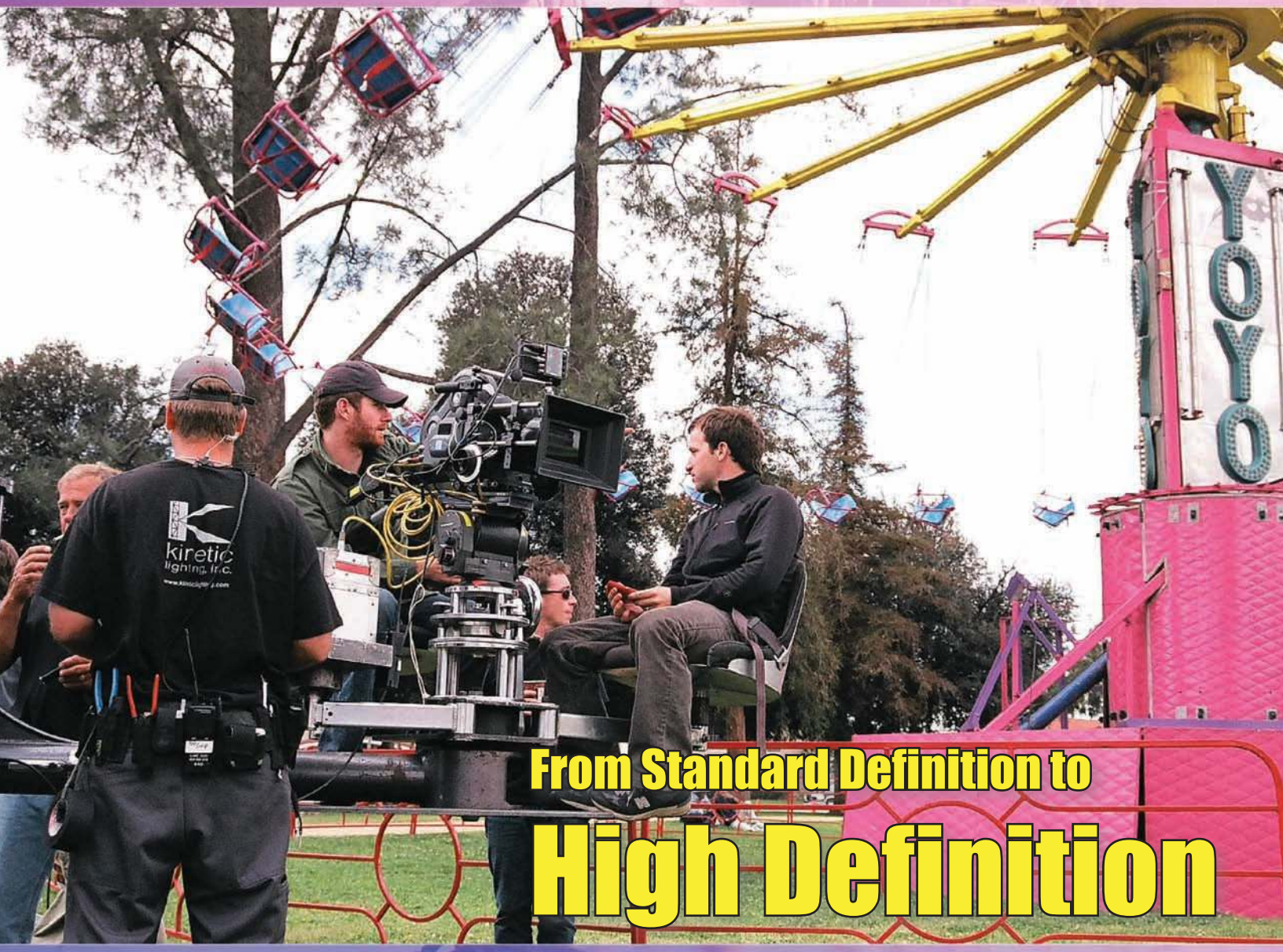
August 2007

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From Standard Definition to High Definition

Lighting Interviews

Cinematographer Cira Felina Bolla

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On the Cover

Brian Lazzaro co-directed with Samuel Bayer and Robert Hales (as the directing team 'Dragon') singer Pink's music video "Who Knew."



We have a very special filmmaker spotlight on Emmy-nominated cinematographer Cira Felina Bolla. After meeting and networking with highly-acclaimed, 40-year veteran cinematographer, Roy H. Wagner, ASC during a StudentFilmmakers.com workshop in 2005 (Cinematography's Digital Revolution Workshop), the young cinematographer Bolla received a mentorship under Wagner, and soon after, earned an Emmy-nomination for her work on the award-winning documentary television series, "Stories of The Sharp Experience" (Episode 5). Find out how she compares her experience shooting the documentary with her experience on the "House M.D." set during her mentorship under Wagner. Also, read Roy H. Wagner, ASC's comments on his experience mentoring Cira (p26-28).

This month's cover story is Brian Lazzaro, a professional videographer who began directing music videos while working under Samuel Bayer, renowned music video director most famous for the award-winning and legendary Nirvana video, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," and numerous music videos during the alternative rock era. Read Larry Jaffee's article and catch our Q&A with the up-and-coming filmmaker in this issue (p22-25).

Becoming a part of the StudentFilmmakers.com and *StudentFilmmakers* Magazine community means more opportunities and more creative, educational ways to network with peers, colleagues, and industry experts. For those of you who haven't yet joined, I encourage you to sign up for the #1 educational resource for film and video makers; network with other filmmakers, videographers, and animators in our online interactive forums; and sign up for a free networking webpage on our social networking site for filmmakers.

As this issue goes to press, we are exhibiting at the Digital Video Expo East in New York City, and distributing our current issue along with special back issues. Familiar faces at the show include some of our writers and online community members from New York City. This month, I will be at the UFVA Conference in Denton, Texas, August 6 through 11, and I look forward to meeting those of you attending. In October, we look forward to exhibiting at the Annual Rocky Mountain VidExpo 2007 in Colorado, the largest event in the Rocky Mountain region.

Enjoy this issue!

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

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The # 1 Educational Resource for Film and Video Makers

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Intensity introduces high definition HDMI editing for only $249



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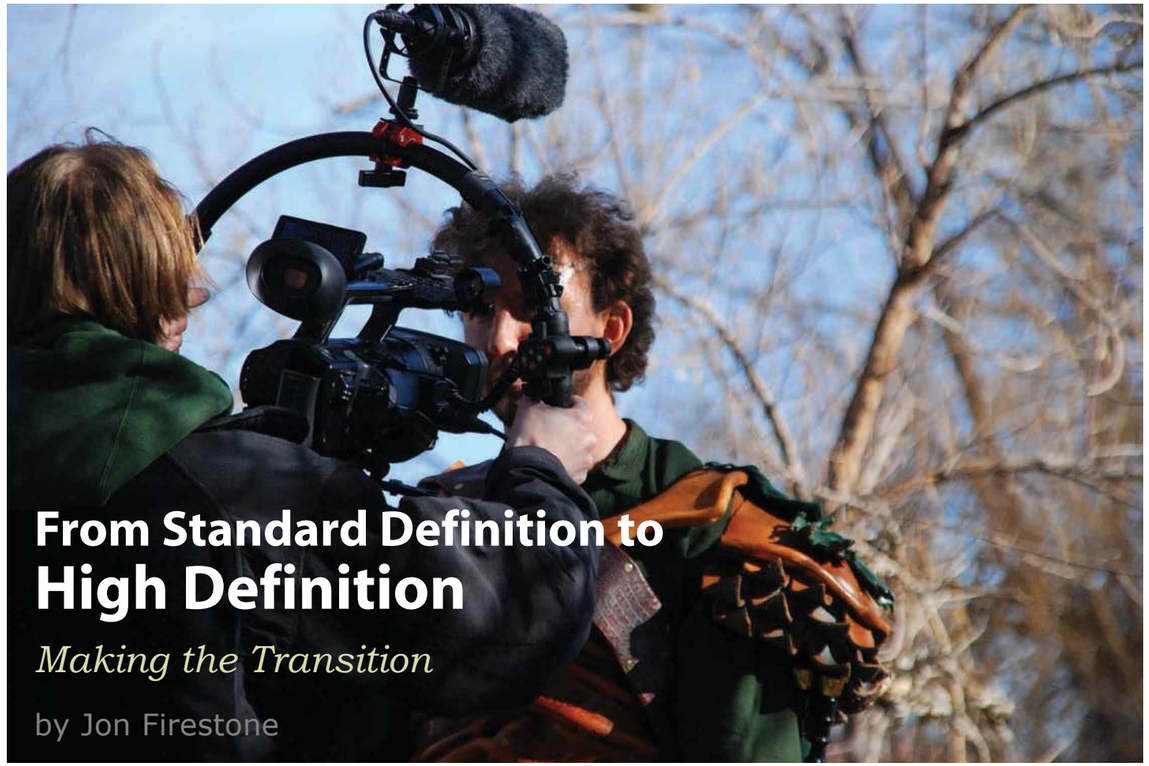
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From Standard Definition to High Definition

Making the Transition

by Jon Firestone

I remember back in the old days. The days of analog decks, with 3/4" machines, edit controllers, time code glitches, and all the fun of generational degradation. But, there was light at the end of the tunnel in the form of ones and zeros. And digital would be our salvation. Unfortunately, in the early days, the promises of digital and the reality were far from synonymous. It was still an analog world, and digital editing became available before digital cameras did, at least for the low budget market. And, we found ourselves shooting with our old analog camera technology, and then, dealing with analog to digital conversion, iffy compression, clunky device control, and a lot of other headaches. It wasn't until DV came out, that digital really started to deliver for the masses.

DV was an incredible step forward in low budget filmmaking. Combined with firewire and faster hard drives, filmmakers could use one camera to shoot with, transfer to the computer, and then, transfer back to tape. The quality was impressive too. While not perfect, it was good enough to be adopted by professionals and took over much of the previously analog world. It was finally digital, done right, made to take advantages of its digital nature, and improve the workflow. Many computers came equipped with firewire, and if not, firewire cards were reasonably priced, when compared to their analog counterparts. The importance of DV and firewire was that one inexpensive cable carried the video and audio signals for both input and output, as well as device control.

When I took the leap into HD with HDCam a few years later, I had become accustomed to the convenience of DV, and now I was back to practically where we were prior to DV in terms of workflow. Expensive capture cards; inefficient or uncompressed compression codecs; needing expensive decks for capture and layback; extremely fast computers with large drive arrays; and in general, an expensive, inefficient, inconvenient world. Editing in HD was such a pain that most of the projects I did, I downconverted to SD and edited in – you guessed it – my old standard, DV.

Then HDV came along and, like DV, had its limitations but it had most of the conveniences and efficiencies of DV, which largely make up for its shortcomings. HDV is from a workflow standpoint a lot like



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DV. In fact, it uses the same tapes (it is recommended to use HDV tapes for best results, but in my experience I have not had any issues using quality DV tapes as well). HDV also uses the old standard firewire that I've appreciated all these years. Which makes HDV an awful lot like a higher resolution DV.

With all the advantages of HDV, I think that the technology has evolved enough while the prices have come down enough where it makes sense for any filmmaker looking at DV to consider HDV instead. For the following reasons:

1. HDV cameras are also great DV cameras. They can either shoot in HDV and downconvert to DV, or natively shoot in DV. Downconverted HDV usually looks better than native SD.

2. HDV is becoming competitive in price and has a much longer useful life. Everyone will want HD content in the future. HD will be the standard and will be expected.

3. Having HD masters can come in handy in the future if the footage it to be used down the road in HD projects. And the cameras can do real-time down conversion to DV for editing now.

HDV also has its cons:

1. Audio-DV has uncompressed audio where HDV compresses its audio; however the compression has never caused any problems for me.

2. Potential for more serious multi-frame dropouts due to GOP structure. Once again I've never had any problems with this.

3. DV allows real-time output through a camera or codec box to a SD monitor within most editing platforms, whereas HDV requires additional hardware if this is wanted.

4. HDV is newer and less refined. DV has had years to develop while HDV is relatively new.

5. HDV requires significantly more computing power.

Shooting HDV vs. DV

When it comes to shooting with HDV, there is very little difference in the controls of the cameras. The biggest differences deal with focus and monitoring. To take advantage of the extra resolution, critical focus becomes more important. The



resolution of the viewfinders on HDV cameras is usually much lower than what the camera actually shoots, making it very difficult to achieve the sharpest focus by looking at the viewfinder. To make up for this, most cameras come with a form of expanded focus where they zoom the center portion of the image to fit the screen, so that you can adjust focus even using the less than HD resolution of the viewfinder. Ideally, you have an AC who can pull focus for you the old fashioned way. But sometimes the camera crew consists of well, just you, and that's when some of these other tricks come in handy.

Most HDV cameras have some sort of in viewfinder focus information as well. This readout generally shows the distance that is most in focus, in meters or feet. Assuming your back focus is adjusted properly you can zoom in, turn on the expanded focus, and set an accurate focus on your subject.

I keep a mental note of what the camera readout is at that distance, and any other important marks in the take. If my subject moves from that spot, I can usually judge the approximate distance, and compensate. Just like the marks an AC uses, I can fairly accurately maintain focus with those numbers. When I'm flying a Jib without an HD monitor, I will use these numbers as well with an SD monitor. And, since I generally shoot jib shots fairly wide, my depth of field is pretty deep, so these approximations work fine.

Monitoring HD is also more challenging. Some HDV cameras have HDMI outputs while most have component connectors for connection to HD monitors. Which is great if you happen to have an HD field monitor – however, professional field monitors are usually very expensive, and often times, don't fit in indie budgets, so people have been seeking out much more reasonable HD monitoring solutions.

This usually means a consumer HD monitor, in the 17 to 19 inch range with native resolutions of 1280 X 768 or slightly better. For those who want to see true 1080, there are several 23 and 24 inch computer monitors that support 1920 x 1200 and have either component or HDMI inputs. Unfortunately, most of these monitors require AC power, which is fine in some cases, and not so good in remote locations. Also, smaller HD capable monitors in the 5 to 9 inch range are very expensive compared to their standard definition counterparts. Fortunately, HDV cameras generally have traditional standard definition outputs as well. So that is an option, when resolution is not important from a monitoring perspective.

In an ideal world to ensure the best possible picture, nothing beats a waveform monitor and video vectorscope. If you plan on using these with HDV, then you'll probably want HD scopes, to get an accurate representation of what is being shot, since down conversion to SD may introduce significant variances to the image. However, using an analog HD waveform monitor and vectorscope may not always be a good idea either, since many HDV cameras output their analog component signal, pre-compression, meaning that the scopes may not be accurately showing the recorded image, as the compression may be altering the image. (I have had this happen where we had some exposure issues because of it.)

The ideal option is to use scopes that take the HDV signal from the firewire port, since this is post compression. Fortunately, Serious Magic created an HDV version of their DV rack program which runs on a PC, generally a laptop in the field and gives scopes as well as many other options, including the ability to capture and playback on the fly. Recently, Serious Magic was acquired by Adobe who renamed HDV Rack to OnLocation, and is now part of the CS3 suite. For Mac users, Adobe includes the PC version of On Location, which can be run with Bootcamp on an Intel Mac.

Editing HDV vs. DV

HDV takes advantage of the infrastructure that was created for DV. However, HDV takes a significantly faster computer due to the extra resolution. Because of this everything from color correction to dissolves require more processing power or time. Most of the popular editing solutions now support HDV natively, but you might need to upgrade to the latest software to handle HDV. Aside from that, and the fact that all HD is widescreen, the differences are not that significant.

In a mostly standard definition world, the transition to HD might seem premature, but as the transition gains momentum, and as the technologies are becoming more available, the time for transition is now.

Jon Firestone is currently in production on *Seven Swords: Cult of the Dead*. He developed and taught the 3D graphics program at the Colorado Film School and works as a freelance director and cinematographer when he is not pursuing his other passion as a Visual FX supervisor and Animator.





Elemental Photography: Set, Camera, Shot Selection, and Lighting

Elements to Keep in Mind when Composing an Image

by Saro Varjabedian

As I sit in my friend's music studio and listen to him talk to another musician I cannot help but wonder how similar the language of music is in relation to film. We are sitting around a computer with a song mixed on Pro Tools. The program looks similar to most video editing software with tracks and clips all layered onto each other on a timeline. They describe how a song consists of a drum track, and a chord progression, and then, vocals, which are structured in verses, bridges and choruses. While I did not understand all the terminology they used to break down the parts or elements of a song, I did walk away thinking that a song, much like a film, is very much defined by the sum of its parts. Each part or element compliments each other to create a whole which sounds or looks good to us. If one of these parts were missing, or not executed properly, the whole would suffer.

The same analogy holds true for the composition of an image. Think of all the elements which can comprise an image. By adding the appropriate elements, and considering how each element works in relation with each other, we can compose an image which moves the story forward in an aesthetically pleasing way. These elements can be classified under four main groups: set, camera, shot selection, and lighting.

One element which can really add volumes to the image is the set or location. Consider just how much can be done within a set or with the right location to add subtext. Your set can exude a color scheme. It can define the movement and energy of the image just by the direction of the inherent horizontal or vertical lines. It can establish space and depth. And, it can convey story information like time and place. Logistically speaking, selecting the right location or building the proper set is crucial in the planning process of equipment selection, lighting set-ups, blocking and even scheduling. Often times, settling on the most available location can be detrimental to the final look of the film.

For lack of a better word, I use the term *camera* to encompass all the elements which are used in capturing the image. This includes formats such as DV, HDV, film, etc. When choosing to shoot in film the various types of film stock and processing methods must be taken into consideration.

Even within video, it is necessary to know the properties of the camera's image processor. When determining what look is needed to tell the story appropriately, it is necessary to do research into such things as the latitude of a film or the color sampling of the video camera before making a final decision on the camera package.

I also consider lens selection and filters as being part of the camera category. Do you want to compress the image or flatten it with a telephoto lens? Do you want to soften the look of video with a soft FX filter?

While the main purpose of shot selection is to get the coverage needed to tell the story, what type of shots used and in which combination really determine the energy and tempo of a scene. Consider the effect of a wide shot on a character or a big close up. Which one is more intimate? What effect does a long take, which tracks in over the shoulder of a character, have? What if that same shot with a track in over the shoulder was done handheld? How intimate and subjective does that shot now become? What energy does handheld bring to the film, and when is it appropriate? While there are no right or wrong answers to these questions, these are questions that need to be asked prior to creating the shot selection. It is often tempting to try to come up with the coolest angle or a plethora of close-ups for cut-aways. But, if the shot selection is not doing anything to help convey the psychology of the story *and* move it forward, then more often than not, a cool shot can be jarring for the audience and actually bring them out of the film. And, when considering the sequence which the shot selection will be edited, there are those basic rules taught in school such as the 180 and the 30 degree rules which must be understood.

Lighting as an element conveys mood by making it look hard or soft, natural or abstract. Lighting can also define the time of day or season. Maybe more importantly it is crucial in transforming a two dimensional image into what we perceive to be a three dimensional image. As part of an image's composition, knowing what light fixtures (such as a Fresnel, Xenon or Kino) produce what type of light outputs and properties is crucial in planning the look of the lighting. Take a Kino for example; it puts out a light whose property is a wide spread beam with less fall off. If that is the lighting fixture you choose to go with, under what circumstances would that work best? If you wanted to control it and make it more directional, you would probably use an egg crate. In addition, utilizing gels, diffusion or flags can add those extra touches to the light providing the ability to mold it to a specific purpose. And, if you are out on location, what does an overcast day say in comparison to say the magic hour?

But, how does one know what combination of elements will work best in composing the final image? I often wonder how a musician knows what sound they are trying to create. I imagine that one day they wake up with a melody or a tune stuck in their head which compels and guides them into creating the final song. In my experience I have found that the composition of an image works in a similar fashion. Once you have read the script and envisioned the look and feel of the film, you have at the very least some sort of guide. With some trials and tribulations, each element can be locked into place and layered on top of each other to compose a brilliant image.

Saro Varjabedian is a director of photography based in New York and has worked on over twenty films, music videos and corporate videos for various production companies. He has recently finished production on *La Chambre de Motel*, which he wrote and directed. Currently, he is in pre-production on the spec for *GeoCache* and the feature film, *Testosterone*.

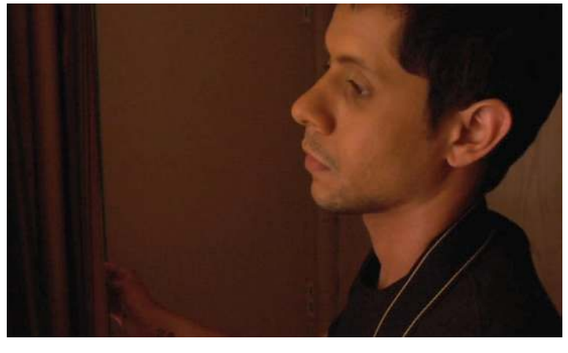
This image was created through a combination of location, time of day, and a sunset grad."



This entire scene was filmed at night with the recreated daylight being the primary source of light for the room.



Actor George Ruiz playing Shaun in *La Chambre De Motel.*



Actress Nina Rausch playing Krissy in *La Chambre De Motel.*

