and classic anamorphic aberrations, have written film history. To balance the anamorphic feel with a more 'forgiving' spherical user case, the Hybrids have a dual iris system in which the first iris blades drag an oval set of blades with them. The lenses are completely spherical but maintain the highlight bokeh effect that many of us are in love with and make it easier to work in close focus with a T stop of 1.9. The flare results of the Hybrids won't streak (as you'd see with the classic anamorphic) so this would have to be added with the famous Blue Streak filters or in post, giving the cinematographer more control over these typical streaks.

THE NEW BUDGET RANGES.

In the meantime, the lens manufacturers have perfected the process of making sharp and good contrast lenses and with the influence from the stills world we have plenty of crossover. Due to the still cameras shooting video, users are requesting smaller and lower budget cine-style lenses to match and cover full frame. The new Cooke SP3 series for E-mount, RF, L, M mount are a good example. Filter manufacturer Nisi (with their new Athena lenses at 1.9) are one of vast amounts of 'others' and relative new manufacturers making leeway, such as DZO Films and Loawa with cinema-style lenses, some of them even with rear filter solutions. We've got an interesting mix between market needs, physics, and quality.

If you want to create a smaller and cheaper lens that must cover full frame, this means we have to use all the modern technology to make these lenses perform well. However, some of the aberrations, field curvature and other distortions that come from these designs are reminiscent of the vintage looks that we recognised in the first place. Micro contrast, breathing and chromatic aberrations are more challenging physics to solve than with their bigger siblings, but are serious contenders for certain types of production, when used well. A slight adjustment of a T-stop can be all it takes to balance some of the artifacts, while others end up being part of the 'look' of these lenses.

The physical precision of smaller bearings internal gears etc. are obviously not as precise compared to the tolerance on larger housings and mechanics but for the owner-operator and documentary crews the look and feel of the cinematic lens is now even more within reach.

THE FILTERS.

Filters are the classic way to change the look of a lens in a modular fashion and this hasn't gone away. The classic sets from Tiffen, Schneider and other filter brands make it easy to take the edge off a lens when equipped with a matte box. Even better, now you have the chance of placing the same filters with different strength options later in the optical path: in the middle with the Angénieux Optimo primes; or at the rear element with Angénieux Optimo primes, the ARRI Signature Primes, NiSi ATHENA DZOFilms, and others.

THE REVIVAL OF SHIFT-TILT AND EFFECTS DIOPTERS.

Also returned from the past are the 'more than filtration' tools. The VFX diopter kits have a classic approach on adjusting the look of an image. The interest in these solutions has almost revived the Shift and Tilt lens fashion from a few decades ago. Back then, these were re-introduced due to stills cameras bringing cheaper Tilt-shift lenses into the world of filmmakers while shallow depth of field was already in fashion. Who knows? Maybe it's only a matter of time before we might see someone shooting with the 'Deakinizer' again (Otto Nemenz, *Assassination of Jesse James* – Roger Deakins CBS ASC BSC. Even Bunnings can help the cinematographer to create their own distortion filters with a DIY project: creating distortions while bending polycarbonate sheets to bend the light is a trial-and-error game but a fun experiment.

BROADCAST LENS TECHNOLOGY.

This year also started a crossover appearance from broadcast technology to the world of PL cinema lenses with Fujinon bringing a new competitor to the long lens world. The DUVO HZK25-1000mm at T2.8-T5.0 with a 1.5x build in extender and stabilizer, has a significant new look and quality. However, the 29 kilos might prevent people from quick company moves. For camera assistants seeing a square box lens might be daunting but the belt-driven focus motors give them a much-needed stability and response when pulling focus on such a long lens.

LENS DATA IMPROVEMENTS.

The need for lens data in the world of VFX and post-production is getting higher and higher. Zeiss has already their own version based on Cooke-I technology, the Zeiss XD eXtended Data adding lens distortion and lens shading to the mix. Zeiss acquired Ncam Technologies this year with the CinCraft camera tracking device and software to either give real-time position and movement for direct use with a LED volume/Unreal engine, or as information to the metadata files for post-production.

THE ART OF CUTTING

Article by Angela Cerasi

Charlotte Cutting, in LA - PHOTO Jason Hargreaves ACS

What shot does the editor wish the cinematographer captured on set? Charlotte Cutting is a Brisbane-based editor who predominately works on feature films and long form TV series. Angela Cerasi interviewed her recently to find out, plus the perks of working with different DOPs and how she decides what makes the cut, and what doesn't.

Drawn to compelling characters and stories, Charlotte loves nothing more than crafting a story that lingers on in the minds of an audience long after the screening is over. She has edited several films that have sold internationally, including those to Disney, Universal Pictures, Netflix, and Hallmark. This year she edited the TV series, *Rock Island Mysteries* Season 2 with Fremantle for Nickelodeon and next year she will return for Season 3. Charlotte was also one of the editors on the globally released, *Dive Club* for Netflix.

Although editors and DOPs focus their attention in different phases of a project, they share the same goal; how can we best tell this story? Not only do editors decide how scenes are sequenced, but how shots are sequenced within the scene, and which take is the best one for each shot. Charlotte admits the best take is rarely the first one, (and depending on the actor, sometimes never the last one!) although the director will usually have their preference recorded on the continuity sheets. The best take is based on the actor's performance, pacing, camerawork, and continuity. Incorrect eye lines and soft focus is a deal-breaker. Editors need to think about dialogue and potentially cut out pauses and stumbles. They can cut out lines altogether and have them replaced with new lines in ADR. Throughout the edit Charlotte will temp in sound effects and music which all become crucial factors in shaping the narrative of a film.

The edit begins on Day 2 of production for Charlotte, when the first day of dailies is received. Avid is used to cut together the rushes and turn them around for production to view the following day. So, by the end of production, an assembly of the film complete with music and sound effects is ready for the director to view. Bigger budget films may have an assembly editor to do this leg work, but Charlotte doesn't mind. She enjoys the process and gets to see and hear everything that is happening in front of the camera, before the clapperboard is even clapped.

Most people are aware that the script supervisor is the editor's representative on-set. But Charlotte has a special insight into production, on-set life, and the challenges of a cinematographer. Her husband is award-winning DOP, Jason Hargreaves ACS. She says the exchange of knowledge works both ways. Charlotte believes Jason probably has a unique insight into coverage, and what editor's do and don't need.

So, which shot does Charlotte wish more DOP's gave her? You might be surprised to learn it's not more establishing shots or unusual perspectives—although she really likes to get these! It is in fact, a dirty over-the-shoulder shot. Charlotte believes they are so versatile—she can cheat performances and swap dialogue on the back of the actors head because you can't see lips moving. Further to this, it can really get an editor out of a jam if networks want to add ADR to scenes to clarify moments, for example.

Charlotte loves working with different DOPs in the same way she loves working with different directors. She says it's great to see how the DOP will cover a scene, how they move the camera and the kind of shots they've chosen to capture. She really loves seeing how a DOP imagines the scene opening with the kind of master shot they've chosen. When assembling the scene, this is usually the starting point. Sometimes as the film gets tightened it may change, but it really sets the tone of the scene.

Using a lot of non-verbal communication in a scene is a method Charlotte really likes to employ wherever she can. Essentially as an editor it makes for a more enjoyable process if there are options where you can make decisions like, 'do I play the line to camera or can I play it through the reactions of other characters?' If there is an opportunity for the nuances in a scene to be captured, this can be gold in the edit. Like a close-up of a jittery foot under a table, or mid-shot of the character raising an eyebrow in amongst the group of people.

Charlotte recently completed the rom-com, *Christmas Keepsake,* directed by Colin Budds and produced by Jaggi Entertainment for The Great American Channel. Filmed in sunny Brisbane but set in snowy winter, cutting around and cropping out green grass a challenge! Charlotte confesses this is a rarity because she very rarely reframes a composition. Unless there's something obvious that needs to be framed out, like a boom or a crew member, she respects the way the DOP has composed the shot and does not tend to touch it. Charlotte has a lot of admiration for crew members and how hard they work, so she sees it as her job to make sure that everyone's work shines and they're proud of the finished film.

So, has Charlotte ever been hit up by a cinematographer to make sure she uses their best shot in the film? Not yet. But if they did, she smiles and admits she would tell them 'She'd look into it'. See Charlotte is a big believer that a shot can't just be pretty, it must be functional. So, make sure the shot is moving the story along, and it will more than likely make the cut.

THE ART OF COLOUR GRADING - TEXTURE

Article by Angela Cerasi

Scene from 'Big Weather' (And How to Survive It)' - DOP Mark Broadbent ACS, Peter Coleman, Phil Dow - Colour Graded by Angela Cerasi

Hello! It's Angela Cerasi, your new ACS columnist, giving you a random 500-word riff about something image-related. I am a senior colourist and founder of Australia's delightful remote colour grading company, Peachy Keen Colour. Last issue we talked about the youthful and fun colour that is magenta, this issue we talk about something more touchy-feely. I give you, texture.

Like other elements that make up an image - camera angle, composition, colour, focus and lighting - texture has its own visual language and can give greater meaning to the story. Texture in screen production refers to the perceived surface of an image, whether it's silky, rough, glossy, gritty, smooth, dirty, soft, or clean.

In modern day cinematography, with exquisite data capture cameras like an ARRI Alexa or Sony Venice, a well-exposed image shot with a new lens will appear slick, sharp, and pretty perfect. This in itself is a 'contemporary' feel and might be spot on for your story. But what about the multitude of other feels that can be created with additional texture?

Back in the day, texture was inherent in images because we dealt with actual celluloid with silver halide crystals that had been eaten by chemicals. Yes, how cool is back in the day?? When we raced the spools of developed film through a telecine or projector and shone through a light beam, we saw the composition of the particular film stock - fast film bigger crystals, slow film smaller crystals/ finer grain - plus a whole myriad of textures like dust, sparkle—not to mention fogging and hairs! Texture back in the day originated a little more organically and magically, but we now have greater control over our image's 'perceived' finish. Grain, noise, sharpness, softness, blurring and noise reduction can be added in post-production, either to the entire film, certain shots, scenes, or parts of an image.

It's not uncommon for a colourist to be asked to give a DOP's crisp, slick, perfect images more of a 'filmic' look. A big element of creating a 'filmic' look is the addition of some grain. Grain takes the edge off a perfect image and gives the perception of something a little more 'alive'. A subtle grain—finer grain or less strength—will do a lovely job of this and adds an authentic and human feeling to the story. The addition of a stronger grain—bigger particles, more strength—will be noticeable and could help signify a period in the past, or a feeling of nostalgia or sentimentality. Film grain is like the comforting and warm sound of a vinyl record crackle.

Together with grain and some handheld camera movement, over-sharpening the image can subconsciously trigger an emotional response from the audience. It is unsettling, gritty, and frenetic, and helps create a feeling of immediacy and danger. You can see every pore in the skin and create a weathered look. Textures like this might be used in a war film or a fight scene.

Opposite to grittiness is a silky, smooth look. Enhancing skin with some softening of mid-tone details is commonplace for rom-coms or commercial beauty work. In advertisements for chocolate the entire frame would usually have a smooth texture as the desired feeling would be luscious, creamy, and glossy.

If an image inherently has some noise because of a higher ISO or slight under-exposure, colourists can add some noise reduction to smooth out any ugliness. Unlike the beauty of grain, noise can have digital artefacts or patterns in it, and is often speckled with unwanted colours.

Playing with texture in the colour grade can make fabrics appear more luxurious or mountains seem more treacherous. In a lifestyle TV episode, drone shots can be softly blurred to sit seamlessly alongside Canon C300. Texture is an aspect of cinematography which can be over-looked, but it not only adds depth and richness to visuals, but is a powerful tool in creating cohesiveness, juxtaposition, or the right "feel".

P.S This column's feature word is 'handles'. An editing term relating to the original source footage either side of the selected shot. The extra footage before the clip's in-point and after the clip's out-point. Colourists colour grade the edit, i.e., a timeline of selected shots, but they often export the selected shots back out of their software with twenty-five frame 'handles'. This means if the edit slightly changes there is breathing room to do so, without needing to go back into a colour grading session.

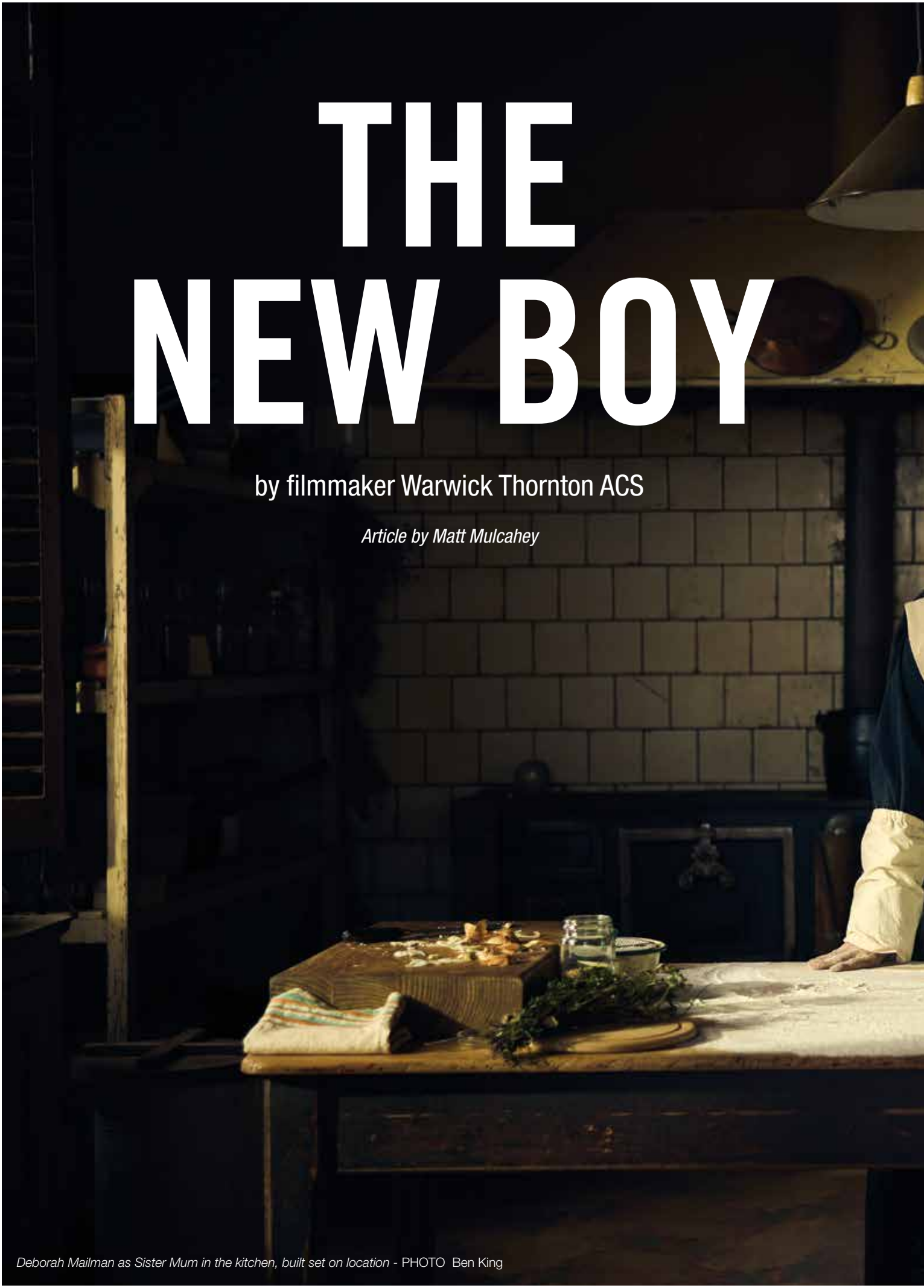
Enjoy this article? If so let me know at angela@peachykeencolour.com.au or DM me at @angela_cerasi

Angela Cerasi,
Senior Colourist
Peachy Keen Colour

THE NEW BOY

by filmmaker Warwick Thornton ACS

Article by Matt Mulcahey



Deborah Mailman as Sister Mum in the kitchen, built set on location - PHOTO Ben King

Wayne Blair and the boys, 'The New Boy' - DOP Warwick Thornton ACS - PHOTO Ben King

When Warwick Thornton ACS was eleven years old and running wild through the streets of Alice Springs, his mother sent him off to a remote Catholic boarding school to '*sort him out*.' There, stepping into a church for the first time, Thornton laid eyes upon Christ's tortured visage on the cross. That experience – and that image – served as the inspiration for the multi-hyphenate filmmaker's latest work, *The New Boy.* ***'I don't write from places that I haven't been or lived or felt. I have to write stories and characters I have a connection to,'*** says Thornton, who also directed and served as his own cinematographer. ***'When I was working on the film everyone around me said, "You know you are the new boy in the story, right?" At first, I would tell them, "No, I'm not," but I think they were actually right.'***

If the writer/director side of Thornton requires authentic connection to the material, then the cinematographer side craves a decluttered environment to create his lyrical images. On *The New Boy,* that meant a crew full of longtime Thornton collaborators working with one camera, one LUT, one shooting stop and just three lenses.

Set in the 1940s, *The New Boy* opens with the striking sight of a nine-year-old Aboriginal boy (played by first-time actor Aswan Reid) atop the back of a police officer in a stark desert landscape, choking the man to near unconsciousness. The boy is ultimately subdued by the mounted patrol and dropped in the dead of night at a remote orphanage run by an unorthodox nun, Sister Eileen (Cate Blanchett). There, he is introduced to Christianity and put to work alongside the mission's other young charges in the surrounding olive orchards and wheat fields. Soon after the nameless "new boy" arrives, a life-size carving of Christ on the cross appears at the orphanage as well, an event that inspired the film's World War II-era setting. ***'The school I went to was run by Benedictine monks and it had those types of artifacts because they sent a massive amount of amazing paintings and relics from Spain to Australia in the 1940s as the Nazis were ransacking the world for anything worth its weight in gold and a lot of [actual] gold too,'*** explains Thornton.

The New Boy debuted back in May at the 76th annual Cannes Film Festival before hitting Australian cinemas in July, completing a journey that began eighteen years ago when Thornton first began work on the script. Early versions featured a different title and a Benedictine monk at the centre of the story. At one point a French actor was cast in the lead, but Thornton couldn't secure funding and the script eventually ended up "in the sock drawer," Thornton's favored home for unrealized projects. That changed when Thornton and Blanchett crossed paths at the Berlin International Film Festival in February of 2020. Though admirers of each other's work, they had never met. When Covid began shutting down production work shortly thereafter, Blanchett reached out and the two began a Zoom relationship.

'At first, we were having massive conversations about everything except cinema. We were trying to suss each other out in a way. I'm sure she was trying to figure out if I'm a pain in the ass, which some people say I am,' laughs Thornton. 'We got on like a house on fire and I thought, "I've got a couple scripts down there in the old sock drawer, and there is one that could work if we changed it from a priest to a nun."'

One aspect of the project that didn't change once Blanchett

Cate Blanchett as Sister Eileen in the church, built set on location - PHOTO Ben King

came aboard was Thornton's dream location – a scenic hillside he'd discovered during his frequent drives from Alice Springs to Sydney. ***'It's a three-day drive, but I prefer that to a three-hour flight in a strange way. I always have great ideas during that drive,'*** explains Thornton. ***'The route I take is through a little town called Burra and whenever I pass through that area it always brings out all these amazing emotions in me. It feels like you are in*** **Days of Heaven.** ***It doesn't matter what time of year; it's magical even though it's just bloody wheat fields.'***

To transform those wheat fields into a 1940s-era mission – complete with living quarters and church – Thornton turned to production designer Amy Baker. However, when Thornton and Baker arrived at the idyllic locale in prep, they were met with an unexpected complication. ***'When I first found that spot I thought, "This is absolutely the most perfect place." When we build the sets, every window will have a beautiful vista,'*** laughs Thornton. ***'Then when we went back to scout, there were 150 giant bloody wind turbines in the distance. Nowadays you can paint them out, but it cost us a lot of money to get rid of them.'*** Even with the towering environmentally friendly eyesores sullying his pristine panoramas, Thornton still raves about the location and Baker's work constructing the sets. ***'Amy did an amazing job,'*** says Thornton. ***'It looked so good that you started to feel like, "Oh no, there's a better shot over here! Wait, there's a better shot over there!" You could get a bit confused because you had too many great shots.'*** The limiting factor to the infinite number of shootable frames was Thornton's choice to go single camera. There may have been a beautiful shot in any direction, but Thornton could only select one of them at a time.

'I grew up in that system where you started at the bottom carrying boxes and worked your way up. So, I always try to give the people around me a leg up if they're interested...

'I've done so many films with two or three cameras and the pressure always mounts to shoot faster because naturally you're getting more angles. Then you walk away from the scene going, "We went through three different setups with three cameras, so I know we must have got something to cut. I don't really know what the hell it is, but we must have got something,"' says Thornton. ***'By having one camera and decluttering the whole system, for every single shot the camera could be exactly where it wanted to be rather than compromising. We never had to say, "Can you move that other camera three feet backwards and two feet to the left because you're in our frame?"'***

For his lone camera, Thornton chose the Panavision Millennium DXL2 and its 8K Red Monstro sensor, operated by Jules Wurm. ***'Jules is a really close and beautiful friend who started off loading for me and then went to focus pulling and now operates,'*** says Thornton. ***'I grew up in that system where you started at the bottom carrying boxes and worked your way up. So, I always try to give the people around me a leg up if they're interested*** **[in moving into a different role].'**

Thornton largely kept the DXL2 at the camera's native ISO of 1600, typical of his preference for defaulting to standard

Aswan Reid as New Boy in barn, built set on location - PHOTO Ben King

settings. ***'I believe in using the native ISO. [That number is set] by people who know what they're talking about,'*** he says. ***'You just have to be careful because grain can raise its ugly head and bite you on the ass. The 1600 native is pretty clean, but it can collapse when you push it really hard and then poor Trish Cahill, the colourist who does 90 percent of my films, has to fight to keep the continuity of the grain.'***

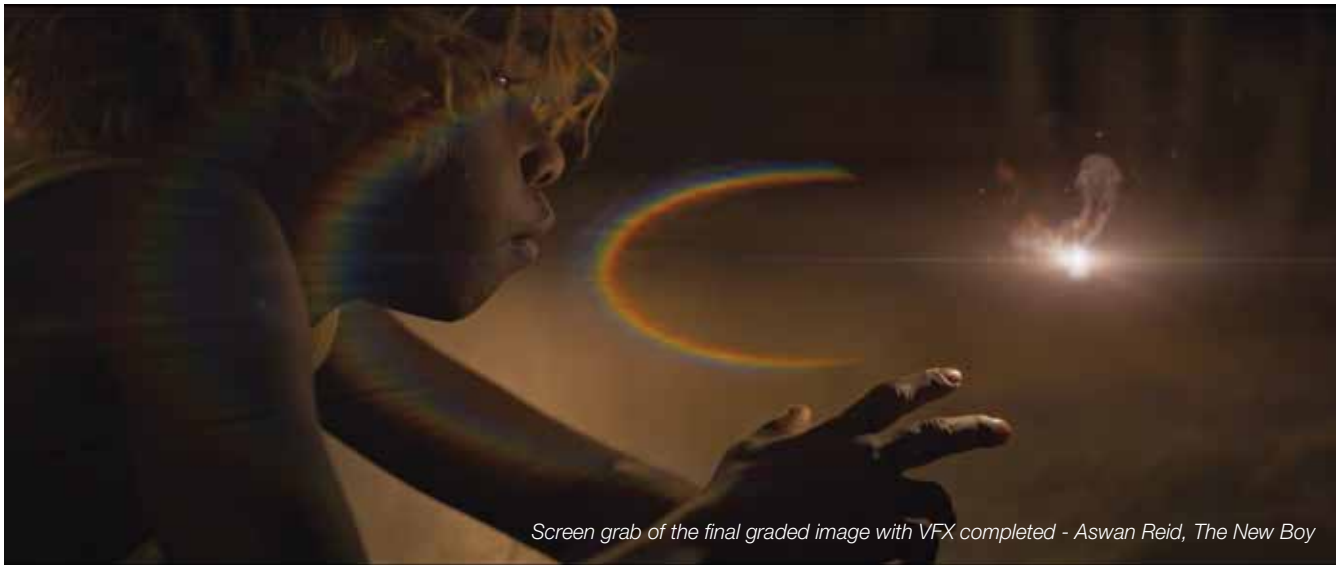
'We've got a duty of care to the actors we work with and when you start playing with lenses wider than 50mm, you start warping faces. When you're working with someone like Cate Blanchett, you've got to behave yourself.'

Thornton's quest for a simplified workflow extended to his on-set color pipeline, which featured a single LUT borrowed from his filmmaker son, Dylan River. ***'I'm actually a LUT thief,'*** laughs Thornton. ***'I'm incredibly petrified of new technology. I wish I could just use my old Panaflex Gold with some Kodak in it. Dylan shot a film called*** **A Sunburnt Christmas** ***and created a beautiful LUT for it. I've basically stolen that LUT from him and I've used it on every film I've done since. I think of the LUT as being like a film stock and over the years I have really learned how that LUT behaves and so I've stuck with it.'***

Thornton estimates 95 percent of *The New Boy* was shot on just three Panavision anamorphic lenses – a 50mm E Series, a 75mm C Series and a 200mm Macro Anamorphic Prime, selected after extensive tests at Panavision Sydney. ***'I'm not a person who needs 10 boxes of lenses. I think it's an incredible waste of money,'*** says Thornton. ***'Give me three lenses and I can make a film.'*** Thornton lists the 50mm E Series as his "go-to" for *The New Boy.* ***'We've got a duty of care to the actors we work with and when you start playing with lenses wider than 50mm, you start warping faces. When you're working with someone like Cate Blanchett, you've got to behave yourself,'*** says Thornton. ***'If you want*** **[the field of view]** ***of something to be like a 27mm or 32mm, then just take 10 steps back with the 50mm and you've got the same thing without the warp.'***

The 50mm may have been on the camera most frequently, but it was the 200mm Macro Anamorphic Prime that became Thornton's favourite piece of glass. Developed in the late 1990s, the lens is a macro-option to match the Panavision Primos. ***'I always forget to get a macro lens and it always bites me on the ass. Those older Panavision lenses are beautiful, but they have terrible minimum focus. Some of them are like six feet. There's always a close shot of something like a drop of blood on the ground and my 1st first AC Claire Bishop, who is an amazing focus puller, will be like "Warwick, the minimum isn't close enough for that,"'*** says Thornton. ***'So, for The New Boy, Jules suggested that 200mm macro lens and I just fell in love with it. I wanted to steal it and keep it forever because it's magical.'***

Thornton also opted for simplicity in terms of previsualization. Though his compositions have a geometric precision, Thornton doesn't shot list, or storyboard. ***'Because I'm the director as well as the cinematographer, I'm not having that dialogue with another person to try and work out what their magical vision is,'*** says Thornton, who has lensed all of his feature films. ***'If it's a particularly difficult sequence and I want to use the camera in a very specific way, I'll draw some stick figure people, but that's more so for the grips. I'll tell them that I want the camera to go from A to B, but***



Screen grab of the final graded image with VFX completed - Aswan Reid, The New Boy

Screen grab of the in-camera rushes – Warwick's hand holding/operating the peanut light for Aswan Reid)

I never tell them how to do it. I don't say, 'I want to use this specific crane or this specific gimbal.' I leave that up to them.'

That approach extends to lighting as well. ***'I never tell gaffers what light to use,'*** says Thornton. ***'They know their lights better than me. I just go, "I want something big and hard," or "Warm it up a bit".'*** Thornton makes the occasional exception to that rule if someone tries to pull out a particular LED unit. ***'My gaffer Andy Robertson kept trying to offer up those S360 ARRI SkyPanels and I'd just say, "Mate, you use those to light a tennis court,"'*** laughs Thornton. ***'They're not my kind of light. I like hard lights.'*** Delegating some of those decisions to his crew was necessary with a schedule like *The New Boy's.* The crucial opening scene of the child being captured by horseback patrol – shot in slow motion – was photographed in just a few hours from dawn to noon. ***'I believe one of the most important things is creating an immediate sense of place for an audience,' says Thornton. 'This movie has a big opening that's meant to feel epic and it's there to say to the audience, "You're going to go on a cinematic experience." It's not going to be a film with pages and pages of dialogue in a flat in New York. It's going to be a visual film.'***

'I never tell gaffers what light to use.. They know their lights better than me.'

Thornton had to quickly acclimate the audience to the new boy's powers as a *ngangkari* - or healer – an ability represented by a glowing orb of light. During the boy's first night at the orphanage, he crawls under his bed and by simply rubbing his fingers together the light appears, hovering in front of him. On set, Thornton hand-operated a practical bulb on a rod – painted out in post – to provide interactive light as well as something tangible for his young star to play to. Finding the right bulb required some rummaging by Thornton and gaffer Robertson. ***'We started off thinking an LED bulb would work, but the ones we had didn't offer 360 degrees of ambiance,' explains Thornton. 'So, Andy went to the truck and dug around in some boxes covered in cobwebs and came out with a tiny little peanut bulb from maybe the 1960s or 70s, a little screw-in bulb that you'd have in an aluminum torch.'*** Thornton also wanted an accompanying lens flare, which took a bit of trial and error to find. ***'I love Panavision lenses because they have the most rocking lens flares possible, especially the old E Series and C Series, but, strangely enough, we couldn't get any flares with that***

DOP Warwick Thornton ACS behind the camera with Cate Blanchett as Sister Eileen in 'The New Boy' - PHOTO Ben King

peanut bulb from any lens except the E Series 100mm, which only worked when the focus was about six to eight feet way away,'

Though not quite harkening back to the era of 50-year-old peanut bulbs, Thornton did prefer more vintage, harder units for his day interiors, rather than LEDs. Many of the exteriors were photographed at dawn or dusk, meaning day interiors were typically shot between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm, when the sun was overhead and not low enough to provide directional light through the windows. ***'We would generally punch in 9Ks and maybe a 6K or two,'*** says Thornton. ***'We'd basically start every scene with the lens at a T5.6 and have a look at the monitor and then start working. Almost the whole film was shot at 5.6, except for a couple of night sequences. Those interiors were all about placing people in the right spot and using the windows to our advantage, going quite hard with the contrast, and letting it fall off in the background. Those shots are about the characters, not the back wall.'***

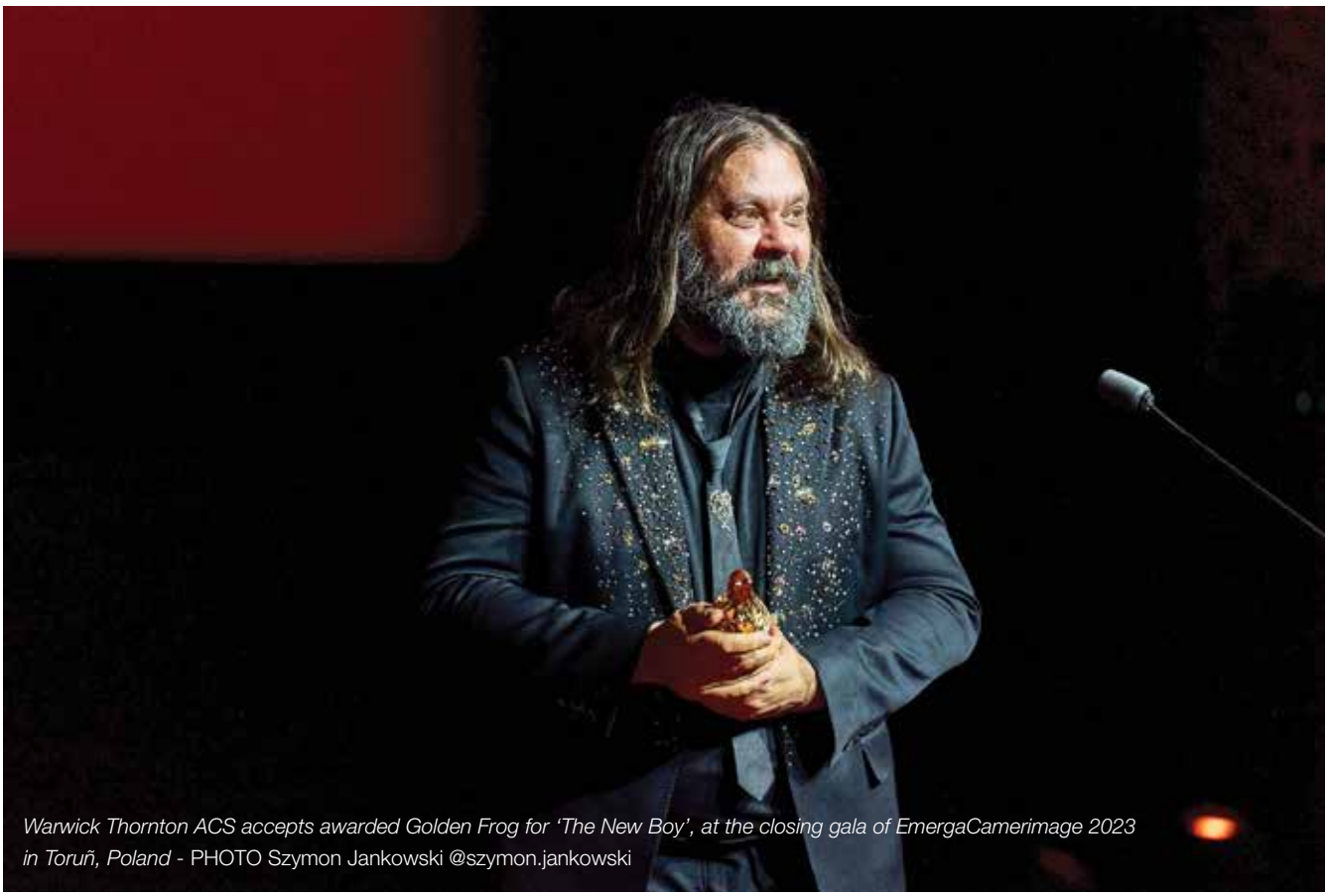
For night interiors, Thornton strove for stark naturalism, with scenes often illuminated by an on-screen bare bulb. Placing the actors in the right spot was again crucial, as was rigging the light so that it could be easily lifted and lowered in the frame for adjustments. ***'It gave us this 1940s noirish kind of lighting – a three-quarter key with a great shadow,'*** says Thornton. ***'That type of downlight can be brutal, but if the character is in the right place, it can be really beautiful.'***

Thornton employed hard light symbolically throughout the film, including several scenes where Blanchett's Sister Eileen faces moments that test her faith. ***'I thought of that light as the "cold light of day,"'*** Thornton says. ***'She is exposing herself to God. She's right out there in the full flood of the sun – or in this case the full flood of one of those big old brown Mole Richardson 10Ks spotted up on her – and she can't hide.'***

Metaphoric luminance was also used for a key scene toward the end of the film as the new boy – his *ngangkari* gifts fading as his indoctrination into Christianity takes hold – stands in church before the crucifix, his face bisected by shadow and harsh sunlight. ***'There are two different worlds happening on his face. You can say that the dark side is Christianity, and the bright side is Aboriginal spirituality, or you can say it in reverse,'*** Thornton says. ***'There's a balance that has to happen with those types of images. A film can very quickly turn into a visual wank and become self-important or self-indulgent. There is a director in me that's worrying about character arc and audience understanding, but then there's also the cinematographer in me who wants to make a film with no dialogue and just tell the story through images and light.'***

The challenge of balancing that duality is part of what keeps Thornton behind the camera on his directorial efforts despite the rarity of that arrangement. ***'I started in documentary, so there were a lot of directors/camera people then – the sole figure out on the great Western plane with their camera. I come from that world,'*** says Thornton. ***'To me, cinematography is a craft. You've got to work at it. And I feel like I'm going to be working at it for the rest of my life, but I love that struggle to make beautiful things.'***

WARWICK THORNTON ACS AWARDED '*THE GOLDEN FROG*' AT EnergaCamerimage 2023 in Toruñ, Poland



Warwick Thornton ACS accepts awarded Golden Frog for 'The New Boy', at the closing gala of EmergaCamerimage 2023 in Toruñ, Poland - PHOTO Szymon Jankowski @szymon.jankowski

Mandy Walker AM ACS ASC stood on stage in Toruñ for the closing ceremony of EnergaCamerimage 2023 and spoke to a full house, ***'Finally, our golden frog goes to a film that beautifully expressed a profoundly visual portrait of an extinguished spirituality.'***

Walker paused as the French translation was given, then uttered that most anticipated phrase, ***'The Golden Frog goes to cinematographer and director Warwick Thornton – for The New Boy.'***

The audience erupting as Warwick Thornton ACS took the stage. With well-versed Aussie vernacular Thornton declared, ***'Well, this is bullshit isn't it, I had a dream last night, I was in a Seinfeld show, and we were cueing for food, and I was being a bit of a dickhead, so the chef said, No frog for you!'"***

He pondered if this was actually the dream and went on to express how lovely the festival been. ***'I've been teary for a week and that's not because of the alcohol or the cold weather it's just the love of cinematography. I truly did realise that I will forever be a student and that is the most beautiful thing about what we do, we will always be students of this craft and this art. So, thank you thank you thank you.'***

PHOTO Maria Kowalska @mariakowalskaphoto

SONY - BURANO CINEMA CAMERA

SYDNEY LAUNCH - by Harrison Upfold

SONY BURANO Launch Sydney - PHOTO Harrison Upfold

SONY teamed up with VA Digital Hire to host an intimate Sydney launch of the new BURANO Cinema Camera.

A beautifully chosen backdrop providing a panoramic view across Darling Harbour through to the iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge did not manage to keep all eyes off the show's star, set up in the middle of the room — a treat given the camera is not yet commercially available.

The launch of new tools from SONY, including lenses, open-sensor photography and indeed the BURANO, had participants in awe of the next stage being taken in digital image production. It's testament to Sony's vision for an entire CineAlta future aligning the BURANO to work effectively alongside the VENICE and FX line.

The BURANO, boasts a 8.6K full-frame sensor, 16 stops of dynamic range, and colour science inherited from the Venice series debuted alongside its CineAlta siblings - the FX3, FX6, FX9, Venice and Venice 2. As the evening sky transformed from orange to blues and pink hues, the BURANO's dual-base ISO capabilities of 800 and 3200 came to the forefront, showing off its prowess in low-light conditions, a feature bound to have cinematographers dreaming of their next shoot low-light possibilities.

The BURANO has built-in image stabilization and PL mount or E mount options, an electronic variable ND filter, flexible resolution and codec options including 4K @ up to 120fps all making it a very versatile camera. The perfect in-between for a DOP filming anything from ENG to studio or on location shoots even 2nd Unit and rigs. An achievable price-tag for those getting serious and a beacon of innovation embodying Sony's commitment to the art of filmmaking. It's staggering quality and resolution is bound to pique cinematographer's interest, **and yes you can pre-order.**

IMAX SYDNEY - THE RIBBON, DARLING HARBOUR

Just look for the building with the "W"

Article by Harrison Upfold *with* included technical insights by Pawel Achtel ACS B.Eng. (Hons) M.Sc.

NSW ACS member Harrison Upfold took the opportunity to attend the surprise early opening of the IMAX Sydney. To celebrate the return of IMAX to Sydney the venue screened a special 'Nolanathon, opening with *The Creator*, which was amazing to see on a big screen, the colour was visceral. His next visit he watched *Interstellar*, which finally took full advantage of the screen size which made the trip back to the cinema well worth it.

Pawel Achtel ACS has strong connections with the Giant Screen industry, having served on the board of directors of the GSCA, and has close relationships with all industry participants including IMAX. As such, he was eagerly awaiting the opening. After seven years, you can only imagine the anticipation.

Pawel adds, the newly opened IMAX theatre is a 4K, 24 fps laser projection. This might have been "a step in the right direction" back more than a decade ago (it was 10 years ago since, together with Christie Digital, we demonstrated the industry's first 8K HFR laser projection demo).

Today with the 16K x 16K LED Sphere in Las Vegas, 8K LED DomeX theatres from Cosm, and an audience used to 4K TV's and phones for the past decade - the quality of the 50 year-old 70mm film benchmark seemed a minimum for today's audience' expectations. 8K TVs are now affordable. The decision to go with 4K laser is while a triumph of IMAX's marketing prowess, is certainly a step backwards compared to the high bar established fifty years ago that made IMAX brand recognisable symbol of innovation and quality. There were those lobbying for 8K LED for Sydney's biggest screen, though the new theatre no longer has side-by-side 15-perf 70mm film projector as it is still the case in Melbourne's IMAX.

The IMAX has 4K laser anamorphic projection (stretching image vertically to obtain 4:3 aspect ratio of the screen). So, not quite 3K measured vertically. To arrange for a proprietary IMAX DCP package production will need around $40K an hour for encoding. Limited to 24 fps, so no HFR capability. With the opportunity to review a test performed by Christie Digital which showed while much better than film projection, only achieve about 7-8 stops of dynamic range with peak brightness levels of approximately 22-foot lamberts (about 50 nits). It is about twice as bright compared to 15-perf 70mm analogue film projection but, for comparison, current LED panels are capable of 1000 nits peak brightness and substantially higher dynamic range due to non-reflective screen (as opposed to silver screen used for laser projection). For comparison my 8K Samsung TV also has 1000 nits peak brightness level - some 20 times higher than IMAX laser. So, contrast and brightness levels are all relative.

So, yes, I'm still excited that we finally have an IMAX theatre in Sydney (and I am working on films with intention to show there), but I'm also saddened at a lost opportunity that it had.

Harrison reminds us that towards the end of this year, IMAX is screening *Napoleon, Wonka, Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom* along with *Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé*. You can expect to see *Dune: Part Two* to fill the cinema for weeks, come 24 March 2024. The IMAX experience can be tailored to your needs, you can book a private box, couple seats or standard seats. Or hire the whole theatre. Whatever you do, support our industry, and see a film in the theatre these holidays. I highly recommend you check out these films on the really big screen at your nearest IMAX.

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Judd Overton, lighting the waterbed kill in 'Totally Killer' - DOP Judd Overton

TOTALLY KILLER

DOP Judd Overton

Written by Zachary Peel-McGregor

Dissecting the art of juggling comedy, horror and time travel, DOP Zachary Peel McGregor takes time out for a detailed look into the journey of fellow Director of Photography Judd Overton's latest collaboration on the feature film, *Totally Killer.*

Judd Overton starts off by saying the genre mashup was quite the ride, one definitely worth the price of admission. Collaborating with Blumhouse and Amazon *Totally Killer* has been widely praised by critics for its ambitious premise. I sat down with Judd over a nice cup of coffee in Culver City Los Angeles coincidentally just before Halloween and peculiarly enough on the same exact day as the main character Jamie Hughes (Kiernan Shipka) travels back in time in the movie - the 27th of October.

Totally Killer is set in the small suburban town of Vernon thirty-five years after the shocking murders of three teenagers, as the infamous killer returns on Halloween night to claim a fourth victim. When seventeen-year-old Jamie comes face to face with the masked maniac, she accidentally travels back in time to the year 1987. Forced to navigate the unfamiliar culture, Jamie teams up with her teenage mother and her group of friends to take down the psycho killer once and for all.

Over the course of our conversation, I came to appreciate how difficult it was to balance the intricate amalgamation of genres this film has. The expectations were high, given the pedigree of Blumhouse's extensive library of groundbreaking horror hits, in recent years including:

Get Out (2017) Director Jordan Peele and DOP Toby Oliver ACS, *The Invisible Man* (2020) Director Leigh Whannell and DOP Stefan Duscio ACS , *M3gan* (2023) Director Gerard Johnstone and DOP Peter McCaffrey

The trio of DOP's hailing from Australia and New Zealand.

Overton's introduction to working with Blumhouse came after operating for Toby Oliver ACS on some additional photography for *Insidious: The Last Key*. When the chance to shoot for the production house came up, he saw it as an incredible opportunity.

However, *Totally Killer,* was a definitive departure from Blumhouse's wheelhouse of traditional horror ventures. Instead, it presented a compelling genre hybrid, blending the elements of comedy and horror, with the added twist of time travel thrown in for good measure. The film pays homage, with multiple references, to the iconic 1980s classic *Back to the Future.*

Hitting the right Tone

One of the biggest challenges discussed was the tricky balance Overton needed to strike. Director Nahnatchka Khan and Overton meticulously navigated a script laden with some very tricky set pieces, and intense moments of graphic horror killings, while at the same time making sure they hit all the comedic scenes in the script. Overton emphasising the need to maintain the right tone throughout the film was very important to his director.

That was something Nahnatchka and Overton focused on from the very start ***'it's a comedy, but it's got horror, and we want the horror to be really ramped up.'*** They also needed to make the comedy consistent, making sure the editing flowed nicely into each other. ***'So that was the other thing we spent the most amount of time on. Where are we at in the script at this point, and how do we make sure we're not just dropping people into something without losing them. We had to look after our audience.'***

Ambitious Schedule

Apart from the ambitious twenty-five-day shooting schedule, the production faced numerous challenges, shooting during the height of the coronavirus epidemic—losing leading cast members, as they fell ill, during filming.

'We had to end up doing sequences without them.' The film had very little VFX, doing almost everything practically. ***'But with the actors going down, we did have to do a little by putting them back into a few scenes after the fact.'***

Totally Killer was shot entirely on location in Vancouver, a feat which demonstrates the impressive pace and efficiency in which Overton and his crew were able to operate all the while still managing to capture beautiful imagery. One challenge was the sheer number of setups required to cover an ensemble

cast which had up to eight characters in many of the scenes.

Overton knew they had an ace up their sleeve having already collaborated extensively with the Director on television including shooting episodes of *Young Rock* together, which meant they were both very comfortable shooting the comedy elements and ensemble pieces, already having a solid foundation of experience doing large page count days with multiple characters and cameras. Since arriving in the United States, Overton has really made multi-camera shooting a part of his forte, having mastered the ability to swiftly capture dialogue heavy scenes, quite often employing at least three cameras or even sometimes four at any one time on shows like *No Activity* and Peacock original, *Killing it.*

Initially production planned for a thirty-day shoot, but with budget constraints Nahnatchka and Overton had to reevaluate the schedule to accommodate the larger set pieces and horror sequences they both wanted to do, which ultimately meant condensing shooting days down to a tight twenty-five-day period.

Meticulous planning

Overton and Nahnatchka are comfortable with comedy, meaning they zoned in on the horror elements of the script in their pre-production period. Meticulous with storyboarding the film's elaborate murder scenes, paying huge dividends on the shoot days. Judd says it was not dissimilar to shooting a commercial. ***'Because of our level of prep, we were able to just play it by the numbers on the day.'*** They had a big cardboard sheet with all their frames stuck up, so everyone knew what we they were doing. ***'And we would just go through and cross off each frame as we executed it.'***

Getting the right Crew around you

Overton was quick to credit his crew as the driving force behind being able to make the schedule work. ***'That's the most important thing apart from the relationship with your director and the material is how do you get a great crew… getting the right crew around you is super important for me personally.'*** Overton likes his crew tight. ***'I make a family out of the crew, and invite that creativity from them as well, I think it's much better if they feel like they're contributing to the project.'*** Having so many moving parts to co-ordinate on this project meant Judd really put the feelers out before starting prep in Vancouver.

'I make a family out of the crew, and invite that creativity from them as well, I think it's much better if they feel like they're contributing to the project.'

Overton mentions fellow Australian Luke Barlow, the A Camera, 1stAC worked in Queensland on Overton's first feature, years earlier. ***'He's been living in Vancouver for a while, and he's got a family up there now - so when the film came up, I was like, "Hey I'm coming to town," and he was great and really helped put the camera crew together.'***

I find that's what the ACS is so great for — having that way of getting in touch and that camaraderie between other

Gravitron panorama 'Totally Killer' - PHOTO DOP Judd Overton

Cinematographers.' Both Jules O'Loughlin ACS ASC and Simon Chapman ACS were shooting in the area, at the same time as Overton. ***'It was just really great to have those two, to kind of check out other crew with.'***

Another person that Overton wanted to highlight is B Camera Operator, Jeff's Zwicker, particularly in helping to shoot the sequences—like the dodgeball scene and some unique murder scenes with dioramas. Models of the crime scenes were cleverly captured with probe lenses and macro moves to depict the murders of the past. These were used extensively in the final film adding another flavour and inventive dimension to the storytelling process.

Creating a distinct look for time travel

Early on in prep, one thing Overton wanted to sort was how to distinguish between the two time periods in the film. Contemporary 2020s and the 1980s. So, they could cut back and forth between the two time periods without having to be too heavy handed with, "We're in the 1980s now," and, "Oh we're in the 2020s now." For the 1980s scenes the team drew inspiration from the innocent tone with John Hughes films, *Breakfast Club* and *Pretty in Pink* aiming for a muted, inviting visual style.

Given 90% of the film happens in the 80s the team knew that they had to get it right. ***'We really needed to nail what that look was, and we wanted the jump to be subconscious with an authenticity without alienating the audience.'***

Overton tested a lot of lenses and even dabbled with the idea of shooting the period pieces with anamorphic glass, but ultimately concluded that not only would going anamorphic be prohibitively expensive for the production, but it would also limit how many matching sets of lenses they could secure for the multiple cameras they would be employing.

'I find that's what the ACS is so great for - having that way of getting in touch and that camaraderie between other Cinematographers.'

'Once you start down that path, you're affecting how fast the assistants can work and it would have slowed us down a lot. So, we ended up staying spherical'.

Overton ended up deciding on a set of Gecko lenses, manufactured in Germany. They essentially rehouse Canon K35's and supplement them with other vintage glass to offer a more complete set of focal lengths. They exhibit lower contrast than modern lenses with potential for a bit of flaring, including a subtle rainbow flare from highlights, which added a nice touch of 1980s nostalgia to the visuals.

Overton did use one anamorphic lens specifically the 32mm Kowa for a couple of shots in the film. The most notable during a scene when Jamie steps out of the time machine for the first time—into the 1980s a substantial 360-degree rotation around her on Steadicam. resulting in pronounced distortion at the edges, creating a disorientating effect. ***'I think it's actually like a 40mm with an adapter on it to give you that wider angle - it's out of control - super funky.'***

Kiernan Shipka as Jamie Hughes in 'Totally Killer' - PHOTO James Dittiger

Conversely for 2023 Overton opted for the Sigma Cinema Primes which offer a clean, neutral look with good contrast. These affordable lenses modelled after the Zeiss master primes provided an instant and effective juxtaposition between the two different eras without taking the audience out of the film.

'We were very clean for all of our contemporary stuff, and we really wanted that contrast.' They couldn't really push the saturation too much in the contemporary, ***'because varying colour was so eighties, we really didn't want that.'*** Using a little bit of atmos wherever they could, especially in the school and those sorts of places to give that sense of nostalgia. ***'It's all about that kind of eighties vibe — that along with the Gecko lenses really nailed it — I love them, they're just not too contrasty, but have a beautiful look which in combination with the Mini LF's full frame sensor is lovely.'***

Lighting Challenges and the Psychology of the Camera

Some of the other challenges was lighting the set pieces like the spooky Doll's House of Horrors. Utilising existing elements and navigating restrictions are testament to the team's creativity working with the limitations. ***'We had to use the electrics and everything that was there — and it was an experience that they had just busted out for Halloween so weren't allowed to move a wall and they had all these hydraulic monsters — so we couldn't touch anything. So, we were only allowed to use battery lights and sort of put them in where we could hide them.'***

The dialogue with Overton further uncovered the evolution of their shooting style, employing coverage techniques where they weren't married to the line - especially in multiple character scenes. ***'Nahnatchka would really just go for the best take for the edit, even if there was a line cross - especially when the characters are in a round.'***

So, they really transcended traditional line constraints. There were other times when line crosses were very intentional to give clues to the audience that something is not quite right here, and upon second viewing an attentive viewer would notice the subtle wink the filmmakers were giving them in terms of the murder mystery. ***'That's kind of the language of a horror film — we have to play with this and there were a number of fake out beats as well - where we're looking at her from the car or the closet, it's actually not a horror beat, but it's in the vein of that.'***

The audience is told that with the first kill, Jamie is looking everywhere for something. ***'Everything's scary for her and then she goes back, and the killer is in the cupboard. It was just playing with those horror tropes.'***

One of the first chats Overton had, was about, "how to do scary," and what they loved about the original Halloween film. ***'Someone did a great comp of our shots verses Halloween — Doing scary during broad day light. How do we do that?***

By using the psychology of the camera's movement Overton made a very conscious shift in style, especially during tense moments preceding a kill—deliberate switching to handheld camera work. A stark contrast to the predominantly sophisticated camera movements in the rest of the film, where the camera is more objective, a choice which heightened the voyeuristic feel, creating a distinct tension and foreboding an intentional stylistic nod to the horror film genre.

Overton explains, Nahnatchka vision for the film was to maintain a consistent atmosphere of enclosure throughout the film, surrounding the narrative with an oppressive cloud covered environment. ***'Shooting in Vancouver definitely helped with that—but in all seriousness, apart from a few exceptions we really tried to avoid showing too much of the surroundings, so all of the characters felt trapped and that there really is very little chance of escape, making the killer feel omnipresent.'***

Tenting the house for 'Totally Killer' - PHOTO: DOP Judd Overton

An Impressive Oner

Totally Killer has a quite remarkable sequence towards the beginning of the film —right after the first kill — involving the merging of a Steadicam shot by A camera Operator Steve Krasznai into a crane shot which was blended with a little VFX. ***'That was one of the tricky shots to execute.' Ultimately delivering a seamless visually captivating opening into the world of the film.***

'We had to look at it right from the start.' Initially they thought they'd do it with a Ronin and a hook up, but they could never quite get it right. 'We tried with the magnet mount which could hook on the end of the Technocrane, but in the end it just wasn't good enough — It just wasn't seamless. I decided if we're going to do it that, anyway, let's not compromise on the first part of the shot.' By using the Steadicam, they were able to match it much more easily to the Technocranes shot.

Gravitron Stunts and Time Travel

One of the biggest challenges was shooting the final climatic scenes of the film where Jamie and her mother have a standoff against the killer inside a moving Gravitron aka, the *"Quantum Drop"*— which incidentally in the film has become jerry-rigged into a time machine.

Overton again highlighted the meticulous planning involved, including detailed storyboarding, discussions with the stunt team, and physically exploring a Gravitron at a County Fair to map out the shots. Unaware, the trip would prove very fortuitous becoming the Gravitron they ended up using in the film.

The confined space within the ride posed limitations, requiring creative solutions for shooting angles and executing the stunts. They couldn't shoot inside while the Gravitron was spinning as it would have been completely impractical to do so — to replicate the spinning environment without the centrifugal force affecting the crew and cameras, the team devised a variety of tricks and rigging setups. Again, Overton gives credit where it's due — with his crew.

James Jackson, Overton's Gaffer in Vancouver was fantastic. ***'We ran everything through dimmers.' They were using LEDs a lot, for the speed and ability to make the changes quickly.***

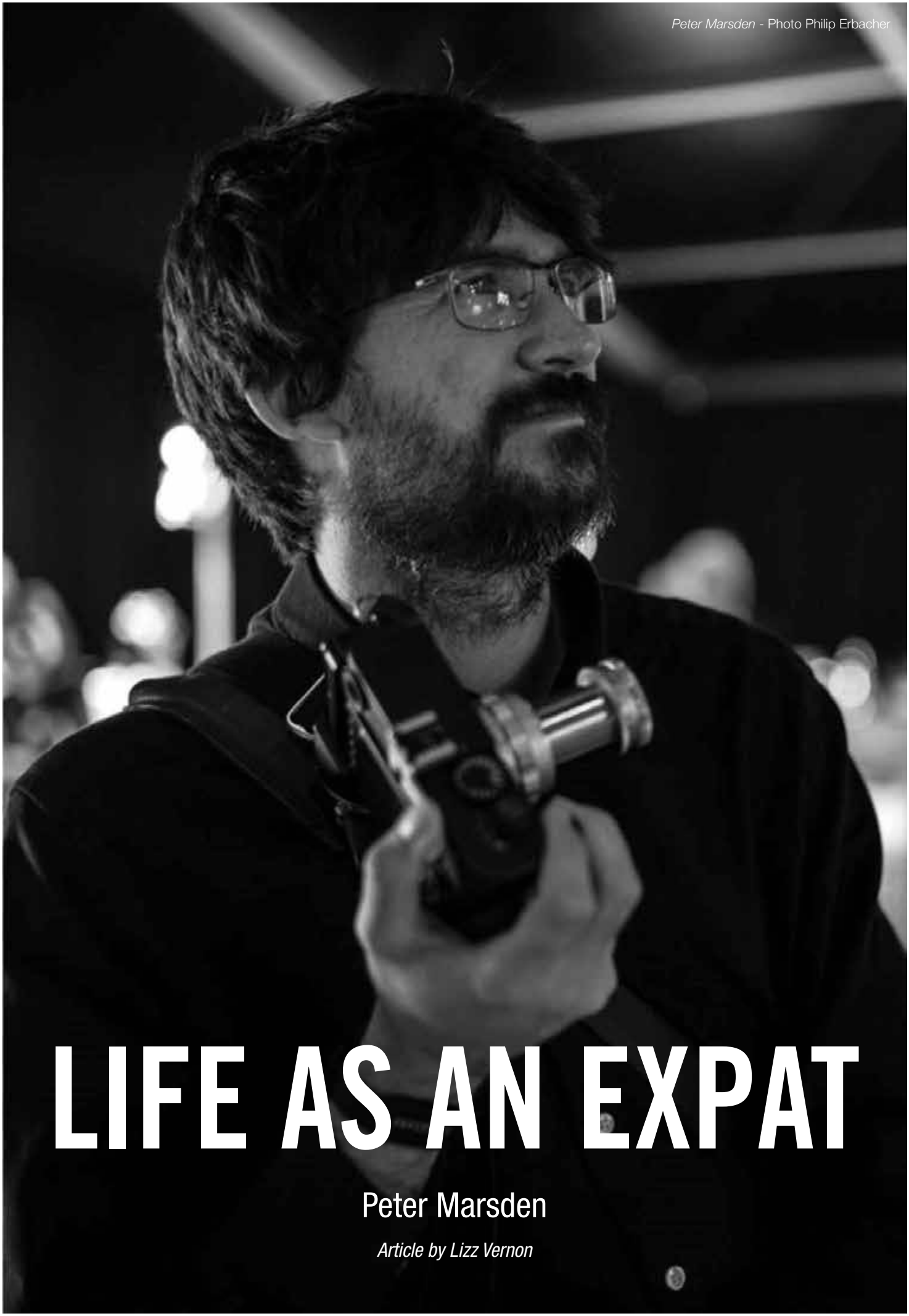
'We ran everything through dimmers.' They were using LEDs a lot, for the speed and ability to make the changes quickly.'

'Because it's a Gravitron period device, we couldn't really use the kind of tools you would usually use. So, he [Jackson] found some LED ribbon that had a rubber casing on it. It looked a lot like the old neon strips, so we kind of used it like that. We set up a chase going around that—we could spin at different speeds to kind of make it feel like we were really ramping up.' It was so effective some crew needing to step out after a little while, because they were feeling sick.

Gripping Solutions

Overton's Key Grip Troy James Sobotka and his crew replaced the whole floor. ***'He built a slightly elevated flooring, just to flatten it all up so that we could push our dollies around in there. For the big 360, we got a Scorpio Head for that —because we wanted to take the camera to 90 degrees as the killer started walking around. We see him stand up and he basically pushes his body away from the wall. A very cool shot! '***

If you want to check out Judd Overton's work, *Totally Killer* premiered on Amazon Prime on the 6th of October for the month of Halloween. Congratulations mate on a job well done.



Peter Marsden - Photo Philip Erbacher

LIFE AS AN EXPAT

Peter Marsden

Article by Lizz Vernon

Peter Marsden and I sat at a beautiful beach in Sydney to chat about his choice to move in London, and work as an expat. I was curious how early Peter caught the cine bug. His father used to censor television, taping shows, and removing sections before his children could watch. ABC Kids and the odd Bond film allowed. It wasn't until his father let him watch the ABC's Police Rescue, that he knew what he wanted to do with his life. ***'It was exciting. And that's where it sort of spurred me on a little bit.'***

As he grew, he was still keen and began to push the idea. Through a friend of his mother, he secured a week's work experience on the second series of an ABC TV drama, Big Sky. He describes it as a sizzle series. ***'And my first time walking onto a proper set. And seeing everything in action, Russell Bacon was shooting. 'Russell, ended up letting me contact him later to fill in a questionnaire for school.'***

Miss Becker, a fantastic English teacher, was a big inspiration on Marsden in years 9 and 10 running a film studies course. North Sydney TAFE came next, and we'll come back to that. One lecturer, Darrell Lass, was a production designer on a film and got Marsden a gig as a runner in the film's art department. ***'Which was amazing because I was able to see pre-production, the shoot, and then post. 'The full spectrum from day one.'*** The film was *The Crop*, with DOP, Roger Lanser ACS. ***'I ended up doing a bit of design that's actually in the film.'*** Marsden sees that film as his big introduction.

Marsden was off and running scoring a position at SBS. ***'I ended up getting work as an assistant editor at SBS, doing current affairs. I'm very interested in journalism. I was going, this is fantastic, to actually see some stories.'***

His role - Ingest the footage captured on tape and digitize. If he was lucky a Journo would have done the shotlist or at least the timecode if not... the key was to digitize everything. ***'For one story I had thirty tapes to do it over a whole weekend, working nonstop, effectively— No sleep.'***

I ponder if this was an early introduction into the DIT side of things. Peter adds, TAFE had edit suites with a brand-new program called Final Cut Pro which set up his knowledge base.

Peter took up an offer for work, as a gaffer, from a contact from a short course at AFTRS. Thrown a little in the deep end he did the role for two years before taking a role at LEMAC. He laughs, admitting most people start with the rental house first, though he had zero regrets. John Bowring ACS was inspirational, loved learning and sharing. ***'He was very technical. And very, very passionate about certain bits of kit, and certain ways of doing things.'***

LEMAC's founder, John Bowring was passionate about Aaton, and their cameras and technology. It was a great place to learn. With film disappearing, John had prepared Marsden who was already doing high definition. It was a time of transition. I ended up focusing for John occasionally on projects.'

Marsden recalled reading histories of the film industry in the 60s and 70s, he'd read as a student. He'd read about Australians that left the country due to lack of film work. ***'They'd been to London, and they'd learned their craft.'***

He figured, armed with a passport, and an English father he'd take the opportunity to go abroad. ***'I wasn't thinking about long term at this stage.'.*** He wrote letters to companies outlining his experience receiving a few positive replies. ***'I thought, I'm going to take a bit of a holiday, I'm just going to go and speak to people.'*** But what started as a recce trip ended up life altering. During a chat on his second day in the UK. ***'Actually, I've just got a job'.' It was at a little rental house at Shepparton Studio's. 'They said, look, if you want to move over, our rentals manager's leaving the company.'***

He made a quick decision. ***'I need to hand my notice in. And so, I did that. And I just sort of set myself up there.'***

That first trip out of Australia gaining Marsden total independence. ***'I worked with that company for first two years.'.*** When the company pinched the second season of *Live from Abbey Road* it created the opportunity to drift from rentals to technician on set. Kelvin Richard, who was the DOP, was lighting.

Marsden and a colleague, James Eggleton, took on a massive Nike campaign. Directed by Guy Ritchie, staring Ronaldo, among others. The Concept was POV, mounting a little block camera called an S12K's on a helmet of a height challenged football players. ***'So, the camera was at the eye height of the other footballers. For me, I know nothing about football, but I was impressed because, I'm sitting right next to them, they're doing their thing.'*** Marsden describes the set up as a bit Heath Robertson, A UK term I'd never heard. I looked it up — William Heath Robinson remains one of Britain's best-loved illustrators and has embedded himself into English vernacular, inspiring the phrase 'it's all a bit Heath Robinson' to describe any precarious or unnecessarily complex contraption.

I digress. ***'It was laptops in modified baby carriers, to hold them and let the airflow around them. And recording onto a compact flash card and running Windows on a Mac. We could change the battery every half an hour. And we had four laptops just for charging purposes. It was such a weird frankified system.'***

Throughout our conversation, it's clear to me relationships play a role in Marsden's work life. ***'We shot that with some really interesting crew. Daniel Vilar — he was the focus puller in Spain, he now shoots second unit for Greig Frasier ACS ASC.'***

Peter began working as a DIT with the industry on the verge of single sensor chip. ***'At that stage RED was around, and ARRI was bringing out the Alexa.'***

There were companies popping up London who were sort of specialising in the technicians too, but Marsden was doing other things and stayed freelance. He took on the DIT on second unit on *Gulliver's Travels.* the film was shot on Genesis with footage ingested onsite with a full Panavision workflow in place on their truck.

Marsden's shot more than a hand full of short films and worked on over seventy major productions as a DIT.

Captain America: The First Avenger, Argo, Gravity, Into the Woods, Macbeth, Darkest Hour, Mr Turner, Skyfall, and *The Acolyte* to name a few. You get the picture and believe me there are so many others – go check out his IMDB page.

So, it's natural that our conversation turns to what it looks like to make it in the industry – I'm surprised how quickly he deflected. ***'I'll know when I get there. But I don't know what it looks like at the moment. When I was a kid, I was thinking gosh I want to do this, shooting this and that. And that's only just sort of starting to slowly happen.'***

I'm curious about mental health, imposter syndrome. How things are when the jobs are flowing, and you're under budget and other stresses. A lot of people are speaking out a little bit more about it, which is great. It's award season, here in Australia, and we discuss how mental health can affect you even when you're successful. Award Syndrome – when you've got the whole industry looking at you and there's sometimes a soul crushing pressure to back that up. Just based on the proximity of the DIT

Peter Marsden - Photo Philip Erbacher

role they're sometimes the therapist. ***'We'll talk about things and what's going on, sometimes just checking if they are okay can be a help.***

He admits he's enjoying the journey. ***'I'm not sure there's any one pivot point. Some people have that really clear [moment] when I've done X.'*** His view on what works is sound advice for anyone entering the industry. ***'If you're good and you're friendly and you know what you're doing—and you meet people and then they invite you on to your next project. That's what the industry has always been about.'***

Reflecting on influential people. Marsden mentions Peter Menzies Snr first. Menzies Snr was his lecturer at North Sydney TAFE. A mentor through Marsden's early years in the industry, even giving him some of his first jobs. A serendipitous moment, working on Peter Rabbit, in the UK, Marsden got to work with Peter Menzies Jr. ***'They were just the same, it's fantastic so it was really nice and then he came back and did the sequel.'***

There have been other people of course. '***The thing is when you get an opportunity, then that's where you, learn.'***

What you should know about Marsden, is he's quick to create opportunities for others. Recommending to cinematographer James Friend ASC BSC, his DIT Assistant Dominka Zieba for their next project, saying, ***'She's going to be good, she'd be a great DIT or anything else actually, for that matter. She's just fantastic.'*** Former assistant of Marsden's, like Sam Okell, now covers additional units for Marsden as a DIT. We should all take Marsden's lead and nurture others coming though the ranks.

Marsden considers the big picture for a moment. ***'And that's the thing, maybe you've made it in the sense that I get asked to do a project. And maybe I've got too many projects, being asked to do things, so then you go pick one. And that's where… sometimes you pick the wrong one.'***

For me, I tend to pick projects for the script or the intention of the project. Marsden's the opposite, choosing projects because of the people, the relationships. ***'Sometimes that works really well. But, if it's not working, it's not because of that relationship. It's because of another factor, because something else is going on, somewhere else, or your production office are inexperienced… They still don't understand the DIT role, as in, what we actually have to do.'***

On communication between DIT's and Cine's, Marsden feels they work well. Issues arise with production. ***'At the end of the day, it's a financial thing —The DIT role often seen as imposters on the budget. Some of them really use you and in a good way… I'll run the iris view full time. And I'll come and check with you or, if you're sitting next to me, we just chat.***

Throughout Marsden's career he's seen the industry focus more and more on business and budgets cuts. ***'The downside of doing bigger projects is that financial pressures trickle down though the money doesn't'.*** He hints, that you feel the value when it does. ***'You go this was like a three hundred million, it would have been a different film under million.'***

It may help when cinematographers advocate for DIT's to be on set, though on the large projects, producers already budget for DIT's - but it doesn't stop them from crying poor.

On a positive note, in the UK, there is a strong push for trainees, even on small projects. Especially in the camera departments. ***'On a small project, it's a little bit less pressure to actually show them something because on a large project can be bit mad.'*** In the past, there wasn't opportunities to have a DIT assistant, though in recent years that's changing. ***'Having someone doing data offset has been great, because they [production] still believe I can do anything on set. And I say, well no. "The DOP wants me full time there. I can do it, but I'll neglect one or the other." It's so important to train new people too.'***

Marsden tells me when he worked as DIT on *Disclaimer*, an Apple project, with director Alfonso Cuaron. ***'We had Chivo (Emmanuel Lubezki AMC ASC) and Bruno Delbonnel AFC ASC, two amazing people.' In this case, having an assistant like Sam Okell stepping up meant that I had a good collaborator working with the other DOP when they were pre-lighting or shooting the splinter unit.'***

The conversation drifts to carts and kits, and one thing's clear—Marsden will fine tune his cart for every job. ***'I've never had the same setup twice.'*** Unlike his method for choosing a project, he very much bases build decisions on scripts, location vs studio, along with the requirements of a DOP. A fully kitted out cart may look great but decrease mobility. ***'My cart is set up for things to be easy to find something when it's gone wrong. Sometimes my cart probably looks a little bit messy. But there's that mindset that if something just got no picture, for example, I know where the trace it'.*** Marsden adds ***'It's about monitoring if things go wrong.'***

If Marsden is working with a new Director or DOP, he'll find out these little details, when tuning his kit. Some things are pretty simple. ***'If it's live grade it's, a Mac with the software, Pomfort Livegrade software. A year ago, when I started doing The Acolyte, I went to IBC, and there was a new LUTBOX launched, I got those because, this is Star Wars, it's got to make it look good. You're always evolving your kit.'***

For those keen to become a DOP, Marsden has advice. ***'Don't be afraid to ask question, if the DIT has been doing it longer than you then don't be jealous. They might have a lot of knowledge… If they've come off a project with someone that you admire, that could be a benefit. Because then, you can ask them questions about it. They might know how "so and so" works, because our departments all about learning, all the time, it doesn't matter what age you are, and how experienced you are. Even those who have multiple Oscars are learning every job.'***

DIT's, especially in the early days were film translators. ***'I had work experience from working with film cameras, and working with film, I shot lots of stills on film, I worked in a photo lab while studying. I learnt film technology and I know how you expose it. And, working with John Bowring [at LEMAC] and knowing he was so enthusiastic about that stuff, too—It was a big help in those days.'***

Sometimes Marsden gets very early access to gear due to his job. *Disclaimer* was officially the first ALEXA 35 project, using the prototype before it had its name. When Marsden gets a new camera, first thing will be to see the stops fall on the waveform, and how much dynamic range it has.

When it comes to advice for anyone wishing to make the leap and work overseas, I know the answer Peter will give me: Research, research, research… ***'I think the only reason I really got there is because I did that groundwork where I was looking online for companies, looking at their background.'***

Marsden pushed rental houses over production companies, finding the rental houses were a bit easier. It's doing that research and finding out what they actually do—seeing if you can fit into that. And, it helps to have some savings,

'I had no idea if I was going to get a job or not, I was going there for a holiday. But I just sort of figured if I save enough money for, I don't know, six months to sustain myself, so I had to sort of work out how much cost of living was.'

Ultimately, it comes down to building relationships. ***'The industry is a people industry, it may be a gig economy, but it's people. If you can't speak to people and have relationships with them… when you do these long projects of sometimes up to six months, or nine months, you're with them more than your partner. And so, you have to have a good relationship with people. That can be tricky.*** Peter may be shy, but still recommends if anyone's coming to Europe, the best thing they can do is go to Camerimage.

Going back to what interested Marsden in the first place, we talk again about shooting. ***'I just finished The Acolyte and I'd already started messaging people saying look, this is my last DIT project. I'm going to start shooting. If you need me to do your additional unit, or your insert, your visual effects or whatever I'm available.***

He got some positive replies and shot some EPK. ***'Fantastic I've got a camera in my hand.'***

That's when he got the call asking if he would work on *Disclaimer*, which would run the rest of this year. ***'It was a nice thing to get asked, because Bruno messaged me and said, look, I've been speaking to Chávez. And we want you back. We know you've retired.'***

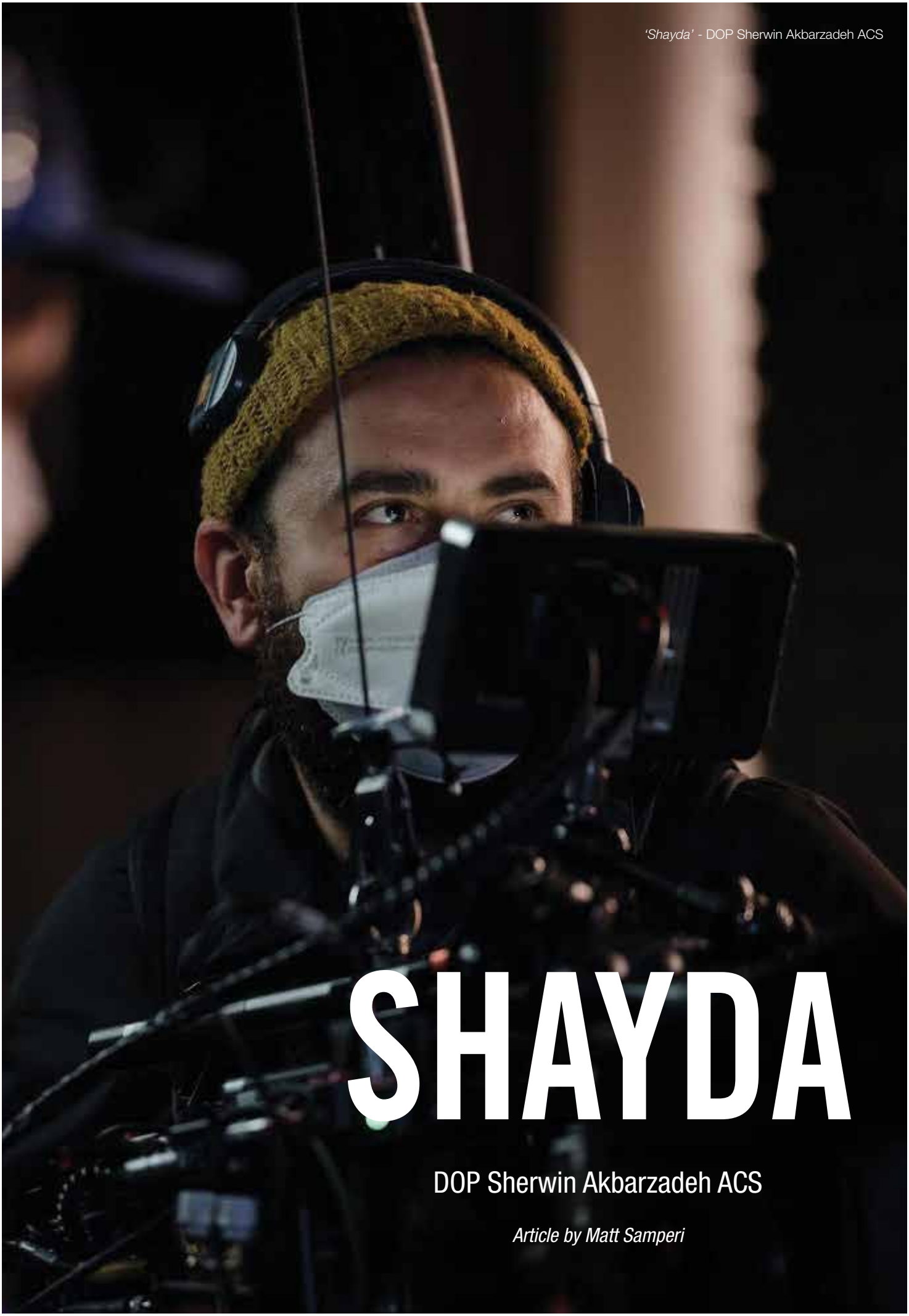
I wondered about homesickness for an expat, but it's been so long that the UK is home now. Australia is now a visit, and Marsden always tries to make the most of each trip. ***'I'll try and do as much as I can in the morning—get a train into Sydney, get on a ferry to Manly, Because I can't do it in London.'***

Given a wish list, he longs to be filming and he'd shoot a nice political thriller combining his interests in politics and drama.

He'd love a show like the wonderful six-part series called *Edge of Darkness,* shot by Andrew Dunn BSC, and directed by Kiwi, Martin Campbell (who would go on to direct *Golden Eye* and *Casino Royale*). '***It's a slow burner. And it's like watching these old BBC dramas like*, Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy *with Alec Guinness.***

I'm glad I choose a seaside location for our chat because Peter next stop was to the airport, for a flight back to the UK for another DIT job. Another film. ***'So, when I land, I'm going to go down to the production office, literally go straight into it.'***

Watch this space, and let's just see what Peter Marsden does after this next film.



'Shayda' - DOP Sherwin Akbarzadeh ACS

SHAYDA

DOP Sherwin Akbarzadeh ACS

Article by Matt Samperi

Zar Amir Ebrahimik as the character Shayda in 'Shayda' - DOP Sherwin Akbarzadeh ACS

In many ways this has been a year marked by violence; the global stage providing us with a harrowing and seemingly relentless display of fighting and brutality beyond our imagination. Violence, unfortunately, comes in many forms, even behind closed doors across our nation - the plague of family and domestic violence. The 2021–22 Personal Safety Survey shows that an estimated 20% of our population reported experiencing physical and/or sexual family and domestic violence since the age of fifteen. Statistics like this are disturbing and demonstrate a deeply rooted problem within our culture that needs to be fought hard against and ultimately eradicated. It is into this dark reality that the film *Shayda* speaks, with a voice of courage, strength and ultimately hope.

Inspired by true events, the film follows the challenging journey of Persian immigrant Shayda (played by Zar Amir Ebrahimi) and her daughter Mona (played by Selina Zahednia), who are living an undercover existence in a suburban women's shelter in the 90's. As they flee a serious case of domestic violence, their struggle quickly intensifies as Shayda's estranged husband finds his way back into their lives and through a legal loophole is granted regular time alone with his daughter. With the implicit support of the Iranian community and the legal system, he threatens his wife and daughter's independence, their safety, and their hope of a brighter future. Shayda perseveres despite this, demonstrating love, resilience, and the lengths one will go to protect their loved ones. Hope is not lost.

The film is lensed by Sherwin Akbarzadeh ACS, a Melbourne-based cinematographer. Akbarzadeh's passion for cinematography is evident in his extensive body of creative and commercial work. Notably, his 2022 feature doco, *The Giants,* which explores the life and work of environmentalist Bob Brown, garnered rave reviews.

Akbarzadeh followed *The Giants* up with *Shayda,* executive produced by Cate Blanchett and winner of the 2023 Audience Award at Sundance. He is on an evident and inspiring upward trajectory. I was interested in where he started and how he arrived at this point. Akbarzadeh admits he always loved watching films and taking photos. ***'I used to shoot short films with friends in high school, and Uni.'*** His parents were a key part of his journey, investing in a camera for him as he travelled overseas in his early twenties. Their support was unwavering, despite his unfolding career path misaligning with the expectations of middle-class Persian culture, which would have seen him become an engineer, doctor, or lawyer. After a few university degrees, he mustered the courage to apply to AFTRS, to do a graduate diploma in cinematography.

'From there it was a few aimless years of drifting around, shooting music videos for friends' bands, doing a bit of teaching work, I just sort of stuck with it.' It wasn't long before some commercial directors noticed his music videos which led to commercials. ***'At the same time, I was doing some documentaries for Vice, who were really active in short form docos in Australia for a while, and that may have helped me get onto feature docs.'***

In describing his process Akbarzadeh hopes there isn't a defining visual look, as he strives towards servicing the story

Zar Amir Ebrahimik as the character Shayda in 'Shayda' - DOP Sherwin Akbarzadeh ACS

by listening to the script—listening to the director—and finding the visual expression of their vision. One thing common to many of his projects is a desire to give a voice to the voiceless parts of society and trying to challenge some of the grand narratives we tell ourselves. *Shayda* is a film that does just that, which makes me curious about its inception, and how he got involved. ***'I worked with the director Noora for many years on her short films.'*** The two have a shared passion for telling Iranian stories. When Akbarzadeh first came across the script for Shayda, he read it cover to cover and it floored him. ***'On an emotional level, just as a story, it was amazing. And then the added layer of having it represent personal identity was just an added bonus.'***

The film is a somewhat autobiographical depiction of director Noora Niasari's lived experience, which is an incredible feat. To not only shine a light on domestic violence but to do so through bravely sharing her own harrowing journey is commendable. You can feel the authenticity and reality of the story through every beat of the film, and here Akbarzadeh's experience in documentary filmmaking shines through. The film is utterly beautiful, injected with an incredibly intimate, authentic, and naturalistic look that so many great docos also share. As a viewer you feel deeply connected to Shayda and her daughter Mona throughout, as if you're living their troubled experience with them.

Akbarzadeh tells me that Niasari loves rehearsals, during pre-production which were especially fruitful with the wonderful Selina Zahednia who plays the daughter Mona. Throughout pre-production they came up with some novel ways to build rapport and prep for the shoot: ***'The child acting coach, Noora and I would go and meet with Selina, and I'd film us doing these acting exercises – these, little role play games.'*** Selina was given a doll to align with certain people in her life. Akbarzadeh explains, ***'like the bully at school—we'd use that to draw out negative emotions and fear from her.'*** This method was used to help the team navigate traumatic scenes without exposing Selina to the actual trauma within the film. For Selina getting used to having Sherwin on camera was huge, ***'There are a lot of closeups so a lot of the time I was only a foot away - right in there - and for the most part they managed to ignore me, which is testament to them.'***

The film is not only testament to the incredible work of the actors, but to this prep work performed by Niasari and Akbarzadeh. Through this focused and strategic rehearsal time, they saved a lot of time and stress on set, particularly considering the restrictions faced when working with a child actor who is in more than eighty percent of the film, almost every scene. Zahednia was limited to four days a week, and six hours maximum on set which must include a ten-minute break every hour. ***'Despite having body doubles for some of her over-the-shoulder shots … we were working at a breakneck speed.'*** For Akbarzadeh it almost became a documentary, ***'just shooting these long unstructured takes with Zar and Selina because we knew that as soon as we cut the camera there'd be a delay.'*** Niasari and Akbarzadeh approached the shoot organically. ***'I think there's a really positive by-product to that approach, being the chemistry that you see between mother and daughter on screen.'***

Leah Purcell as character Joyce in 'Shayda' - DOP Sherwin Akbarzadeh ACS

This chemistry is indeed palpable on screen, a beautiful thing to behold. As mentioned earlier, the look of *Shayda* is intimate and authentic. Of course, a powerful performance is crucial to this, with intentional decisions from Akbarzadeh around camera, lensing, and composition to craft that intimacy on screen.

'We shot on Alexa Mini with Panavision Close Focus Primo Primes.' Including a consideration for the 90s period with a 4:3 aspect ratio being chosen. Primarily they wanted to box in their characters—for it to feel a bit claustrophobic. The starting point for many scenes was to approach the coverage using a 40mm lens for moving master shots, 'focusing on the character whose perspective the scene was told from,' followed by another over the shoulder master shot, usually with a 50mm lens. ***'It helped connect the audience to Shayda or Mona, ensuring the story was told from their perspective.'***

Akbarzadeh gives a huge shoutout to his camera team, 1st AC Corydon Anderson and 2nd AC Sara Ricupito, who made the whole experience an amazing one.

As far as references and inspiration go, László Nemes, Hungarian film, *Son of Saul* along with a lot of work from English filmmaker, Andrea Arnold OBE, were all formative in the team's approach. ***'Those films are all very intimate and are connected to character, and there's no objective sort of coverage. If the characters are walking into a room, then the camera is walking in with them, usually behind them, rather than already being planted in the room and seeing them come through the door. This meant the team designed the sets to be accessible to almost 270 degrees. 'In terms of blocking, our approach was quite free form … Allowing the actors to move freely without specific marks to hit.'***

The film effectively captures the aesthetic of 90s Australia with a relatively modest budget. Akbarzadeh chose to shoot the whole film using shallow focus to isolate characters from their surroundings.' ***'That definitely had the positive by-product that we could get away with angles we wouldn't have thought we'd get away with.'*** At times they had to be creative. Akbarzadeh describes the scene at the bus stop, 'shot in front of a car park full of non-period cars'. ***'We framed most of our shots the other way, and when the bus arrived in the scene, it conveniently blocked the areas we didn't want in the shot. We always found a way to make it work.'***

This approach works indeed, demonstrated through a coherent, consistent portrayal of the '90s aesthetic. The locations feel real and accurate for the period—no mean feat. This came down to a large investment of time and energy by Akbarzadeh along with Niasari, and their production designer Josephine Wagstaff. Knowing how pivotal locations would be for the film, they started scouting before official pre-production began. ***'With a fairly thin locations department, half of my pre-production was devoted to scouting.' Locations can make or break a film in terms of authenticity, especially when your goal is a specific time period. 'We were always looking for locations that were 90% of the way there.'*** The team were mindful of cost implications for an already stretched-thin art department. ***'We were quite nervous about being able to find and secure them in time, and some***

Leah Purcell (Joyce) plays with Zar Amir Ebrahimi (Shayda) and other mothers and children in the shelter - DOP Sherwin Akbarzadeh ACS

weren't found until quite late in the game.'

At this point, Akbarzadeh refers to one of the pivotal locations throughout the film. ***'About two weeks out from the shoot we found this place. It was just a beautiful time capsule in a random shopping mall in Dandenong.'*** It was a small thoroughfare in a shopping mall — used when Shayda is forced repeatedly to meet with estranged husband for visitations with their daughter. ***'We only found it through a conversation the location manager and I had with a shopkeeper in another mall who rejected our application.'*** Sometimes rejection leads to the best outcome.

In terms of lighting, Akbarzadeh was true to form, listening to the script to find an intentional approach that served the story. ***'The film sort of oscillates between Shayda's experience of fear or trauma, and her experience of joy and love.'***

He described the experience as toeing a fine line between complete naturalism and expressivism. ***'One of my main aims was to capture this tension between lightness and darkness in my lighting. And, to embrace the heaviness of the darker subject matter with a lot of shadow.'*** He and the director Niasari talked about the use of lighting to lean into the thriller elements of the film. ***'Though we had a fairly documentary approach, we didn't want it to look like a documentary.'***

The lighting achieves this duality of natural and expressive and Akbarzadeh credits gaffer Tommi Hacker. ***'There was a real consciousness of embracing imperfection and rawness and showing restraint. Not necessarily having the key light in the perfect place, which I think allows both integrity in the story and a bit more freedom in the movement of the actors.'*** The pair worked closely throughout pre-production and the shoot to achieve the desired look. Knowing there was so much to shoot with such little time and limited budget. I was curious about the approach in terms of fixtures or lighting package. ***'What I love to do is to put light outside of the shooting area, not only to give the actors space, but I just think it looks a lot more natural when you can do that.'***

'What I love to do is to put light outside of the shooting area, not only to give the actors space, but I just think it looks a lot more natural when you can do that.'

Akbarzadeh expresses huge appreciation for colourist Edel Rafferty, who created a LUT for the shoot, ***'The thought process is really to get people on board early, especially if you're pitching a specific look for the film.'*** She came on board during pre, crafting a LUT beyond the standard Rec709 that so many of us are used to. ***'On Shayda the approach was a little bit filmic, and I wanted to give a little bit of a twist to some of the colours - reds that were a bit more saturated and blue, which resonated with me.'*** Rafferty also brought a very delicate approach to the grade. They experimented with some footage in the grading suite. ***'I shot both at day and at night in pre and we came up with a few***

Mona (played by Selina Zahednia) call to her father in 'Shayda' - DOP Sherwin Akbarzadeh ACS

LUTs for each.' Akbarzadeh adds the LUT is only partly for him. ***'It's important for other people to get used to the look of the film through editorial so that they're not shocked when they see the direction I want to take the grade in.'***

With such a gifted and synergistic team, it's no wonder the film is so beautiful. Apart from the talents of an amazing crew, the beauty comes from the environment and portrayal of Iranian culture. ***'I think that Iran suffers from an image problem, so it really needs stories like this to come out. Persian culture is rich and ancient and deserves visibility and deserves to be celebrated … It's pretty incredible to be part of that.'***

It's no surprise that the film is resonating so strongly with audiences. ***'I think that part of the acclaim and the visibility that the film has got is because of the women-led uprising that's been happening in Iran for the last year or so, which we didn't know was going to happen.'*** This is a visually stunning portrayal of a story highlighting a universal issue — the plight of so many women trapped within domestic violence. ***'I don't know if we ever made the film with an audience in mind, but we hope that the film raises much needed awareness around family violence. Even though the story is set in a very specific cultural context of conservative Iranian culture, it applies to a global issue.'***

If this story has brought up any issues or concerns,

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CREDIT MAKER II - EROTIC STORIES

DOP's Kate Cornish, Tania Lambert ACS & Martin McGrath ACS
along with Producer Liam Heyen discuss their experiences

Tania Lambert ACS (left) and Kate Cornish (centre) discuss coverage and lighting for 'Masc Up' directed by Leticia Caceres (right). - PHOTO Kent Wang

KATE CORNISH – CREDIT MAKER CINEMATOGRAPHER

When the Credit Maker initiative was announced through the ACS and Screen Australia, I was beyond excited to apply. It's been an enriching experience that has had a lasting impact on my journey as a cinematographer. I'm grateful for the opportunity to share my story, and hopefully inspire other productions to take on a Credit Maker placement.

I was fortunate to shadow the brilliant Tania Lambert ACS who was the set-up DOP of Lingo Picture's ***Erotic Stories***; an anthology drama series exploring, well… Erotic Stories! During the pre-production phase I was given an all-access pass to production meetings, recces, and camera tests. This was invaluable to my education, as it allowed me to observe exactly what the cinematographer's responsibilities are during this crucial time before production. Watching Tania conduct her camera tests gave me the confidence to run the camera tests for Block 2, which I really enjoyed. Her insights and methods during pre, especially for simple things like camera breakdowns have given me the blueprint for my future pre-production methodology.

Because *Erotic Stories,* is anthology in nature, I was given the unique opportunity to take visual ownership of an episode, giving me the chance to express my creative interpretation of the script. Our producers encouraged us to make each episode visually distinguishable, down to the aspect ratio. Inspired by Tania's setup documents for the first Block, I developed a creative treatment that reflected the visual style I had in mind. My episode, 'Masc Up', is one of the more youthful episodes, featuring an ensemble cast of queer women/ non-binary folk. I opted for a mostly handheld approach to keep an energetic and authentic feel to the storytelling. I was also able to develop my own LUT for the episode at Cutting Edge with colourist Dwayne Hyde using my footage from the camera tests. I brought in a lot of summer-y and saturated visual references to help achieve the look. Shooting with the Alexa 35, we opted for the 'Soft Nostalgic' texture to add a bit of dreaminess to the image. I decided on an aspect ratio of 2:1, which slightly widened the canvas to accommodate the ensemble cast comfortably within the frame.

Working with a cast of five characters was a new challenge for me, one that pushed me to grow and learn in unexpected ways. The first two days on set was a test of my abilities, as we faced a challenging underwater sequence and an exterior night scene with the ensemble. The pressure was on, but I was fortunate to have an exceptional crew and a supportive director (Leticia Caceres) who stood by me. Tania's mentorship played a pivotal role in guiding me through the ups and downs of the production. Upon reflection, I laugh a bit to myself- I have recently finished shooting a short series that's a sports/ action comedy with a cast of 12. I wouldn't have been able to confidently shoot that had I not had this experience.

'I can't emphasize enough how vital initiatives like 'Credit Maker' are for aspiring cinematographers like me.'

This initiative provided an opportunity that would have been hard to come by under regular circumstances. It's crucial that programs like these continue to uplift and upskill deserving female cinematographers who are seeking that essential leg up in the industry. These initiatives pave the way for more diverse

Kate Cornish shoots a five hander around a pool on set - PHOTO Renata Dominik

voices and perspectives in filmmaking, enriching our industry as a whole. My hope is that 'Credit Maker,' and similar endeavours continue to thrive, offering aspiring talents the chance to shine and make their mark. Thank you to the ACS and Screen Australia for the opportunity.

TANIA LAMBERT ACS – SUPERVISING CINEMATOGRAPHER

I believe mentoring is one of the best ways to support more budding cinematographers in rising up to shoot bigger and more interesting projects. Credit Maker seemed like a great way to level the playing ground and allow more females to get a foot into the world of TV. I was fortunate enough to get an opportunity early in my career and I want to give more females that opportunity.

Erotic Stories is an anthology series of distinctly different visual styles, so it was actually perfect for someone to step in to take over one episode. I didn't know Kate Cornish, but our producer Liam Heyen and set-up director Madeleine Gottlieb had worked with her, and they were both big advocates for Kate. I looked at her work and thought she had talent and enough experience to be ready for this opportunity. Liam suggested Kate would be the perfect fit to shoot the episode called 'Masc Up' written by Jean Tong, which featured an all-female identifying and non-binary cast.

Stepping up into TV drama can be a stressful transition. Not only is there more time pressure than in short form but also the needs of many people in power above you dictate the rules of play. Learning the balance of how to maintain your vision for a series and execute skilful storytelling whilst dealing with those pressures is one of the first steps to succeeding in this world. In addition to that I think you need to be an effective communicator, which allows you to collaborate with your creative team and in turn this allows them to support you in creating that vision. Film sets can be stressful places, but I believe in being a generous and calm leader without shouting and ego.

Kate was given eight weeks of pre-production which she divided up between preproduction on my block, attending camera tests and then doing her own prep with her director, Leticia Caceres. She created an outstanding in-depth pre-production document that thoroughly examined each scene of her episode. I spent a day with Kate in her main location as she outlined the coverage, lighting plans and we workshopped potential issues and she could ask me any questions she had.

While I was shooting the 1st Block for four weeks, I was unavailable to assist Kate, so the ACS put forward Martin McGrath ACS as an external DOP to support Kate with any advice or feedback for her pre-production process during that period. Then during her shoot, I was on set for most of the time to give advice if needed. Production also granted some additional overtime for some shoot days to help support Kate. An extra half hour can make all the difference in supporting the learning process of a new DOP. I've given feedback to the ACS regarding overtime being helpful and they will endeavour to implement this on future placements.

I saw Kate's confidence grow dramatically in being able to tackle the hectic schedule and coverage demands of scenes which featured up to five characters all with speaking parts. It was a learning curve for me as well, especially in knowing how best to support Kate on set. I had to learn when it was helpful to give

DOP Kate Cornish shooting TV anthology segment 'Masc Up' - Erotic Stories - PHOTO Kent Wang

guidance and when to hold back and allow her to make mistakes. In the beginning, I began by mirroring what I had experienced of my own teachers at AFTRS during my master's and I was interrogating Kate's choices and asking her why she decided to choose certain angles or lighting. She later told me that the questions were too overwhelming, so we figured out that it would be better if I could be a lifeline if needed and only step in if I felt angles were not being covered, or things were overlooked in terms of storytelling.

Without seeing the completed episode but from what I have seen, Kate's episode came together incredibly well. Her preparation was invaluable in creating an engaging, considered, sexy and cinematic episode.

I would highly recommend the Credit Maker experience to other projects with the caveat that you need to give enough time for pre-production to the DOP and potentially the opportunity to operate A or B camera on other episodes so that there is a level of familiarity and ease for the Credit Maker DOP before they have to step into the role of DOP on their episode.

MARTIN MCGRATH ACS – MENTOR CINEMATOGRAPHER

Earlier this year I was asked to participate in the Credit Maker program for the ACS. I had plenty of questions about the intent behind it and once discussed was left convinced it is a necessary mechanism to give producers the confidence to 'take a chance' on an emerging female cinematographer. I contacted my mentee, Kate Cornish, and we talked through aspects of the project, *Erotic Stories.* She filled me in on her pre-production schedule and her general thoughts about the look. Kate is quite advanced along her career path and needed no real ideas from me, but I was able to help with logistics. One of her scenes was to be shot around a pool and we talked about how to use an underwater camera operator to the best advantage.

Usually, the biggest concern for producers with emerging cinematographers is the fear they won't be fast enough. In Australia we tend to shoot as much in a 10-hour day as is scheduled in the United States for a 12-hour day, and the pressure is to not go into overtime unless absolutely necessary. In the end it falls to the DOP to plan. Kate had a handle on this and had the chance to watch Tania Lambert ACS (who was the main cinematographer) and the crew in action. She was fully prepared once it was her turn to step in. I would love to see more productions sharing the DOP credits around, not to do myself out of a job but to share that experience with others and get a few more women into the DOP role.

LIAM HEYEN – PRODUCER

The opportunity to facilitate a Credit Maker placement on Erotic Stories was an exciting one, and a bit of a no brainer for me.

I've known Kate Cornish for many years now, (since her days working at Panavision!) and have been extremely excited to watch from afar as she went from strength to strength as a DOP. So, I was very excited on a personal level to bring her into the fold and knew she'd exceed our expectations on *Erotic Stories.*

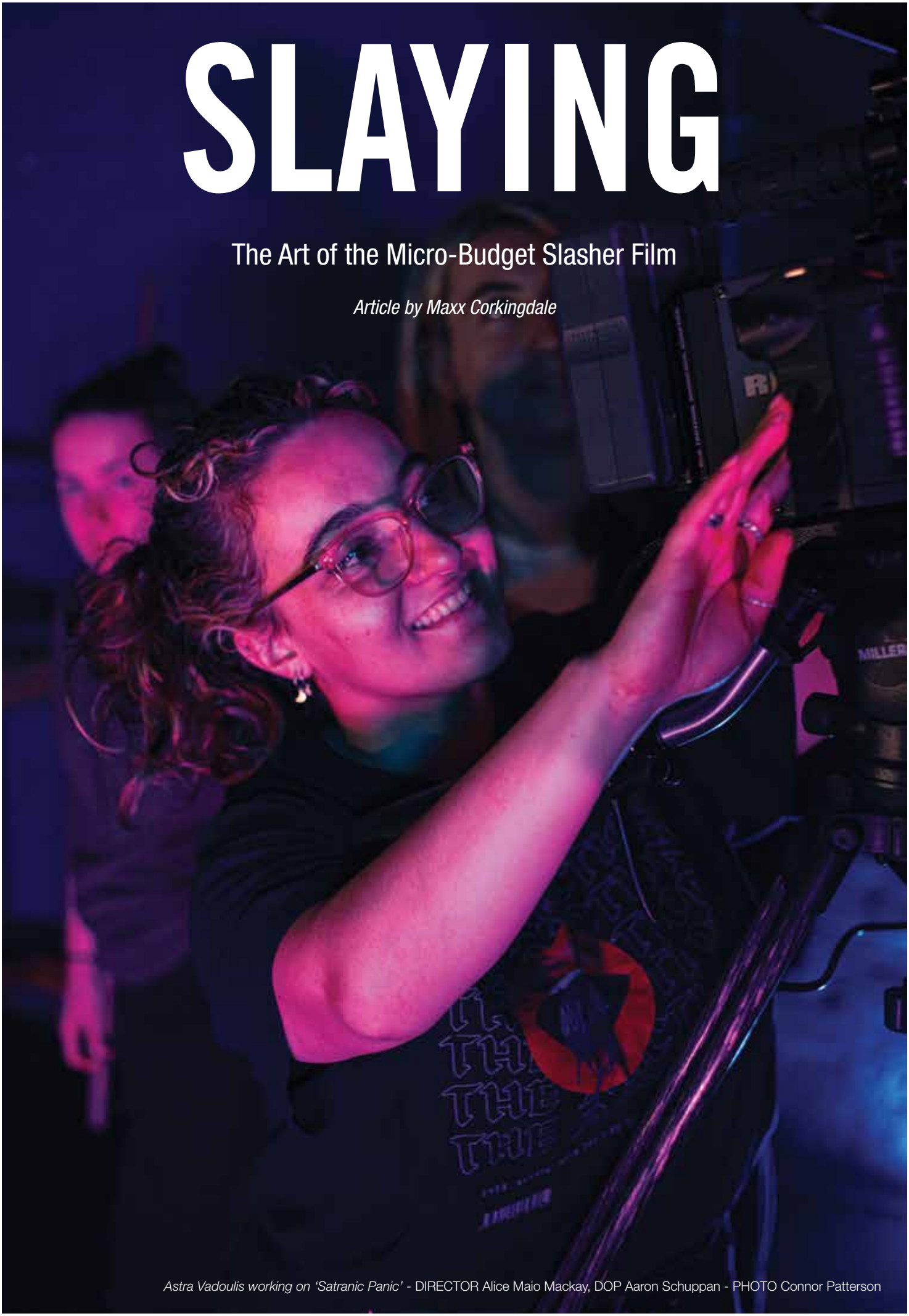
As an anthology we were lucky to be creating individual worlds each episode, which especially suited the structure of the placement. This also meant Kate was able to work with director Leticia Cáceres to set up a very specific look and style for her episode, whilst adhering to the budgetary and creative parameters we were working within across the anthology more broadly. During pre, Kate worked extremely hard and delivered one of the best visual briefing documents I've seen, and we were also so fortunate to have our inimitable Block 1 DOP Tania Lambert ACS mentor Kate throughout the process and be on set with us. It was extremely exciting to see all of Kate's hard work pay off during the shoot and post. Kudos to the ACS and Screen Australia for this wonderful initiative!

Tania Lambert ACS framing up Joel Lego playing CJ in 'Bound'. - PHOTO Renata Dominik

SLAYING

The Art of the Micro-Budget Slasher Film

Article by Maxx Corkingdale



Astra Vadoulis working on 'Satranic Panic' - DIRECTOR Alice Maio Mackay, DOP Aaron Schuppan - PHOTO Connor Patterson

DOP Aaron Schuppan, Day 1 filming for 'Carnage for Christmas' - DIRECTOR Alice Maio Mackay - PHOTO Connor Patterson

Alice Maio Mackay is a nineteen-year-old filmmaker, well on her way to build an impressive film catalogue of micro-budget queer slasher/horror films. *Bad Girl Boogey, So Vam, Satranic Panic,* and *T Blockers* have played at festivals around the world, with Alice picking up an Emerging Talent award recently at Outfest in LA – the world's largest LGBTQ+ festival. Let's meet the team behind the camera on those films, Aaron Schuppan and Astra Vadoulis who are currently filming Alice's fifth Feature film, *Christmas for Carnage.*

Aaron and Astra have worked together for a while now, they met when Alice was a student at Uni SA. Maxx Corkingdale sat down with Aaron and Astra on set to talk about their journey with Alice.

Aaron Schuppan works closely with the South Australian based production company, *We Made A Thing Studios*. The Studio works in partnership with *UniSA* to run a program called, *Film Concept Lab,* allowing students to shadow a film production from development through to postproduction. ***'It's been a wonderful program over the last few years and Astra was a part of the first class we ran.'*** Students observe, though slating allows the camera department students closer to the action. Aaron recalls the day the students challenged each other to change the phonetic alphabet to a somewhat more creative one for slating. ***'Scene 35 BRAVO became Scene 35 BUTTS and so on. It got a lot of laughs and kept things fun. Astra stepped up to the plate and without a moment's hesitation spent an hour rattling off the most creatively crude replacement words. None of which can be repeated here in print. I knew instantly this was someone I wanted to work with.'***

Fast forward a couple of years and the two work tightly as a team, on Alice's projects and other productions. It's simple for Aaron, ***'Without specifically having Astra working with me I don't think I could achieve what I achieve. Sometimes you work with someone, and the chemistry is just there.'*** Though he is also quick to mention others who have stepped up and volunteered in the camera department, the likes of Sarah Whyte, Bec Taylor, Rebecca Dunker and Brianna Harlow when the team needed extra hands-on deck. While awaiting results of a covid test he had Bonnie Paku shoot a half day on *Bad Girl Boogey.*

Astra has her own view, ***'Aaron and I have a very good working relationship; he's taught me so much and after working together in such a pressure cooker environment you learn how to work together quickly and efficiently.'*** The two have complimentary work ethics, they're inventive which is and a desire for high quality films. ***'It's a lot about knowing the person you're working with and pre-empting what they're going to need and where they need it.'*** The pair are adaptable, resourceful, experts in the ways of 'Shitty Rigs,' and they've got their own systems down pat. ***'If Aaron has a particular shot in mind, but we don't necessarily have the right equipment for it, we creatively come up with a solution that often involves a lot of tape and Aaron getting into some questionable poses even experienced yoga instructors wouldn't attempt.'***

University is full of theory and films sets are a not for the faint hearted, intense, exciting, and fun and exhausting all rolled into one. For Astra being on set is where the real-world experience is, and doing the work of multiple people is mind blowing. ***'Working on these films is like learning and unlearning everything! Due to the short schedule and low budget it's all about making it look fabulous in little to no time! It's such a fast-paced set you learn to work quickly and make the most of what you have on hand.'***

Astra learned so much about cinematography and fast paced sets finding the experience improved her work ethic and led to working harder on sets without the same time limitations found on micro-budget sets such as Alice's.

Scene from 'Carnage for Christmas' - DIRECTOR Alice Maio Mackay, DOP Aaron Schuppan

Aaron jumps into to a talk about micro-budgets. ***'We don't really get much in the way of pre-production. A couple phone calls here. A chat over coffee there.'*** Fortunately, he believes the fun, camp, slasher tone works in their favour. Leaning into a 'Stylised' allows the team to get away with a lot in a pinch. If they were trying to creative naturalistic, immersive images Aaron believes they would all have a harder time. ***'Do a daytime sim-trav scene, and you've got fifteen minutes to light it and get rolling it really helps that you can lean into the campiness or the highly stylised nature. A little bit shy of realistic is a nice place to be sometimes. If it's hour fourteen and I'm exhausted and my brain is falling off my ears and I've got to light a last-minute shot in the corner of a very boring room it's wonderful to be able to grab a PavoTube and yell, 'Hey, what colour haven't we used today?' Someone will call out 'Purple?' Purple it is!'"***

With dialogue heavy films, Aarons also a big fan of the 85mm lens for close-ups. ***'If I can line up a series of nice closeups with a lot of depth, I'll dress in foreground and background elements and lights to really pretty up the frame.'*** With a background in music videos, he loves going handheld, ***'I've gotten good at getting seventeen shots for the price of one. There are entire, eight-page, four-way, loosely blocked scenes in Bad Girl Boogey that I shot in four single takes all handheld, moving with the actors, keeping track of eye-lines in my head, and finding dynamic angles along the way.'*** Astra points out almost the biggest hurdle they face is the lack of time! '***Due to the tight schedules, we really have no prep at all. Most of the time we turn up to set and it's the first time Aaron and myself see the space, which makes us very adaptable and creative as we have to decide what will work and look best quickly. '***

In *Bad Girl Boogey,* Astra found a spatula in a cutlery draw and rigged it to the rods on the camera kit creating the perfect mini light stand to mount an Aputure MC. Perfect when the location makes it extremely difficult to rigg lights.

Aaron is no stranger to shooting multi-cam with BMPCC 4K coupled with Zeiss Primes, with Rebecca Dunker and Bec Taylor and even Astra. He found they were able to get as much coverage as possible, he loves the images. The jump in cinematic images when shooting with ARRI or Red helps elevate even the cheapest looking shot. ***'That's always the goal really - to find ways to transcend the limitations and rise above our meagre budgets.'***

As *Bad Girl Boogey* came around, Alice and Aaron discussed, and agreed they would shift to single cam. WeMat has a trusty old Red Scarlet in the office, which Aaron helped himself to and off the pair went.

Understanding the influences on a director, in this case for Alice Maio Mackay; 80s slasher films, Mr Robert Zombie and,70s Italian Giallo. ***'I translate those three influences into a decision to go gritty with a lot of lurid colour.'***

Armed with the snaffled Red from WeMAT, an eBay sourced M42 – EF adapter, and his own old stills lens collection Aaron knew they would be ready for all the tight close-ups. ***'Raw, unfiltered, unflattering glass would counter the clean digital image of Red and give us that mean-spirited slasher feel that we wanted. I kept lighting very minimal. We did a whole night driving sim-trav sequence with only four Aputure MCs. 90% of the film was shot camera-on-shoulder.'***

'Our latest work, *Carnage for Christmas* ***came with the brief from Alice to 'make it look like a CW TV show'. So, glossy, and melodramatic was the order of the day. I think we really got our kit perfect on this one.'***

Armed with a bag full of Christmas lights Aaron went with a set of Nanlite Pavotubes and a Nanlite Forza 60B with the projector mount. ***'I figured if I can't light my scenes with three lights then I should just quit the business.'*** His choice to use the projector mount with gobos was a specific, he's pretty sure as readers you'll agree with his why. ***'White walls are a cinematographer's mortal enemy and so I decided to throw shapes on any bland backgrounds we encountered.'***

Soft lighting was the key on this one, so a single c-stand and a selection of different diffusion fabrics was the perfect choice.

Scene from 'Carnage for Christmas' - DIRECTOR Alice Maio Mackay, DOP Aaron Schuppan

Apart from that they had the obvious tripod and Aaron's lightweight, easy to assemble, happy to swear by Wally Dolly. ***'If you can add movement to even the simplest of shots it just adds invaluable production value which is vital on projects like this.'***

Astra adds, ***'All of these films have been shot on the RED Scarlet, the lenses have changed slightly depending on the look Aaron is after!*** *Bad Girl Boogey* ***was shot using old still lenses, it gave the film a really authentic grungy and gritty look. The other films have been shot with Zeiss Prime Circle Cine Lenses.'***

'I get to go make a movie. It's all I've really wanted to do with my time at any given point since I was eight years old.' For Aaron being on a micro-budget film allows him to truly test his skills. ***'For me, each project is a case of setting a certain standard in my mind and seeing if I can rise to it under the extreme restrictions of the budget, time, and resources. It's a real case of, 'Okay pal, you think you're pretty good at this? Let's see how good you really are?''*** Aaron admits micro budgets are not always a roaring success, but he's always so proud of the effort put into what's achieved. ***'It's also great training. Now when I walk onto more resourced sets it feels like a breeze by comparison.'***

Outside of the professional stuff, Aaron has met some of the coolest, most fun, open, and welcoming people he's ever worked with. ***'Alice is big on inclusivity which creates a glorious, 'no dickheads' environment. People I met on the first one, are now collaborators on other projects and many I now call friends. I get excited for each project now because I get to spend a week with my mates blowing up foam heads and lighting drag shows and what could be better than that?'***

Astra adds, ***'They definitely are a labour of love! I absolutely love working with everyone on these films, we have returning cast and crew that makes the whole experience so much fun and feels like I'm working with family!'*** Supporting Alice as a director and seeing her style grows from film to film is something Astra loves. And, as far as working with Aaron: ***'Amazing, he is always so forthcoming with knowledge and really encourages me to push myself no matter the project! I get a real sense of fulfillment after completing these films.'***

When asked about a favourite film, Aaron is quick to comment, ***'I can't speak for our latest one, 'Carnage for Christmas', although I'm sure that will be my favourite of my work. We shot the first four movies within seven-day schedules, so Carnage's twelve-day shoot felt luxurious on a Kubrickian level by comparison.'*** He goes on to discuss his thoughts on the films that are completed, saying T-Blockers is his favourite.

DOP Aaron Schuppan and Astra Vadoulis working together on set of 'Carnage for Christmas'
- DIRECTOR Alice Maio Mackay, PHOTO Connor Patterson

'It's really fun, fast paced, and alive with youthful vigour. I think the chemistry of the cast, especially the two leads (Lauren Last and Lewi Dawson) is truly one of those beautiful lighting-in-a-bottle things.' He reminisces about a shot that might just make the world feel like a better place. ***'There is a shot in the beginning of a trans-woman shaving her face while nervously preparing for a first date. I remember turning to Alice and saying, 'I have never seen anything like that in a movie before.' It felt like we were making something punk as hell and worthy of future discourse.'*** Aaron praises ACS member, and as he puts it 'alternative media wizard Liam Somerville, who shot a lengthy sequence on VHS, ***'It really brought the authenticity to that aspect of*** *T Blockers*.'

Astra thinks having favourites poses a tricky question. ***'They all have such a unique story and vibe; but I think Carnage for Christmas (our most recent film) has to be my favourite! I love the story, cast and the Christmas vibes are immaculate! I feel like we really levelled up on our production side, Aaron and I have mastered the 'Alice workflow', which helps us to smash it out at a high level and I'm just really happy with how it looks so far! '***

For Aaron working with Alice for the past three years has been a great adventure and he hopes Alice keeps wanting to work with him, ***'I'm so glad that three years ago I said, 'Yeh why not, kid. I've got a spare week. I'll help you make your vampire drag-queen movie.' I hope that Alice's audience continues to grow and that we get to keep contributing to the art of cinema in new wild, weird, and wonderful ways.'***

To Astra's way of thinking, ***'Alice is already crushing it! To be nineteen and have five features under your belt, and features that are showing all over the world is so incredible! She is creating such amazing content that really resonates with a large audience; she tells stories of LGBTQ+ which sheds light on their experiences, which currently is lacking in mainstream media. I hope Alice keeps getting the recognition she deserves, putting these incredible stories out there and keeps absolutely killing it.'***

Max asked Aaron and Astra if they had any advice about making micro budget films. Aaron jokes around before talking about setting aside ego, perfectionism and any preconceived notions of what standard practice are – those may need to be set aside for the week of filming. He settles a little before saying, ***'In all seriousness I say pick one or two consistent motifs for your images that will give the film a verisimilitude across all its scenes. By that I mean perhaps a consistent framing style, colour palate or camera movement style and then build a kit that is as limited as possible. The more gear you have the more gear you will be tempted to use. And that takes up time. Which you do not have.'***

Aaron ads a final advice, ***'find someone you love working with. Someone you actually want to hang out with during all the exhausting chaos. Astra, outside of her tireless and matter-of-fact work ethic never fails to make me laugh, listen to me moan, crank some Nickelback (don't argue with us) or bring me a glass of water. Whoever is reading this, I tell you - HIRE HER.'***

Astra's advice seems to mirror Aarons. ***'Surround yourself with people who are passionate! Passionate about the story, you, the message, and the outcome! Micro-budget productions are hard and a lot of work, if you don't have people around who are wanting you to succeed and support you in any way they can, then it will be a difficult time. If you have fun, are open to others' ideas and work hard it'll end up being the best experience!'***

GEORGES
SINCE 1981

STRIPPING BACK CINEMA CAMERAS

The latest addition to the Star Wars universe, the epic sci-fi action thriller **'The Creator'**, showcases a significant paradigm shift in cinematography. This groundbreaking movie underscores the revelation that traditional cinema cameras, historically reserved for big-budget productions, now face formidable competition in **size, functionality, and cost-effectiveness.** The utilisation of cutting-edge technology, particularly the pairing of Sony's FX3 camera with Atomos's Ninja recorder. The quality of the resulting images is virtually indistinguishable from those captured by larger and more expensive cinematic cameras.

Discover in-depth insights into the movie's production process In our Q&A with **Oren Soffer**, one of the films Directors of Photography. The Info-packed Q&A session was from our Monthly community-driven event, **GAS Studio Sessions**. You can catch the full interview on our Youtube Channel, Georges Cameras TV.

GAS brings something new every month so join us to connect with like-minded individuals, expand your learning, and enjoy a friendly gathering with the crew over a cold beer and sausage sizzle. We look forward to seeing you there!

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The Favourite
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