December 2006

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Award-Winning Short, *My Backyard Was A Mountain*

Interview with Michael Apted *49 Up* and the Up Series

Character-Driven Screenplays

Mounting Cameras to Vehicles

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This was a year of tradeshows and most importantly, a year of learning and growing. DV Expo provided a record-breaking number of subscriber sign-ups for the magazine at one show (850 new subscribers counting schools), and we gave out about 4400 magazines or 36 boxes of 125 each with a very small stack left over. This is counting the back issues attendees were stocking up on.

We enjoyed meeting everyone who visited our booth at the show. People from all levels of filmmaking signed up for the magazine. Contributing writers Fred Ginsburg, C.A.S., Ph.D., George Avgerakis, and Marc Franklin were among some of the many familiar faces, as well as Los Angeles-based filmmaker, Adam Schlachter, who is featured in this month's issue in an article written by Jake Lovell. We thank all of our readers who took the time to drop by, and we thank everyone who signed up for the magazine during the show.

One important thing we learned in 2006 is that a magazine takes more than hard work and dedication. It takes sponsors. Many of our advertisers got on board when the magazine was in the development stage. They continue to believe in the idea of StudentFilmmakers magazine and share our goal of supporting filmmakers. These are companies that care about growing the art and business of making movies. I believe that they are companies you can trust. They have the kind of people behind them that will listen and support you with the products, services and expertise you need.

Please enjoy our final issue of 2006, and ring in the New Year with new insights and enlightenment. Don't miss the article about reflections by the master filter maker Ira Tiffen. I really love this article. He talks about the speed of light in relation to reflections. Mr. Tiffen breaks it down for you on page 10. Be sure to read all the articles for the most powerful learning experience possible.

We look forward to 2007 being a New Year of education, inspiration and excellence. Have a beautiful holiday, and a Happy New Year!

Kim E. Welch
Publisher/Editor-in-Chief

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On the set of *My Backyard Was A Mountain.*

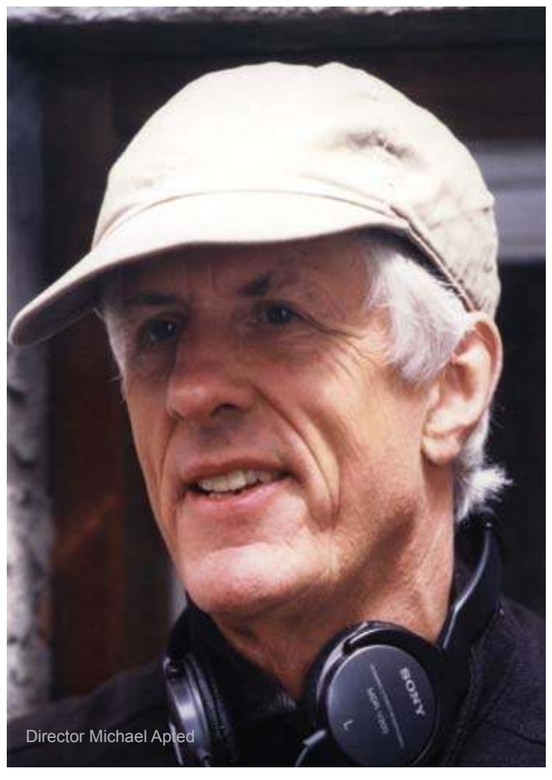
Michael Apted Straddles Features and Documentaries

… But the Up Series is the 'Most Important Work I've Done'

by Larry Jaffee



Jackie, Sue and Lynn as seen in *49 UP*, a film by Michael Apted. A First Run Features release.



Director Michael Apted

Although for the past several decades he's been a regularly working Hollywood feature film director, Michael Apted finds himself often returning to documentary, which is how the transplanted Brit launched his career as a researcher for Granada Television. Apted, currently the president of the Directors Guild of America, has directed such Oscar-winning films as *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980), *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988) and *Nell* (1994) or a big-budget blockbuster like his contribution to the James Bond canon, *The World is Not Enough* (1999).

This duality suits him fine, and in fact, Apted almost doesn't have a choice, as he's the prime mover behind the Up series, a landmark documentary series that Granada began in 1964 as *Seven Up!*, a study of British school children of different backgrounds and social spheres at the age of seven to find out their hopes and dreams. He was a researcher on the original production, and has since directed the series every seven years, regrouping with as many of the original kids who will participate.

"The Up series is the most important work I have done in my career," Apted tells a New York Film Festival audience of film critics following a screening of *49 Up*, which was recently released on DVD by First Run Features and is the seventh film of the series.

Roger Ebert calls the Up series, "Brilliant. An astonishing, almost noble use of the film medium (which) penetrates to the central mystery of life. On my list of the ten greatest films of all time."

In an exclusive, follow-up telephone interview, Apted elaborated on what the Up series has meant to his career, his need to keep it going while pursuing other film projects—both feature and documentary—in between, and how the concept has been spun off in Russia and now the U.S. As far as the U.K. version, Apted has "never even thought about not" continuing the series.

"I will always make space to do an Up. It's more important to keep this going. A head-on collision [between directing a feature and the working on the Up series] hasn't happened; I managed to juggle it. If it was headed toward a head-on collision, I'd definitely keep the Up going."

During *49 Up*, one of the women, Jackie, who grew up working class in the East End of London, tears into Apted that she's fed up with the way he's portrayed her in *42 Up*, suggesting that she's miserable over the way her life had turned out (single mom with three sons), which is not the case.

Asked about the scene during the press conference, Apted concedes that "Jackie had a fair point, and that she and I should discuss it [on camera]." He acknowledged that he might have

been guilty of similarly manipulating another situation earlier in the series.

"When Tony (who also hails from the East End) was 21, I drove him around all the big crime places [trying to give the impression] that he was headed for a criminal life," Apted admits, only that it didn't work because that's not who Tony [Walker] is.

Walker, who owns a taxi cab and owns a summer home in the south of Spain, joined Apted for the press conference. "I feel privileged to be part of U.K. television history," Walker says of Apted, who interviewed him for five days.

Apted finds himself "all the time" having to twist the arms of his original group of school kids to continue. "You have to use every piece of diplomacy or blackmail you can think of to get them to agree to do it. It's very hard, tiring and nerve-wracking work. I don't want to lose people."

One of the early subjects, Charles, dropped out at 21, and refuses to return. That refusal completely bewilders Apted because Charles became a documentary filmmaker. "He's been under a lot of pressure to do it from his peers, but he's resistant for a long time now."

49 Up was the first installment of the series that was shot on DV [as opposed to film], although Apted has worked that way on other documentary projects for the past two or three years. But shooting digitally helped the Up series because it allowed him to do longer interviews "without interrupting every 10 minutes to change a can of film. But as a whole, the day of the **film** documentary is over. I can't imagine people spending the money to do it."



The men and women from the UP series at 21. A First Run Features release.

The UP series, 7 plus 7,Neil and Peter



While he can appreciate the economic reasons for shooting digitally and advances in technology to streamline the post-production process, when it comes to a big-budget feature film if Apted had his druthers he will stick with celluloid.

His most recent feature films have been period pieces, and he's never considered shooting anything but film. "I cut on tape, HD, and preview it on tape. We never see it on film until print on film. We go through most of the post-production without ever seeing it on film, which is not what I used to do, but it seems the most compact [process]. Certain low-budget things I would shoot digitally—I haven't done it yet. So far I prefer the texture of film. If I had to do something down and dirty and quick, dark and all that stuff in the Michael Mann mold, I would certainly think about [DV], but that hasn't presented itself to me as of yet."

Apted is cognizant that theatrical windows have shrunk and there's a greater reliance on DVD to recoup a release's investment, especially for a documentary, but *49 Up* is holding its own, playing at New York's IFC for nearly two months at the time.

"Most of the press has been wonderful. It's going out on DVD much quicker this time, so it'll be in a certain number of theaters for a month then go out on DVD with the hope that it can catch a buzz from all these reviews, and hit out to a very wide market quickly. So that's a whole different way of doing it. We'll see how that works, rather than slowly rolling it out across the country over 18 months, then put it on DVD and then television. The whole process is much quicker this time. They'll keep running it theatrically as long a it pays for itself. It still seems to out-gross a lot of the stuff that comes to the IFC. *28 Up* ran for nine months in a small theater on Bleecker Street, long since demolished. New York City has always been my best market in theatrical terms. *49 Up* will be on 'POV' on PBS next year."

Apted is executive producer of a new, American version of the Up series that

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Tony from the UP Series as seen in *35 UP*, a film by Michael Apted. A First Run Features release

already was screened at the Silver Docs festival, the Chicago Film Festival and in Los Angeles. Same concept: interview a diverse group of kids every seven years, starting at seven. The Discovery Channel funded the film, and will televise it in 2007.

Of the American Up series, Apted notes, "It's very interesting how knowledgeable kids are, how savvy they are about the world compared to my generation of kids. In the great scheme of things, if you put my 14 with their 14 it would be pretty shocking, and you see how the world has changed. It's not just a cultural thing between England and America. I don't think they would know a tenth of what they now know."

There also have been three Russian Up series, the latest being *21 Up*, also all executive produced by Apted, who comments about the Russian kids: "They've evolved unbelievably between 7 and 14. There's a chilling moment in 14 when someone asks, 'Tell us about communism,' and he says, 'What's communism?' Incredible. That film started at a very appropriate time—as the [Soviet] empire was disintegrating. We chose the kids geographically. We watched how this Soviet empire has become fragmented, and the effect it had on these kids. It really dramatizes the breakup of an empire. We're trying to find a home for it here [the U.S.]."

Apted's next feature, *Amazing Grace*, played the Toronto Film Festival. The film is coming out on the 200th anniversary of the Anti-Slave Act, which is what it's about.

Another Apted-directed documentary series, *Marriage in America*, is slated to be aired by the Hallmark Channel around this Valentine's Day. It follows nine married couples.

Apted also has recently made two documentaries about soccer, which he still calls "football," despite living in Los Angeles for a quarter century. His official film of the World Cup is complete, which the other film he's still cutting deals with the impact of the game on different parts of the world.

"I want to do another feature. I don't want to do another documentary. With *49 Up*, I've done four [consecutively]. I take what's going. If there's a good documentary, or a good documentary falls into place for me, I'll do it. If I were planning my work, I'd just want to find a movie and concentrate on that."

Larry Jaffee is a New York-based freelance writer specializing in the entertainment and media business. His writing has been published by The New York Times, Rolling Stone, Hollywood Reporter, and Billboard, among numerous other publications. He may be reached at lsjaffee@gmail.com.

Suzy as seen in *49 UP*, a film by Michael Apted. A First Run Features release



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Reflecting On… Reflections

How to handle them and how they've contributed to modern lens design.

by Ira Tiffen

Think you're doing the right thing by cleaning your lenses? Ordinarily, that's true. But once, about 80 years ago, as I heard it, a researcher in England did that and got a surprise that paved the way for the lighter, faster, more capable camera lenses you use today. Measuring light transmission through a series of individual lenses, he noticed that they were marked with fingerprints. So, logically, he cleaned them. Just as logically, he expected to find more light being transmitted. In fact, the opposite occurred. Having instead measured a reduced amount of light, most of us might have assumed that something was wrong with our readings and moved on. Fortunately, that's not what happened here.

Trying to explain the phenomenon took an understanding of why light reflects and refracts. After all, have you ever wondered just exactly why it is you can see things, like glass, that are otherwise transparent? Well, usually, what we're seeing are reflections off the transparent surface. Remove the reflections, and the object can actually appear to disappear. Let's take a closer look at what's happening here and why it is important to modern filmmaking.

Light traveling along in a certain direction strikes a piece of glass, say, a window; in doing so, its speed changes. The act of reducing speed when it enters the different medium throws off energy in the form of reflected light. While not intuitive, this is the case both when it enters the glass from the air and when it exits back into air again. Each time, there is a reflection.

To help us understand this further, and apply it to optical design and reflection control, we can measure the difference in the speed of light through the medium and relate it to the speed of light in a vacuum (which, as it happens, is very close to that in air). The ratio of the speed in a vacuum to the speed in the medium is a constant for any given material known as its absolute index of refraction. The higher the refractive index, the slower the speed of light through that medium.

In plain window glass, the usual amount of light lost to reflection is about four percent per side, totaling about eight percent. Now, this may not seem like much, but take a camera lens, for example, which has eight different glass lens elements assembled in a barrel. Not unusual. Light will be lost through each one to the tune of about eight percent. By the time the light has passed through to the camera, about half that light will be lost simply to reflections. That's a lot, but it doesn't end there.

Think about where all that reflected light goes. Light reflecting from the front of the first element goes back from whence it came, to the outside. However, light bouncing off the second, or internal side of that element bounces back into the glass and some of that is then reflected back into the camera from the first surface. This gets increasingly more complicated when the ninety-two percent of the light that makes it through the first element loses some energy to reflections off both the first and second surfaces of the second element, and then of the third element, and so on through the entire array.

What happens is that you start getting light bouncing back and forth, with an increasing portion being directed back into the camera, and showing up in your image as secondary (and potentially tertiary, etc.) reflections. These are generally referred to as internal reflections. This situation is made worse when you have bright lights, say street lamps, in several places in the image, and each one produces a separate reflection or series of reflections in various parts of the image. This can be exceedingly disturbing.

Now we can get back to our optical researcher. He correctly deduced that the increase in light transmission from the fingerprint-covered lenses was due to a similar reduction in light lost to reflection. Reflected light was reduced because the light wasn't just passing through an air-to-glass or a glass-to-air interface, but also through the intermediate medium of the fingerprints. With the refractive index of the fingerprints falling between that of the air and that of the glass, the effect was to reduce the light lost overall to reflection. And that accounted for the increase in transmission.

Once this phenomenon was understood, applying it to lens production involved the development of what we call anti-reflection coatings. Various materials having specific refractive indices are applied in a vacuum chamber to glass surfaces; these materials can be counted on to affect light in a pre-determined manner. In particular, the more numerous the coatings, the more capable they can become. Today, multi-layer coatings can reduce light lost to reflection to a mere fraction of a percent.

The impact of this technology on lens design is huge. Instead of losing about half the light through those eight lens elements in our earlier example, coatings reduce that to a relatively minor amount. So to transmit the same amount of light as the uncoated lens, the coated lens doesn't have to be as large, nor as heavy. This makes for lower cost, faster speed, and smaller, more compact lightweight designs.

Another effect of refractive index is that it is also a relative measure of the amount of bending of light when it passes the interface. The higher the index, the more the light will bend. Lenses have curved surfaces, so designed to bend light to our needs which, unlike flat filters or optical panes, obtain

