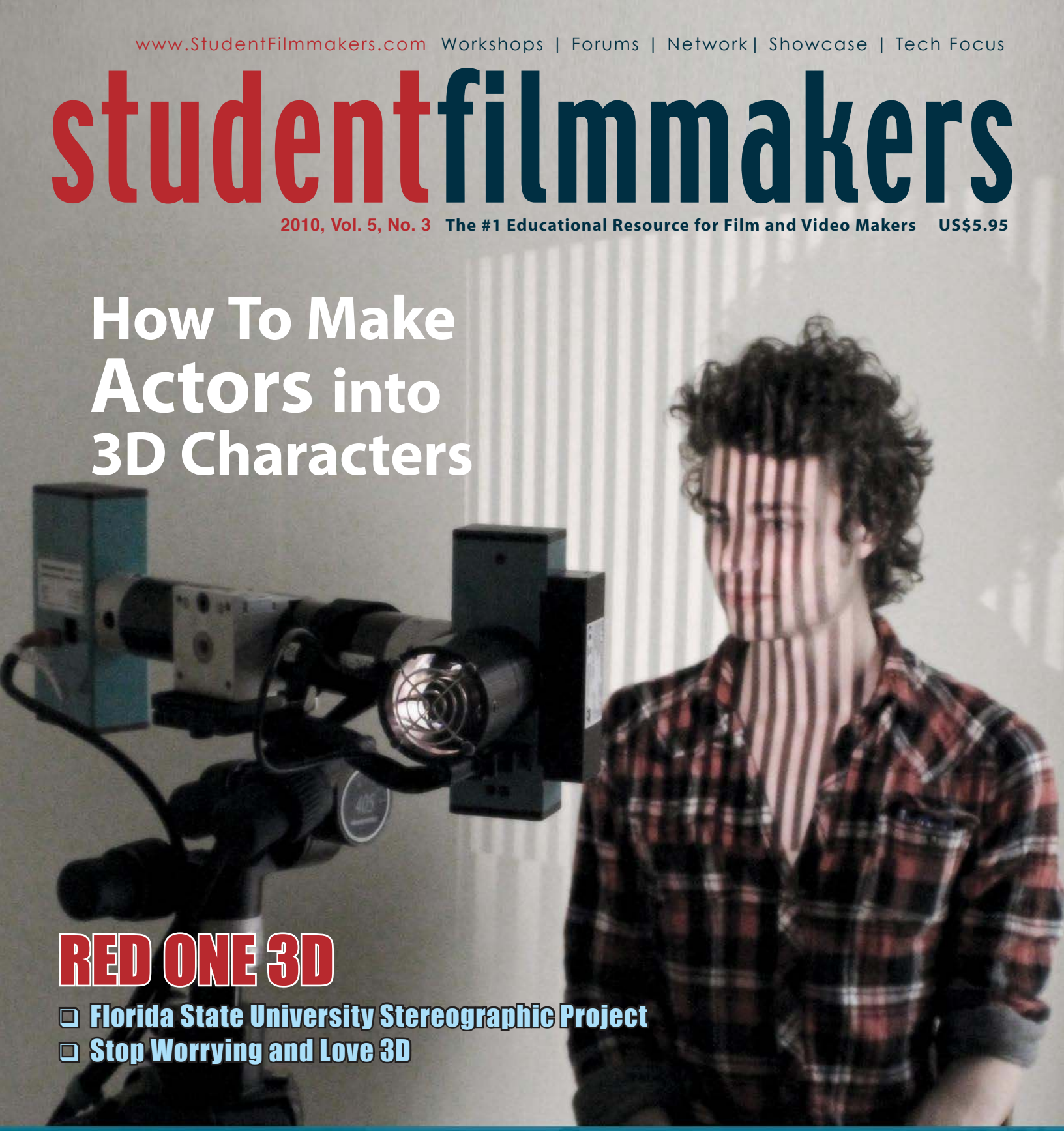
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How To Make Actors into 3D Characters

RED ONE 3D

- Florida State University Stereographic Project
- Stop Worrying and Love 3D

Dispatch : A True Life Creative Collaboration

Steven Sprung's Feature Film Directorial Debut

PLUS

- On-Set Convergence
- "*What!?*" …And Other Bad Dialogue Writing
- Shooting a Sitcom in One Day
- Clearing Music for Your Film
- Financing Films via the Kickstarter Method



For the first time, StudentFilmmakers Magazine features three educational articles written by Film and Scientific Computing undergraduate and graduate students attending university. "First, Beg for Two Cameras" serves as a film student's stereographic starting point for RED ONE users. The three-parter additionally takes a look on-set convergence and the process used to make actors into 3D characters. The Florida State University 3D Project teams researched RED ONE stereographic cinematography with the assistance of Rexford Metz, ASC.

Also on 3D: "How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love 3D," written by documentary filmmaker William Donaruma about the basics of what he used to establish a 3D workflow from production to post to presentation for his 3D project.

Feature article, "Dispatch: A True Life Creative Collaboration," (Close Up Department) takes a look at award-winning editor Steven Sprung's feature film directorial debut.

Excellent articles in this edition also include: "The Close-Up Lens with a Split Personality," by Ira Tiffen (Cinematography Department), "Shooting a Sitcom in One Day," by Scott Essman (Production Department), and "The Power of Rubberbanding," by Jeff Turboff (Editing Department). "Create Highly Stylized, 2D Animated "South Park"-Like Cartoons," by Sherri Sheridan (Animation Department) gives readers eight tips and seven steps for getting started. "Financing Films via the Kickstarter Method," by Larry Jaffee (Film Business Department) is about the stories of two independent filmmakers who use crowdfunding as an alternative method to raise money for their films. Join us in welcoming new contributing writers Steven Ascher and Christopher Ball, CSC. Turn to the articles, "Clearing Music for Your Film" (Music and Sound Department) and "'What!?' …And Other Bad Dialogue Writing" (Screenwriting Department).

If you haven't done so yet, we encourage you to sign up for a free networking page in the Film and Video Makers Networking Community at http:// networking.studentfilmmakers.com. This is a great opportunity for you to get exposure for your films, find other productions to work on, and be found by productions looking for filmmakers, video makers, and crew.

Enjoy this edition!

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

studentfilmmakers

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Stereographic Project: An actor gets his face scanned by light sensors. The first step in the process of making him into a 3D character. Photo by Madeline Eberhard.

The Close-Up Lens with a Split Personality

Getting to Know the Split-Field Lens

by Ira Tiffen

It's all well and good to know to use a close-up lens when you need to focus more closely on a subject than the lens would otherwise; it's another thing entirely when you need to focus both near and far *in the same shot*.

Harrumph, you say? Can't be done, you say? No way, you say? Well, as you might by now be starting to suspect, in fact, you can. You do it with a variation of a close-up lens that we call the 'split-field lens.'

Split-fields are essentially close-up lenses cut in half. While you can get them in exotically-mounted square sizes for film and television cameras, they typically come in round mounts that allow you to rotate them in alignment with the needs of the shot. They come in the same array of diopter strengths that close-up lenses do, and as far as the lens-half goes, they work in the same manner.

It's a classic case of what is *not* there being what's important. The lens half lets you focus up close. It's the other half, without the glass, that allows you to focus on things that are a great distance away, since it is exactly like using the lens with nothing attached. So on one side, you focus up close; on the other, you can focus farther away, and you can do both *at the same time*.

In our picture examples, we can see that without a split-field lens, the camera can only obtain good focus individually on either the background or the foreground but not both at once. With the addition of the split-field, in this case a +2 diopter, you can get both sharp together.

No Lens; Background in Focus



No Lens; Foreground in Focus





With Split-Field Lens; Both in Focus.

Now using split-fields may seem tricky, but I've found that there's a general procedure to follow that simplifies things greatly. Here's how to do it:

(1.) Select a focal length that will give you the overall framing you want;

(2.) Select a diopter strength that will allow you to focus on the subject in the foreground when the lens is set to focus on the background;

(3.) Using the split-field in that chosen strength mounted on the camera, align the lens-half with the foreground subject;

(4.) Set the lens to focus on the background, frame the shot, and then simply move the camera in or out from the foreground subject the short distance needed to get it in focus.

(5.) Record!

The idea is that the far focus will unlikely be affected by the small movement needed to get the foreground in focus; once they are both in focus, you're set to go.

You may be wondering what happens to the area in the image that coincides with the cut-off edge of the lens. Excellent thought! You will want to align that, where possible, with part of the scene that has little or no detail, as that will be a relatively narrow out-of-focus area corresponding to a line from one edge of the image to the other, and angled the same as the lens is. If you have the lens on the lower half of the image, with the edge aligned horizontally, then you'll have an out-of-focus area running horizontally to match.

In our split-field example, you can see this soft-focus area running horizontally just above the top of the base; it is the ground detail that is affected most.

Changing the lens opening allows you to define the amount of image softness at the lens edge. Closing the lens down will increase depth-of-field and minimize the softness. Conversely, opening it up can enhance the softness.

With some lenses and formats, closing the lens down a lot can allow you to get both near and far focus, too. However, you will want to turn to split-fields when you aren't using such a lens or format, or when you don't have sufficient light or exposure latitude to allow closing the lens down suitably. In those instances, the split-field lens may be your best bet.

Split-fields are great in situations where you can readily define foreground and background: in a hallway, with something happening up close and something else going on farther away, with the demarcation line aligned with a door or corner in the wall, for example.

CAUTION: Be careful not to have action moving between areas of focus (unless you are looking for that 'special effect!'). An object moving from background to foreground will very suddenly loom larger in the image than you would normally expect, most unrealistically.

When in a tough spot, split-field lenses can be your best friend: a pinch hitter, so to speak, with a split personality.

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.





Dispatch:
A True Life Creative Collaboration

Award Winning Editor Steven Sprung's Feature Film Directorial Debut

by Mary Ann Skweres

The common wisdom generally imparted to new screenwriters is to write what you know. In *Dispatch,* a story about one night in the life of a Hollywood limousine dispatcher, co-writers Michael Bershad and Steven Sprung take that advice to heart. Both came to Hollywood to work in the film industry and met on their survival job.

Michael shares, "We drove limos together in Los Angeles from this drafty old airplane hanger, oil on the ground, cold and miserable in the winter and hot in the summer. It was very glamorous." Sprung adds, "We sat on these pull out seats waiting around dispatch all day long without getting paid, trying to get these little airport runs that would pay us about thirty bucks for two hours of work. That would be our whole day's work. While we were sitting around, Michael and I would just be talking." Over that time, they discovered their "mutual interest." That interest has since segued into a multi-faceted collaboration that draws from the complimentary talents that each brings to the partnership.

Bershad had been an actor in New York and was an actor in Los Angeles. Wanting to be a serious actor, he often rejected commercial and soap opera assignments, holding out for classic stage acting jobs, a decision that somewhat hindered his success in the acting profession. "That is just the death knell for an actor's career," admits Bershad.









Bershad also did a number of other jobs in the movie business, including working as a casting director.

Sprung dreamed of making films since he was a teen. He first discovered the magic of entertaining people when he started performing magic tricks at kids' parties. "I was fascinated by illusion and manipulating peoples' perceptions of reality. Entertaining people with sleight of hand was an enormous rush," reveals Sprung. "Making films is the ultimate sleight of hand." Early on Sprung discovered an aptitude for editing, which was confirmed when he received a prestigious American Cinema Editors' A.C.E. student editing nomination while still in college. Opportunity steered him into editing, but the directing bug never left. He made a number of short films, pretty much doing everything from "writing to directing to doing the camerawork to standing on my head."

Eventually Sprung got to the point where he needed someone to work with. Sprung explains, "I'd always looked at Michael as a really strong producer. I called him up." Bershad continues, "I actually remember that day. I was taking reservations at this limo company. In the past we had sort of talked about it, but I kind of backed off. For some reason it now made sense to me. I called him back the next day." Sprung picks up, "Now mind you, he was calling me from the limousine dispatch office at 11 o'clock on one of his night shifts. He said, 'I want to make movies with you.' I said, 'Great,' and he said, 'I have this idea.' Then he said…" Bershad laughs as he elaborates, "Well, basically, it's called *Dispatch* – big shock. Because I was an actor, I originally thought of it as a one-man show. As I started thinking about it, I thought, let's make this a movie. Let's bring in some characters and tell a story here."

A day later the pair started writing. Sprung took notes on a legal pad as Bershad told stories about things he had experienced as a dispatcher. Although Bershad quips that they started writing in "1947," the film actually took about two years to write working part time. In the course of writing the team simplified the screenplay, cutting out several characters and story lines. Although some of the events were things that happened to him, Bershad comments, "It's really not my story, but I can honestly say that everything that happens in the movie was experienced by somebody."

The film is an amalgam of different characters that the writers encountered during their tenures in the limo business. It is also a character study about choices, and where each person's









particular choices lead them in life. A story with universal appeal, it often elicits similar responses from viewers. "This is an adult movie," says Bershad. "So many people look back on their lives and say, 'What a bad choice I made.' I heard an interesting thing recently that resonated with me about how when people come to the end of their life, they never regret the things that they did. They almost always regret the things that they didn't do. That's the reason we made a movie."

Bershad brought his strengths dealing with actors and casting to his producing role. He admits that Sprung also did a lot of the producing, but they also had a lot of help from the production manager and line producer that they hired. They went to meetings together to choose production keys such as the cinematographer.

Although it seemed initially that the script would be easy to shoot, the large cast added a logistical complexity to the production that they had not anticipated. "We had designed it to be very simple: one night, one location," explains Sprung. "What we didn't account for was that in order to keep it interesting and make it a full story, we had to write so many characters that it ended up being very unwieldy trying to juggle all the actors' schedules and making it all work in a concentrated period of time. In some ways it might have been easier if we had written a script that had only four to six characters and multiple locations. Then we could have spread it out over weekends." As it turned out, the film was shot straight through over an eighteen-day schedule and the production was locked into having actors at very particular times.

During production, the pair wore different hats once again. Bershad took the lead role of Nick, the "lifer" limo dispatcher, and Sprung took up the director's megaphone. In regards to directing his co-writer, Sprung jokes, "It was great! I finally got to push him around." Bershad questions whether he might have played prima donna asking, "Did I get snotty?" Sprung immediately denies that.

Nevertheless Sprung comments, "As you might expect, with any creative partnership there are definitely points where tension can get high, such as when we tried to figure out the best way to execute a scene, but really it was quite fun to work with Michael in that capacity, to put aside all our other experiences because as far as I was concerned, the writing was in the past. It is a whole different mindset to work with actors and interpret the script in a cinematic way. I didn't feel like I had written the script at that point." Bershad also acknowledged that the script seemed like foreign material once they got into production.

One of the traps in independent filmmaking is being too close to the material. After living with the written story for years through the development and production stages, once the film is in post production, it becomes impossible to detach emotionally from the work that had gone on previously, making it difficult to cut and shape the material during the editing.

This was a peril that Sprung and Bershad faced when Sprung sat down in front of his Avid. Bershad comments, "I've got to say, more than anyone I've ever known or worked with, Steven has a really clear vision of when something can be cut. If anything, I'm the one who says, 'I don't know. That scene is kind of important.' He's really brutal when it comes to that. That's one thing that actually surprised me a bit, because there was a lot of stuff that we shot, that I thought we couldn't do without." In the end they realized there was material that they could do without. Even scenes that were difficult to shoot and brilliantly executed, hit the cutting room floor for the good of the overall story.

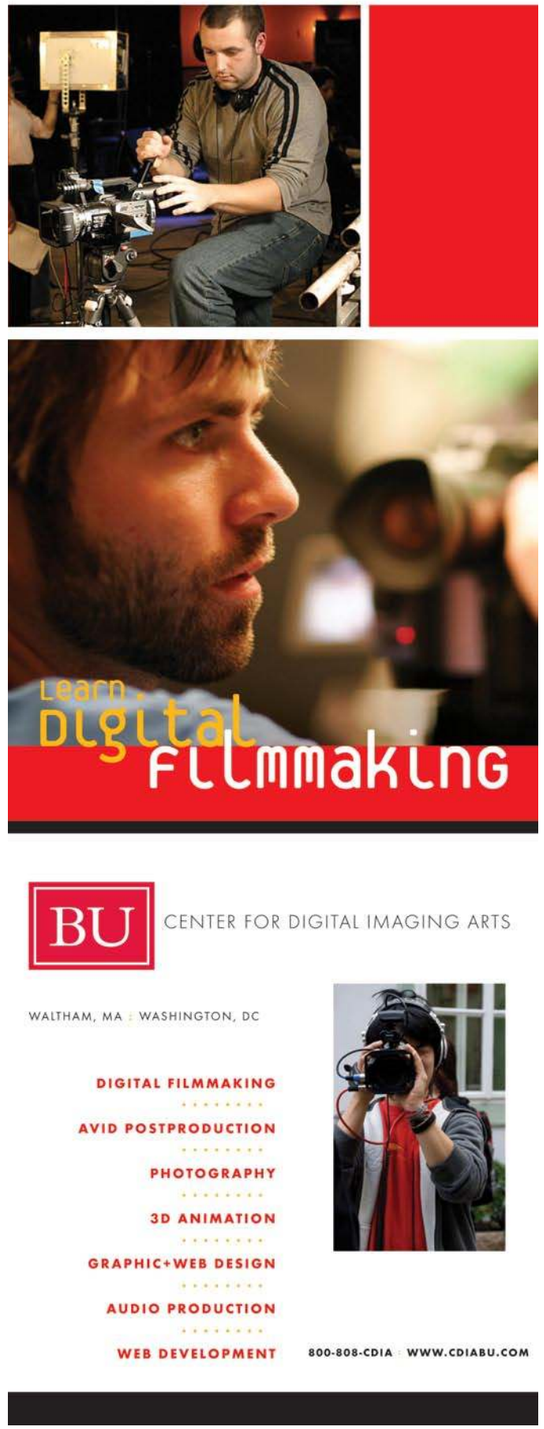
Filmmaking is inherently a collaborative effort, but finding the perfect partner is not always the easiest thing. Wearing many hats can be a pure necessity under the constraints of indie filmmaking, but finding the unique combination of complimentary talents is as complex as the different people who make up the ideal film crew.

"Michael and I have a true collaboration," says Sprung. "We are two halves of the same brain…a creative team. We are always checking in with each other. Is this working? What can make it better? We build on each other." Bershad adds, "It sounds like a pat, Hollywood feel-good answer to say that we both agree on the creative choices, but I can't think of a time in the writing, or any of it, when we fundamentally disagreed. That is one of the reasons it works. If we had different tastes, I think we would have a problem." Sprung agrees, "We have the same tastes and complementary strengths."

Bershad concedes he has a high-strung nature and the fact that Sprung has the patience to put up with him is a big factor in their successful collaboration, but he is also sensitive to Sprung's quieter character. If Bershad is on a roll talking about something in the story and notices that Sprung is not "chiming in," he has come to realize that something about the story is not quite working. "This whole business about partnership, especially in something as creative as writing, is really, really tenuous," concludes Bershad. As for a continuing relationship Sprung admits that the two are "joined at the hip" and Bershad confirms that they are already working on their next script, a much more commercial paranormal thriller with mostly exterior locations and a smaller cast.

Much like the choices the main character in *Dispatch* made that shaped the course of his life, Bershad's and Sprung's individual decisions to work as limo drivers, were fateful actions that ultimately led them into the perfect creative venture. Life imitating art in the true sense.

Mary Ann Skweres is an award-winning independent writer/director with over a dozen produced short films under her belt. A member of the Editor's Guild, she has edited feature films, documentaries and shorts. She writes about the art and craft of filmmaking for magazines including Below the Line, Film and Video, VFX World and Animation World Network. She can be reached at mas4reel@aol.com.





The completed camera rig.
Photo by Jacob Abrams.

First, Beg for Two Cameras

The Film Student's Stereographic Starting Point for RED ONE Users

by Hali Gardella

Do not be fooled. Proper stereographic cinematography with RED ONE cameras on a limited budget is not easy to accomplish. Before putting any money or time into your 3D movie, you need to make sure you have thought out all of the details of a two camera production. This will require extensive research, but hopefully this information will be able to prepare you, a student filmmaker, to delve into the realm of stereographic cinematography.

Recently, I was the producer on The Florida State University 3D Project, an interdisciplinary collaboration between departments at the university (The FSU College of Motion Picture Arts, The College of Communications, The Department of Scientific Computing, and Seminole Productions). For this project, we would attempt to combine live-action 3D scenes shot in 4K on the RED ONE cameras and 3D Computer Generated scenes featuring video-game style avatars of our main characters (made by The Department of Scientific Computing).

From January to March 2010, our teams researched RED ONE stereographic cinematography with the assistance of Rexford Metz, ASC, an informed specialty cinematographer with a wealth of knowledge on RED shooting. We tried to research the correct approach, technically and aesthetically, to stereography. We found that there was no single approach. In addition, it was hard to find advice geared toward the film student demographic; we had the cameras needed to make high resolution images, but our budget was far from that of a professional production.

We considered many options for the live-action portion that we found ideal, such as using a beam-splitter camera rig. A lot of time was spent researching the use of equipment and practices that turned out to be completely inaccessible to us, as students. It soon became evident that the cost of a modest production for RED ONE 3D could easily rise to well over $10k per day, just for equipment. At six days of production, that was unreasonable. We had to scale back our equipment from what we wanted to what we absolutely needed in order to stay within a reasonable budget. Mainly, this meant that we would be shooting with a side-by-side "rig", really just a plate that attached two cameras together, and that we would have to adapt our shooting style to our new equipment limitations.

Convergence Distance, Lenses, and Filters

When shooting side-by-side with RED ONE cameras, you should be prepared to work with a minimum interocular distance (the distance between the centers of the two lenses) of 7 inches, because the cameras are large and you will need to have space between them to connect your cables. The interocular distance between your eyes is 2.5 inches. Simply, what this means is that your ideal point of convergence (a comfortable place to view objects in a shot) should be at *least* 35' from the cameras (actually, from the cameras' image sensors). When the interocular distance is at 2.5 inches, as it is with a beam-splitter rig, you can effectively converge objects 3-5 feet from the cameras. At 7 inches, every object in the shot that is within 35' of the lenses will show up twice on the screen. It is a similar phenomenon to trying to read a book that is two inches from your face. You will get a headache.

We did a shot in which a football player ran down the bleachers in our stadium. Two dimensionally, it was a beautiful perspective shot of the bleachers fading into the distance. The football player was consistently more than 35' from the camera, and his image converged nicely in post; however, the area of the bleachers that fell closer than 35' from the camera began to separate into two images. The most separated areas were closest to the camera. Remember that foreground elements must also remain at the correct distance for proper convergence. Depending on your interocular distance, I would recommend calling the technicians at 3ality and Element Technica to find out

Natasha Narkiewicz (1st AC) adjusting the camera.
Photo by Jacob Abrams.

