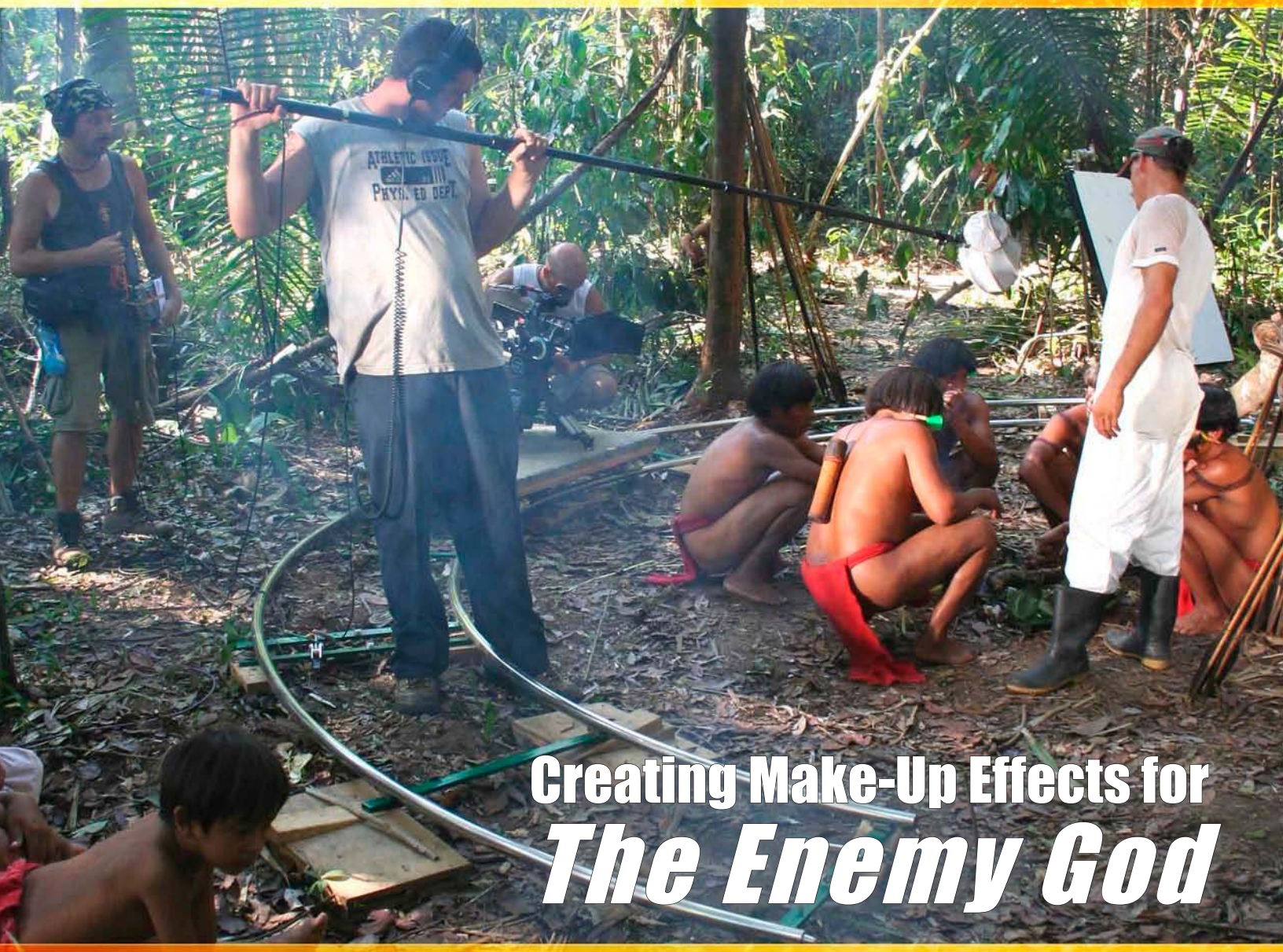
July 2007

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Depth of Field Techniques

Shooting and Editing *Aloha New York*

Working with Music for Your Film

Production Design for Dialogue Recording

Six Habits of Highly Effective Editors

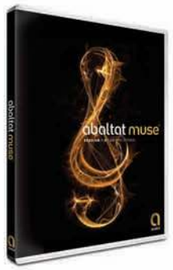
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Table of Contents July 2007









Cinematography
6 Using a Polarizer to See through a Windshield by Ira Tiffen
8 Depth of Field Techniques Using the Panasonic DVX-100A by Gregory Singer

Directing
12 Creative Collaborators: The Director and Cinematographer by Jacqueline B. Frost
18 How Script & Budget Can Dictate Inventive Solutions for Difficult Shots by David K. Irving

Filmmaker Spotlight
20 Shooting and Editing *Aloha New York* Carolina Cruz Santiago Rides the Wave of Success (and Hard Work) to Tribeca by Taryn Bensky

Editing
24 Editing is Re-editing: From Rough Cut to Picture Lock by Mark Kerins
28 Using Transitions by Lew Schatzer

Music & Sound
30 Working with Music for Your Film by Myrl Schreibman
32 Audio Mixing Tips for Editors by Bryant Falk
34 Production Design for Dialogue Recording by Fred Ginsburg C.A.S. Ph.D. MBKS

Props & FX Make-up
36 Creating Make-Up Effects for *The Enemy God* by Todd Debreceni

Production
42 Shooting Abroad in Tanzania by Carl Filoreto

Tech Focus
46 Keeping Handheld Camera Shots Steady by Chris Cavallari

Screenwriting
34 Cinema and "Reality": The Importance of Emotional Truth by Michael Karp, SOC

Networking
52 Filmmakers Networking Community by Brandi J. Sims

On the Cover
Behind the scenes of *The Enemy God*.



Movies can have a political, economic, and a social influence. They can make us question ourselves; they can inspire and influence us deeply. In Michael Karp, SOC's article, we see that even the fantasy film can have moral truth that we can learn from. Read Michael's article relating to story: "Cinema and 'Reality': The Importance of Emotional Truth" (page 34).

This month's Cover Story is "Creating Make-Up Effects for The Enemy God" (page 36) by Todd Debreceni, who wrote the article following his return from the production shot on location in Belize. Fred Ginsburg writes about "Production Design for Dialogue Recording" (page 34). And, Myrl Schreibman writes about "Working with Music for Your Film" (page 30).

Please join me in welcoming our new contributing writers, Carl Filoreto ("Shooting Abroad in Tanzania," page 42), Jacqueline B. Frost ("Creative Collaborators: The Director and Cinematographer," page 12), and Gregory Singer ("Depth of Field Techniques Using the Panasonic DVX-100A," page 8). We also welcome new staff writers Taryn Bensky, Brandi J. Sims, and Michele Wein.

StudentFilmmakers magazine recently returned from Cine Gear Expo 2007, which took place in Los Angeles, CA. We would like to thank everyone who stopped by our booth and picked up free copies of the magazine. By the end of the show, not one single copy was left! A wide range of interesting people visit and signed up for the magazine including: cinematographers, lighting technicians, DITs, new filmmakers, camera operators, young producers, and aspiring actors.

We will be exhibiting this year at Digital Video Expo East, to be held July 20 through 22, at our home state, New York. If you're an independent filmmaker, producer, or play any role in the professional video industry, you need to be at DV Expo East to engage with the talent behind the scenes and see the tools powering next-generation productions. If you get a chance please stop by our table. For ongoing updates on *StudentFilmmakers* magazine events and happenings, visit our website at www.studentfilmmakers.com.

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

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Entry Deadline: September 30, 2007 5pm EDT

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Using a Polarizer
to See through a Windshield

When Closer Isn't Clearer

by Ira Tiffen

The robbers burst through the bank's doors with a bang, racing straight for the getaway car. Sitting quietly at the curb, its idling engine belies the thunder about to emerge. The camera moves in to take a closer look at the driver and his henchman (See Image 1). We can't see them clearly amid the reflections from the windshield. On goes the polarizer, and we see more of these villains (See Image 2). But wait! Can it be? What's this? The driver can't be more than five years old! If only we could see even more clearly.

The cameraman knows just what to do. Moving the camera further away, he zooms in to maintain the framing (See Image 3). Now, we can see more of the driver. He's not a getaway driver at all! We can see, in fact, that he's none other than my five-year-old son, Max, playing! And his 'cohort' turns out to be Big Blue Bear, not a villain after all!

What a surprise awaits the scrambling thieves headed their way! It's a good thing Max knows how to keep those car doors locked! These thieves are sure to be caught.

Now let's take a step back, literally, from our make-believe movie scenario.

What's happening between Images 1 and 2 is about what we would expect from a polarizer. Without a filter, the reflections almost totally obscure the view through the windshield. Placing a polarizer on the camera lens reduces these when the angle of reflectance is close to the ideal of 33°. When the camera is close to the windshield, however, more light reflects at angles further from the ideal, and we still see more reflections than we want.

The solution, as our cameraman knows, is to move the camera back, away from the reflecting glass. The farther you go, the more the reflections come closer to the ideal angle; more of them can then be absorbed by the polarizer. More details become visible through the glass, as can be seen when comparing Images 2 and 3.

Our bank robbers would also have liked getting further away, but they learned this lesson too late. On the other hand, you still have plenty of time to cash out with this knowledge – that sometimes you can see more clearly by getting further away.

In over 30 years of making optical filters, Ira Tiffen created the Pro-Mist, Soft/FX, Ultra Contrast, GlimmerGlass, and others, netting him both a Technical Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and a Prime-Time Emmy Award. Elected a Fellow of the SMPTE in 2002, he is also an Associate member of the ASC, and the author of the filter section of the *American Cinematographer Manual*.


Image 1: No Polarizer.


Image 2: Polarizer Up Close.


Image 3: Polarizer Further Back

Depth of Field Techniques Using the Panasonic DVX-100A

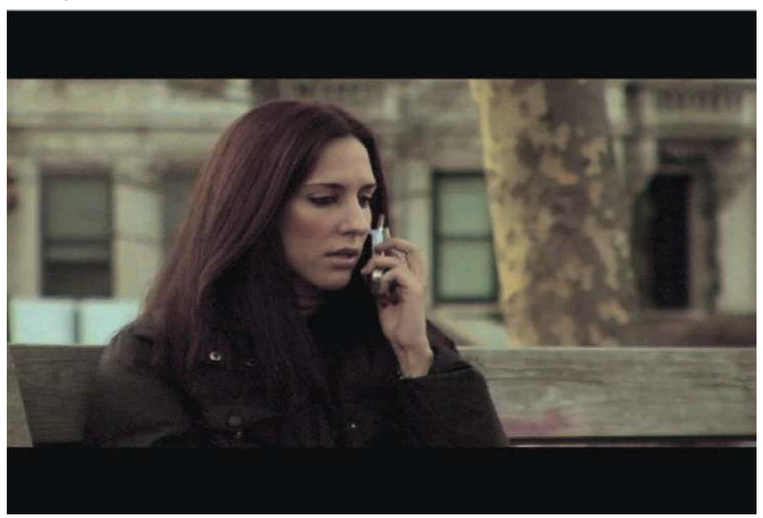
Quick Tips for Creating a More 'Cinematic' Image

by Gregory Singer

So you want to make a great looking movie but you have limited resources? Like any film fanatic out there, you love the look of 35mm, but you don't have a spare $50,000 for camera and film stock? How can you make your movie look more "Hollywood" if you don't even have the money for a Red Rock 35mm adapter? Everyone has their own theories about what the differences between film and digital are, but the overwhelming consensus is the major differences are depth of field, color rendition, and contrast. Another reason is shot selection and frame composition, but that is a separate discourse. Contrast and color rendition are dependent upon the camera model, but depth of field applies to every camera. Personally, I love the Panasonic DVX-100A because of the way it captures colors and the manual controls for the zoom and focus. It also has a plethora of controls to tweak the image exactly to your liking. Whichever camera you decide to purchase, you need to learn how it works and how it responds to changes in settings and environments.

Six months ago I obtained a depth of field plug-in for Adobe After Effects, Premiere Pro, and Final Cut Pro. I wanted to learn to use it, so at the spur of the moment I grabbed my camera and my friend, Shanna Withers, and took some test video of her acting in a spontaneous scene. Our purpose was to create a short clip that looks very cinematic, like it was taken from a much larger piece, so that I could play around with Adobe After Effects and she could use it on her reel. Here are some of the techniques I used.

Shooting Shanna Withers with our DVX-100A



1. Zoom

Even though lenses on digital cameras have a deep depth of field, it is possible to give the impression of a shallow depth of field. The simplest way is to zoom all the way in and then move your camera back until you get the desired framing. The depth of field isn't altered, but zooming exaggerates any out of focus scene elements, giving the feeling of a shallow depth of field. In the first photo you can see the result of placing the camera (DVX-100A) 20 feet away and zooming all the way in. The image has a very pleasing look and the background is very soft.

2. Move the background further back.

If possible, move the actor further away from the background. If the background behind an actor is further from the camera then obviously it will be more out of focus. If you compose the scene properly, the audience won't be able to tell and you'll get a more cinematic image. In the first photo the apartment buildings are about 100 feet behind Shanna.

3. Open the iris.

If the camera iris is wide open then you will get the shallowest depth of field possible. Open the iris as wide as possible, and use neutral density filters to stop down the light so the image is not overexposed.



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*The On-Air software is currently included for Mac OS X with Windows coming soon.



Before applying effects



After applying depth of field plug-in

4. Use a plug-in.

For a shot in the test shoot with Shanna, I used a depth of field plug-in for After Effects. In pictures 2 and 3 you can see the difference it makes. To get the best effect, you can create a focus map to tell the plug-in how much to apply the effect to each pixel. This works best with a static shot, but it is possible to track the background in a moving shot and still get acceptable results.

In this shot, the camera was static on a tripod so it was relatively simple to create the focus map. I took a still from the sequence and imported it into Photoshop. There I converted it to a grayscale image and erased (made black) all the parts of the image I wanted to keep in sharp focus, like around Shanna and the bench. I was very careful on the object edges, like the slats of the bench, so that the image looked realistic. In the background, I used the blending tool and the eraser to rough in the areas that I wanted to be more out of focus. On background object I applied focal lengths that made sense. If you look closely at the three trees, the one on the far right is more out of focus than the ones directly behind Shanna, yet it is not as out of focus as the people are. The more care you take in roughing out the focus map the better results you will get.

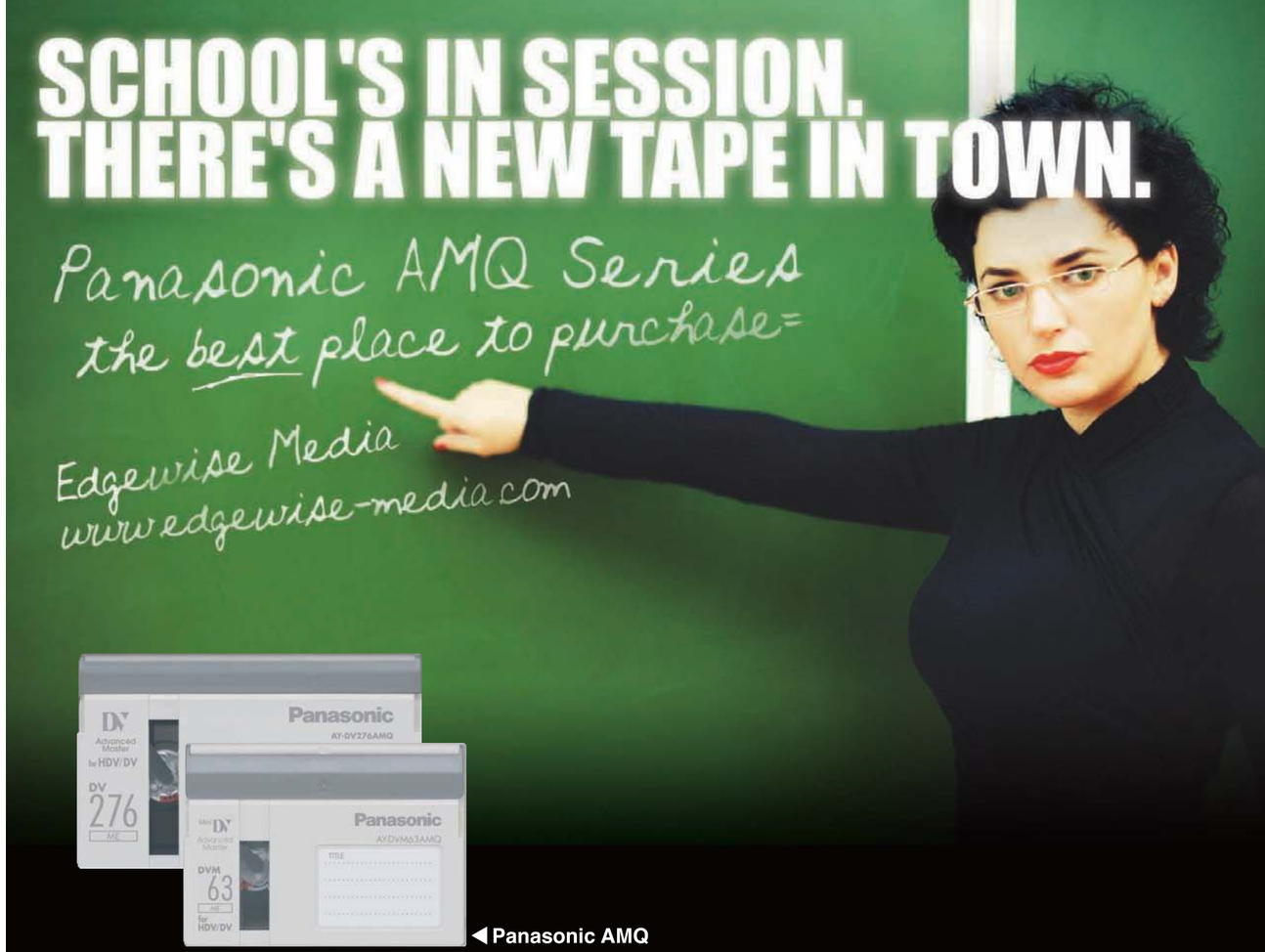
The shots from this camera angle are the only ones where I used the depth of field plug-in. The other shots use the zoom technique and proper framing. The resulting video file is titled "TEST – Shanna Phone Call" and is viewable on the Filmmakers Networking Community site at studentfilmmakers.com. It can be downloaded at http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com/gregorysinger.

Contrary to popular belief, small sensor digital cameras have the ability to create great looking images. With proper planning and forethought, it is possible to create a movie that people are amazed by, and one that leaves them thinking, "Did he use film?"

Focus map. Lighter areas become more out of focus than darker areas



Gregory Singer is a documentary filmmaker and editor. He runs Stallion AV Productions that produces independent works about sociological issues. He is currently producing Live Indie TV for PBS and is in pre-production of *Seoul Search*, a documentary feature about the good, the bad, and the ugly of international adoption.



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