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This Month's Featured Networkers

On the Cover
In The Tradition of My Family: Cast and crew rehearsing a take.
Photo by Rich Block



Last week I attended the 61st annual conference of the University Film and Video Association at the University of North Texas. I strongly recommend this organization to anyone interested in the making and teaching of film and video. This year's conference was hosted by UFVA President Melinda Levin and her team at the Department of Radio, Television and Film at the University of North Texas in Denton.

This was an educational, inspiring and forward thinking conference. I stayed in the dorms and had flash backs to when I was in school living in the dorms.

The UFVA was founded in 1947 and has developed into an organization of professionals and institutions involved in the production, research, writing and education on film, video and digital media arts. UFVA members are image-makers and artists, teachers and students, archivists, distributors, publishers, universities, libraries and media companies. The annual conference offers a chance to screen, present, mingle, learn and become inspired.

This year's conference included a variety of exhibits, traditional receptions, and showcase panels from sustaining members, formal and juried screenings, paper presentations and panel discussions.

For those of you who have not signed up yet don't miss this opportunity to win awards and prizes with your summer footage. Enter the free-entry Summer Shorts 2007 contest online. Sign up now and upload your shorts at www.studentfilmmakers.com/summershorts.

We want to thank our Summer Shorts 2007 sponsors especially, Sony, Fuji Film, Lowel, OurStage and Avid for their support.

We will be attending the VidExpo 2007 event this October 10th and 11th in Colorado, and DV Expo West 2007 in Los Angeles, December 4th through 6th. If you are attending, stop by our booth to pick up the latest issue and say hello.

Enjoy this fantastic issue! Please send your comments to the editorsdesk@studentfilmmakers.com.

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

studentfilmmakers

The # 1 Educational Resource for Film and Video Makers

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Using Colored Light

Quick Tips for Common Problems

by Kevin Zanit

In the world of music videos cinematographers are often faced with very limited budgets and even more limited time to get good looking material. At the same time, however, cinematographers are given almost free rein to follow their instincts creatively. More often than not, a cinematographer can ignore the notion of naturalism and completely motivated light.

We can use the fact that we are not constrained by naturalism to come up with different kinds of creative solutions to common problems that can arise when shooting music videos.



For example, on a recent music video project, I'm faced with shooting a club scene in a location which only looks good when the camera is looking in only a few directions. I have a shot that has to look in one of the "bad" directions, with an ugly, undressed white wall in the background. This wall will kill a lot of the mood and drama of the imagery.

What I decide to do is fill the room up with haze (which is different than the smoke produced by a conventional fog machine) and use several large focused lights in the background. With the haze in the location, the light projects a very distinct shaft of light which essentially covers up anything behind it. I project this light in the background and thus camouflage the ugly white wall with an interesting blue shaft of light. It would be hard to justify this solution for a project where naturalism is important.

Another problem that can arise when shooting music videos is because of their quick-paced cutting, it is easy for a viewer to lose a sense of location and the layout of the location. For example, in this same club scene, we shoot small vignettes in different parts of the club, and there is little to tie these different places together as one location. I decide to create a motif of blue light in all the club scenes so that the viewer would immediately associate blue light with the club subconsciously.



There are endless "quick" solutions like the ones above which cinematographers could work into their arsenals for different circumstances. Color, for me, is a powerful tool that should be used sparingly to maintain its maximum effect. Too many colors going on at once can often just look muddy and unattractive. Using a limited palette of colors can help maintain the impact. Blue backgrounds can look quite nice with warm skin tones in the foreground. Experimentation is key to figuring out what you like and don't like.

Images courtesy of Kevin Zanit.

Kevin Zanit is a California-based cinematographer who has worked on numerous commercials and music videos. His filmography includes *Room Service* (2006), *These Days* (2006), *Inner Prison* (2005), and *Passing Moments* (2003). Kevin and his partner, Elhanan Matos, recently launched a production and consulting company specializing in high-speed photography (www.studiobattlerattle.com).

Backlighting for Video

Different Ways You Can Deploy a Back Light

by Carl Filoreto



An interview set built for a shoot with U.S. Winter Olympic athletes during media week held prior to the Torino Games. Here, the backlight is a 200 watt HMI mounted on a C-stand and diffused with a soft box and grid insert. The production was performed for The TV Guide Channel.

A lot of work I perform for clients hinges on the ability to create interview looks that are appealing to the eye. It's true across the video production spectrum, from network news magazines to corporate image pieces. In the week prior to writing this article I received three calls from producers specifically looking for a DP who could deftly handle lighting high end, high production value interviews.

Well-lit, compelling-looking interviews can be seen in a lot of different places. Even reality shows using mostly handheld footage shot on the run often utilize well-composed interviews as the anchor of a video segment. When *American Idol* comes down the stretch run, the producers use carefully crafted interview locations to highlight their personality profiles. The well-crafted interview look, often using multi-camera set ups, has been a stylistic staple of Dateline NBC since its inception over a decade ago. And over the years I've worked with a producer who likes meticulously lit interviews where we place the camera on a jib or dolly and keep it in constant motion as a way to create a more dynamic look.

Interview set-ups can get fabulously complex, or they can be extremely basic. But you don't necessarily need to back a two ton grip truck up to the loading dock to produce good lighting results. One of the basic ingredients in the recipe for good lighting is the simple use of a well-positioned back light. You can call it a kicker, a hair light or a shoulder light – whatever you'd like. Just always include it in your "must use" list. Even if I only have the time to set up two lights, one will of course be a key light, and the other will be a back light. It performs two vital visual chores: it provides separation between the subject and the background, and it also lends a sense of depth to the setting.

There are a number of different ways you can deploy a back light. One of the simplest and most efficient methods is to put a simple 100-200 watt fresnel on some type of boom arm, and then position it behind the subject. I usually put the light on a dimmer so I can easily adjust the intensity. For me, it's easier to get the light in the position I like, then, control it from there.



At the same shoot, we also utilized a green screen set. Two 200 watt fluorescent light banks are used as back lights in order to cover the widest possible area. We were prepared for groups of athletes, as well as covering an area where the athletes may walk or demonstrate a technique.

Since I light most of my interviews using daylight balanced instruments, I put some ¼ or ½ color temperature blue (CTB) gel in front of the light. This helps match the color temperature of the fresnel to daylight, while still providing some additional warmth. Keep in mind, when you use a dimmer, you affect the color temperature of the light being emitted from the instrument. The more you crank it down, the warmer the light a tungsten instrument will give off. So you'll probably want to compensate for the change. Otherwise, you may quickly move from a look that degenerates from one of pleasing warmth to one that has a disturbing reddish orange hue.

Staying with the basic theme, there are different ways to mount the light and get it in the most effective position. As I mentioned, you can take a simple beefy type stand, and put a straight boom arm on it. It doesn't provide the most flexibility when positioning the light but it's simple, quick and it works. Adding a clamp with a stud-like attachment will provide some maneuverability, while a handy device known in the trade as a magic finger will let you maneuver the light in a number of different directions, then lock it in place. Run the straight arm through a device formally called a mini grip head, or more commonly referred to as a "knuckle", and you'll achieve even more maneuverability. You can also use a combi stand, which has an articulating arm that folds out of the basic stand, and *presto*, it creates a dandy boom arm. It's one stand with two distinct and effective uses. Also, remember that you'll need some shot bags, usually of the fifteen pound variety, to throw on the base of the stand to anchor it and prevent if from tipping over. And you may need one to counter weight the boom arm. There's not much worse than watching your stand begin leaning precariously during the middle of an interview, and threaten the safety of both the guest and any other innocent folks who are suddenly in harm's way.

So let's ramp it up here. Personally, I often like a back light to act as a hair light and to also throw a rim of light on the





Record breaking endurance pilot Steve Fossett looks off camera during a live interview on NBC's The Today Show. Even with grey hair the back light was diffused in a way that allows a soft glow to hit his hair, while also providing a rim of light on his shoulders.

A 200 watt HMI is diffused with a light box and an insert grid for this shot with record breaking endurance pilot Steve Fossett. An additional piece of grid cloth was added to reduce the intensity of the light hitting his grey hair. Fossett is seated in front of the Virgin Atlantic Global Flyer, the plane he used to make the first solo nonstop and non-refueled circumnavigation of the world. The set up was for a Today Show live shot located in Wichita, Kansas.

shoulders of the subject. That's a lot to ask of a small fresnel. So I'll reach into my bag of tricks and use a two bank fluorescent instrument. I can then be doubly clever and use one daylight and one tungsten lamp, which again throws that hint of warmth into the overall look. Unfortunately, most fluorescent based lights are rather heavy, so I have to set up a C-stand to handle the extra weight of the instrument. This is also a handy way to provide a backlight for multiple interview subjects. There are also light boxes that are much longer than they are wide, and with the help of a speed ring they'll attach to most tungsten or HMI lighting instruments. They also make a dandy head and shoulder back light, or they can be used for a multiple subject set up.

Okay, this discussion has been focusing on the mechanics of whipping up a back light in short order and zipping it into place. But what is the most effective position for it? Well, beauty truly is in the eye of the beholder. Lighting is highly individualistic, and one person's lighting epiphany is another's demise. One of the first questions I'll ask when I begin to set up is *"What does the person(s) we're going to interview look like?"* My choice of set ups will depend on their sex, hair color, complexion and height. If it's a woman with luxuriant blonde hair, then I'm smiling because back lights make blonde hair radiant, and I'd have to be an idiot to screw up the look. If it's a professorial gentleman with a receding hairline, or a professional football player with a buzz cut, then I'm probably going to dismiss the idea of a back light altogether. I'll try to aim it at their shoulders and squeeze down the barn doors, but inevitably, it will produce a nasty hot spot on their skull. Not good.

There's a myriad of choices. Some DP's like the back light to come from directly down the middle and over the top, while others like to slide the backlight so that it comes in more from the side. Since you're

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