



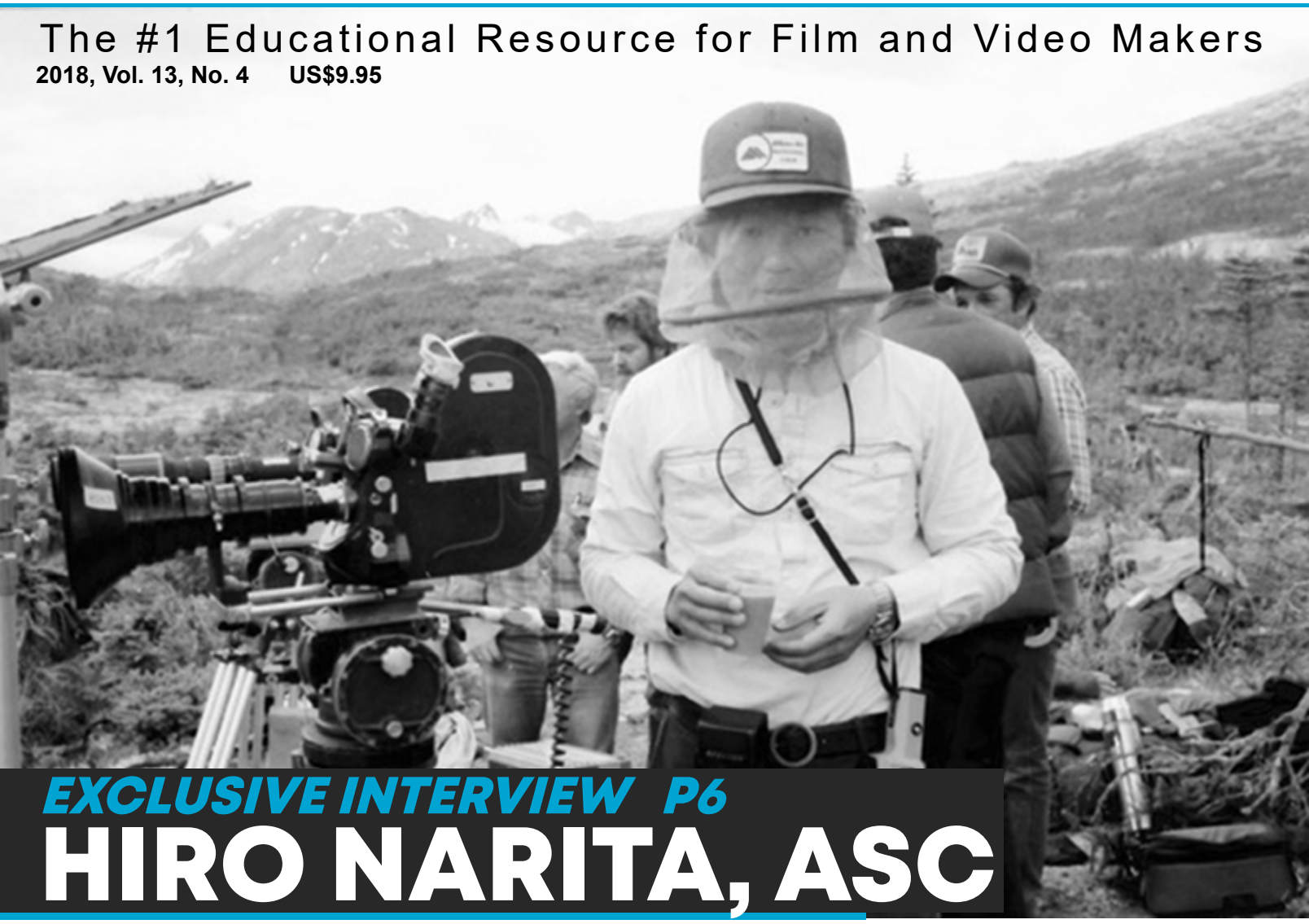


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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW P6

HIRO NARITA, ASC



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TWO CAMERAS

Yay or Nay?

By John Klein



You're a cinematographer. You're shooting an indie film. The producer comes up to you and says that, due to budget and scheduling conflicts, you only have two days on set with a Very. Important. Actor. And immediately, your producer poses the age-old question every cinematographer dreads:

"Can we shoot with two cameras to save time?"

It's a fair question. Seems simple! Especially in the DSLR era, getting a second camera and operator is easy as apple pie. And that 42-setup day you have on the schedule isn't going to shoot itself. Now you can grab two shots at once; your output for the day has instantly doubled! Right?

Not so fast. You know better. You've heard that old film adage that given the options of fast, cheap, and good, you can only pick two. And so now it's up to you. How do you frame this conversation with your producer? What should you consider when deciding whether or not filming with two cameras will solve your problems?

First of all, when it comes to budget, it's not always a cheaper proposition.

Bringing on a second camera necessitates a second camera operator, and usually also a second focus puller. And unless you have a monitor large enough and capable enough for your director to view both shots at once, you're going to need to rent a second monitor.

To springboard off that, then, you need to make sure all your equipment matches to as much a degree as is possible. Try as you might in the color grade, you're not going to completely match a Black Magic Pocket Cinema Camera to a Sony FS7, or a Canon C300 to a Red Epic. Low-light scenarios are even worse; a Sony A7s at 3200 ISO may look clean enough, but don't even try going to 1600 ISO on a Black Magic Ursa Mini. And even if you have two of the same cameras, do you have two of the same lenses? Those cheap Canon FD mount lenses your second operator got off eBay aren't going to pair well with the set of Zeiss Compact Primes that you rented. And keeping track of all that gear means having assistant cameras who are terrifically meticulous and organized.

Now, don't get scared. Let's say your budget will still allow for the rental of all this extra gear and crew because it's still cheaper than adding a day to your production or to your actor's time on set. Great! You still have to consider creatively and logistically how it will affect the work on set. What type of film are you making?

If it's something that involves meticulous storyboards, visual effects, or high-key beauty lighting, shooting with two cameras will pose problems. You won't be able to sneak lights just outside of your frame as easily if a second camera is pointing right in that direction! Wider lenses are tougher to employ. And a customary two-camera setup – shooting a wide shot and a close-up at the same time – means no adjustments to the lighting or blocking for a close-up. The quality of the lighting, and the image, will suffer.

However, if it's a character drama, perhaps even one with children or with several emotionally draining scenes, two cameras may be a very valid choice, as it allows the actors to do fewer runs of a difficult scene. Even if your lighting suffers, sometimes the scene isn't about the lighting but rather about allowing the truth of a performance to come out and the interactions of the actors to take priority. If you as a cinematographer can deal with that sacrifice and find a way to light the scene evenly and effectively while maintaining the mood and style you want, everybody benefits.

There are other instances where multiple cameras help. Stunt work and action sequences where you may only be able to do one take can and often do utilize several cameras at once. Or if you're in a situation akin to Danny Boyle's opening scene of 28 Days Later where they only had a short time to shoot on a closed bridge in London, hiding multiple cameras along the scene's path can give you the opportunity to cover the whole scene quickly.

Consider other elements as well. Set dressing may be a challenge if the cameras have to point in two different directions and will take longer to set up and maintain continuity. Trying to keep the other operator out of your shot is always a dance, especially if you're handheld or on a Steadicam or gimbal. Editing a two-camera shoot may seem straightforward and can help with making simple setups like interviews more dynamic; but taking pauses and those dreaded "um's" and "I mean's" out of a person's phrasing can seem like jump-cuts if you're not careful with where that second camera is framed. Remember the 20% rule: that second camera should offer a different enough angle to cut properly!

It's not productive to rain down on the two-camera parade. Directors like Boyle, Ridley Scott, Rob Marshall, and James Mangold have employed two cameras or even more on their films, and if you know where to put them for maximum effect, it can be very worthwhile. But don't forsake image quality for that extra angle! It may not be as easy or as fast or as cheap as you – or your producer – wish it were.

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A CONVERSATION WITH HIRO NARITA, ASC



"The most exciting part of my work, also very challenging, is to capture our real emotion and express them visually."

Interview conducted by Jody Michelle Solis

Hiro Narita, ASC has a filmography that includes over seventy-three titles ranging from feature films to episodic television series to documentaries. He is known for his work on "Never Cry Wolf" (1983), "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids" (1989), "The Rocketeer" (1991), "Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country" (1991) and "The Scorpion King" (2002). Narita has received Emmy award nominations for "Farewell to Manzanar" (1976), "Dirty Pictures" (2000), and "Half Past Autumn: The Life and Works of Gordon Parks" (2001). He has garnered numerous film awards including best cinematography for "Valley of the Heart's Delight" (Boston International Film Festival, 2006); and "Never Cry Wolf", (National Society of Film Critics Awards, USA, 1984; Boston Society of Film Critics Awards, 1984).

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