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2010, Vol. 5, No. 4 The #1 Educational Resource for Film and Video Makers US$5.95



DSLR Filmmaking

Embracing the Canon 7D for a DIY Feature Shoot

Simplicity and Hard Light

Special Effects

- ❑ Hybrid VFX Techniques
- ❑ Bluescreen Shooting

- Chiaroscuro Lighting for an Art House Feature
- Jack Green ASC Talks about "The Look"
- How to Write with a Partner
- Capture Your Subjects in Low Light and Get a Clean Audio Track



Welcome to the Volume 5, No. 4 edition of *StudentFilmmakers* Magazine. Cover Story, "Chiaroscuro Lighting," by Emmy-nominated cinematographer Cira Felina Bolla (Cinematography Department) discusses the process of lighting a critical scene for a European art house feature film. In the interview, "Jack Green, ASC Talks about 'The Look,'" (Close Up Department) the Oscar-nominated cinematographer shares his insights and how studying *art* helped him to visualize.

"How to Write with a Partner," by Dana Weidman Dorrity (Screenwriting Department) gives you the how-to from choosing the right partner to your final re-writes. This great article also touches on the 70-Beat Outline, and unveils Dorrity's 7 Big Beats.

"Embracing the Canon 7D for a DIY Feature Shoot" (DSLR Filmmaking Department) highlights HDSLR advantages and why the Canon 7D was selected for a production that also shot scenes on an EX 1. "Capture Your Subjects in Low Light and Get a Clean Audio Track," by Bryant Falk (Production Department) talks about the strategy for a project that requires the use of an overhead projector, filming subjects in low light, and handling software audio interface cues while still capturing a clean audio track.

Turn to "Hybrid Visual Effects Techniques" by Scott Essman (FX Department) which discusses Hollywood trends. "9 Bluescreen Shooting Tips" by Sherri Sheridan (FX Department) shares special effects techniques.

We invite you to discuss these film and video making topics in our online interactive forums at studentfilmmakers.com/bb. Join the discussions or start your own threads. We also invite you to join the Film and Video Makers Networking Community at http://networking.studentfilmmakers.com. Create your own networking page for free, share your films and videos, and connect with other filmmakers, videomakers, and storytellers around the world.

Enjoy this edition!

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

studentfilmmakers

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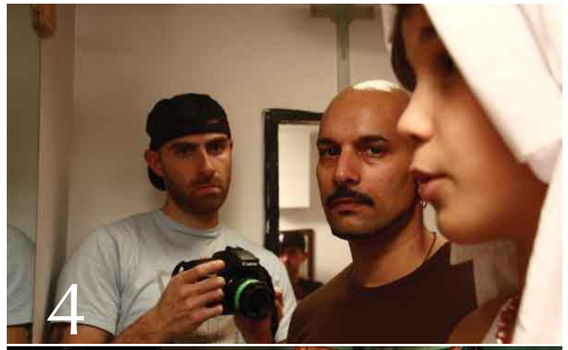
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On the Cover

On the set of the art house film *Malice* by Belgian director Pascal Baillien.

Embracing the Canon 7D for a DIY Feature Shoot

HDSLR Advantages

by Saro Varjabedian

Choosing any camera system, whether film, Red, HD or now HDSLRs, always comes down to: *What medium will best serve the story?* Often, the creative choices are also weighed against practicalities in terms of resources, space or time restraints. On the production of *Elliot Loves*, a DIY indie feature shot in New York, the choice to use a Canon 7D became a topic of hot debate between the director, Gary Terracino and myself. Terracino was understandably wary about using such a new and somewhat unproven system. In addition, he's a visceral filmmaker. Terracino needs to feel connected to the camera, so he doesn't believe in using monitors. Rather he wants to look through the viewfinder.



Director Gary Terracino (center) and DP Saro Varjabedian (left).

Having shot several shorts with the 5D Mark II and the 7D, I am more comfortable embracing the system but am concerned with how to appropriately use it in conjunction with an EX1 and adaptor footage.

What allows for the possibility to mix camera systems is the style in which Terracino wants to film *Elliot Loves* and the construction of the story. The story moves between two different periods in Elliot's life. Half the film takes place in Elliot's childhood and the other in young adulthood. Terracino wants to constantly shift the color palettes and tone of the film from a lush, vibrant playful tone to a drab, gritty reality.

Keeping in mind the need to "switch between tones" makes the decision to use the Canon 7D that much more appealing. What I have found is that the HDSLRs are really good at getting color saturation; whereas the EX1, as a result of the adaptor, is better suited for getting grittier images because the glass in the adaptor adds a texture to the image while pulling out some color saturation.

Secondly, we very quickly discover that the nature of this DIY project creates practical restrictions which the Canon 7D resolves for us. We are shooting on location, often in small, cramped spaces, and because of limitations in resources, we can't afford to get a generator to power up larger lights. So the Canon 7D offers us more camera angles in the tight spaces and the ability to use smaller lights. (But not less lights; we'll talk about this a little later.)

So the reason why I am choosing the 7D over the 5D is that we know we are going to film this at 24p. At the time production began, Canon had not released its 24p firmware update for the 5D. In addition, while I think the 5D does get a better image in terms of latitude, I do feel like the sensor is a bit too big making focusing far more difficult. The 5D sensor is closer in size to 65mm film, while the 7D's sensor is similar in size to Super 35. The extra frame size of the 5D makes the depth of field very shallow, and in low light situations where you can have a lens set at f 2.8, hitting focus marks in tight time restraints on long takes following actors becomes very difficult. Secondly, to blend the two systems I am choosing to use Canon glass for both the 7D and the EX1 and adaptor.



The crew films a scene from *Elliot Loves* with actors Fabio Costaprado and Jermaine Montell.



A scene from *Elliot Loves*. Elliot being hit on by thug.



A scene from *Elliot Loves*. Elliot at church prays to find love.

One of the considerations I need to take for the Canon 7D is that the film requires a lot of movement. Often this movement needs to be clean tracking shots, but when the story gets grittier, we would go for a more breathing, handheld feel. The HDSLRs, while great on slow movements, sticks or focus pulls, are terrible when going handheld because of the weight of the camera. To go handheld with the Canon 7D you must weigh it down or else the movement becomes too jagged and unnatural. To weigh it down, I place a matte box and rod support, and then, add weight to the bottom of it. I use Canon lenses which have the image stabilizer function, and when I need to get even smoother, I use a glide cam rig. And, I always make sure to avoid quick pans because of the rolling shutter effect of the HDSLRs.

In terms of exposing for the Canon 7D, my biggest concern is how far I can push the ISO before it starts getting noise. From what I've seen at around 800 ISO, the 7D starts becoming noisy. The 5D was a bit higher, about 1250 ISO. So with the 7D, I make sure to never go over an ISO of 640. And like other HD recording devices, I shoot to protect the highlights of the Canon 7D. I find that protecting the highlights for the 7D is particularly important because I don't like how it handles blow out.

Talking about lighting, a funny story comes to mind. One of the locations we are filming in is a giant church. What I want to do with the church is boost the light coming through the beautiful windowpanes. So I tell Terracino that I want to place HMI's outside the windows. He tells me that the condition in getting the church is that we do not place any lights outside. So not wanting to lose the window as a source of light, I tell Terracino that I won't place any lights outside the windows but that we'll be using the Canon 7D. Terracino says, "Great," and thinks that to mean that I won't be using any lights at all. So he reassures the apprehensive priest by telling him that we won't be using any lights in the church as well. Well, come the day of the shoot, I have my crew rush in twenty or so lights, and the priest starts getting agitated, calling Terracino a liar. Well, no one wants a priest calling him or her a liar, so Terracino comes to me and says, "I thought you said we wouldn't need lights with the Canon [7D]." I said, "No, I just promised I wouldn't use any lights outside of the church".

I tell this story because the common mistake is to think that because the Canon 7D camera is so sensitive, you just don't need to use any lights. And that might be true if all you're trying to do is expose an image. But that's not what we're trying to do in filmmaking. In filmmaking, we're trying to create an image that affects us emotionally. So lighting isn't something you do just so you can see what's happening. Lighting is used to create tone and mood, through contrast, color, and the placement of it. So when thinking about lighting with the HDSLRs, it's helpful to think of it as needing less light in terms of wattage but not sources. So you can use smaller lights, but you'll probably still be using the same number of lights.

Saro Varjabedian, has been working as a freelance DP in New York for over five years. As a DP Saro has photographed many short films, music videos and features. Currently, Saro is in production as a DP for the feature "Elliot Loves" and is attending Columbia University as an MFA film student. Saro Varjabedian can be contacted at: www.sarodp.com



Chiaroscuro Lighting

The process of lighting a critical scene for a European art house feature film.

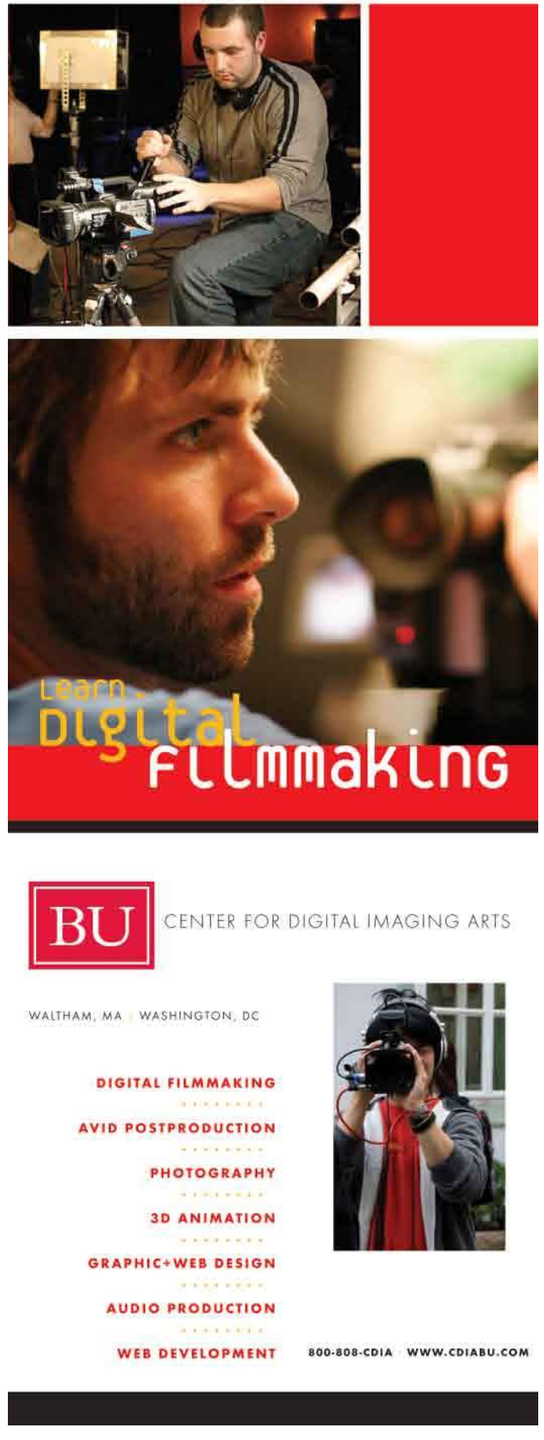
by Cira Felina Bolla

Last Fall 2009, I was hired by Kudetat Productions to shoot the art house film, *Malice* for Belgian film director, Pascal Baillien. It was an international production. We shot in and around Los Angeles with a Panavision Gold II Super 35mm (3 Perf) and a set of Primo Classics Series Primes, a T3.5 20-150mm Angenieux on Kodak 5219 stock.

One of our primary locations was the Villa Linda Hospital in Boyle Heights just past Downtown LA. It was chosen by the director for its institutional backdrop and its great industrial basement. Originally the opening sequence had been storyboarded in Belgium to take place in a small hospital room. The "Electrocution" scene was critical as it sets up the main character of the film in the opening sequence. While scouting the location with Pascal Baillien and production designer, Laurent Couline, we set about to explore some of the alternate basement areas beneath the Villa Linda hospital. It was that moment when I spotted the area in an open space where the electrocution chair and other items for the scene were temporarily staged that I had the inspired idea (see photo raw). I said to Laurent, this is good (in French). It was then, I proposed the idea to shoot right there, place a pool of water around the chair, hit the low ceiling covered in pipes with light and have a hard light source above the Electrocution chair be the focus of our frame with the water to cause reflections. Pascal and Laurent loved it, and we had a new plan! This new spot would prove even more beneficial with the space as it allowed us to lay 16 feet of track for a slow move into the establishing shot. That night over dinner with my gaffer, Christopher Williams (aka "The Magic Man") with lighting company, Light It Up Pablo, I was excited to discuss the idea. We added another brush stroke of light with two Kino's and Fog to open up the back element of the frame and create depth with an illusion of light.

I specifically chose Kodak Vision 3, 5219 stock for its latitude and lucidity. In my opinion, 5219 is quite possibly the most beautiful stock on the market. Panavision is always my first choice for their legendary glass and cameras. In the climate of today's movement towards originating on HD, I am a cinematographer who loves shooting film emulsion. I am grateful to work with a European film director who values the look, beauty of film and the power of the image. Pascal was so happy after he viewed our first two days of work in telecine at RIOT that we continued on with great synergy till the very end of principal photography. While we worked primarily from the wonderful storyboards he prepared prior to my being on board, still he allowed me to bring ideas to the table, and it was a truly wonderful experience with my excellent crew and collaboration with Pascal and his team.

Malice is an art house film with a highly stylized look that is unique and true to director Pascal Baillien's vision for this alternate world he created inspired by a contemporary twist on *Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass.*









machines were dimly lit with 650's that were black wrapped to bring out surface shadow detail as I intended to crush the rest of the black references in the frame. The machines were also used by my gaffer to hide the outer left edges of the Kino's that were set on the floor pointing light upward with a dusting of Fog machines to mimic gutters emanating light. Gaffer Chris Williams set a Source 4 with a 50 lens and rigged it over the Electrocution Chair. The chair was surrounded in a pool of water that served as an additional reflective surface that up lit the ceiling pipes while throwing a hard reflection captured in the opening frames. First we worked on the dolly for our long slow establishing shot then I went handheld, operating with swift successive movements that matched the emotion and intensity of the actor as she is shaking in the electric chair.

The Set Up:

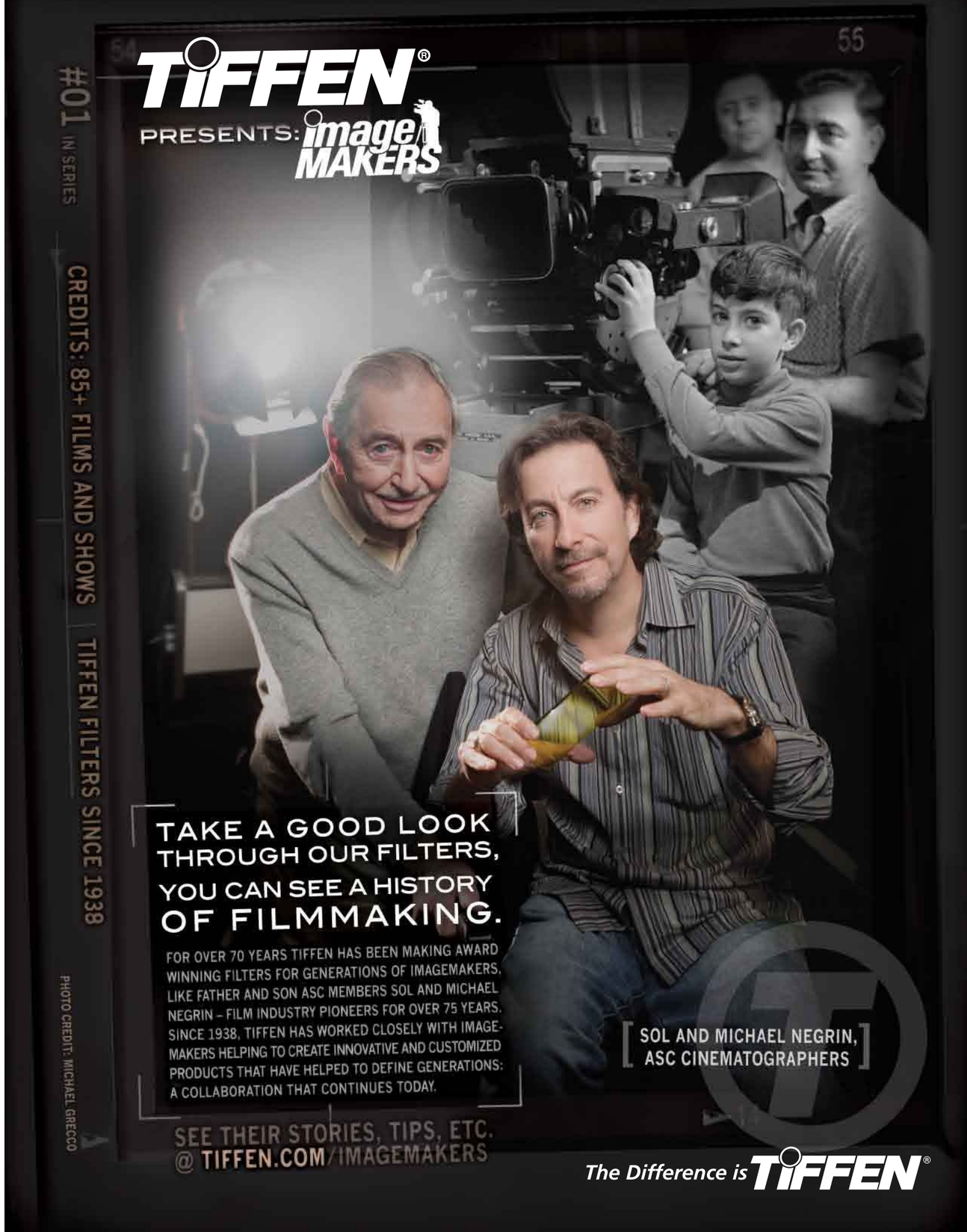
The "Electrocution" scene came at the end of our first day of shooting. I had walked my gaffer through the location earlier that day. The production designer Laurent had brought in two additional medical machines he staged in the distance. These

Simplicity and hard light. It was two-time Academy Award winning cinematographer Richard Kline, ASC, who taught me to create a focal point in the frame of my work with light that draws the viewer into the story. I hope he will enjoy these frames.

Malice is currently in post production and is due for a 2011 release in the US.

Pascal Baillien is a Belgian film director, writer, editor and producer who started his professional career 15 years ago as a music video director who after many music videos for European artists, gradually entered the international movie industry with his preference of filming on 35mm and known for his art house style of artistic repertoire.

Cira Felina Bolla is an Emmy nominated Cinematographer who studied film at NYU Tisch School of the Arts and trained under Roy H. Wagner, ASC, (a former student of Ansel Adams). Bolla's work is artistic instinct in motion. She is both an EU Italian and US Citizen working on independent features and commercials internationally. Bolla is Rep'd by Angelique & Associates.



Jack Green, ASC Talks about 'The Look'

And how studying 'Art' helped him to visualize…

by Ira Tiffen

In July of 2005, I had the privilege and distinct pleasure of talking with Jack Green, ASC about aspects of his experiences as Director of Photography. He had just come off production on Joss Whedon's science fiction adventure, Serenity, following his work on Judd Apatow's, The 40 Year Old Virgin.

Jack's first cinematography credit was for Heartbreak Ridge in 1986. He went on to do many further films for director Clint Eastwood.

Jack was nominated for an Oscar for Unforgiven in 1993, and for the American Society of Cinematographers' (ASC) Outstanding Achievement Award for The Bridges Of Madison County in 1996. In 1998, he received the President's Award from the Society of Camera Operators.

In February, 2009, he received the ASC Lifetime Achievement Award, an honor bestowed on a very exclusive group of cinematographic visionaries.

Ira Tiffen: What I'm looking for, Jack, is to help people who are initially presented with a project to understand what kind of thought processes – investigative searches into technology, delving into art, looking into lighting, whatever there is – go into what it takes to define and achieve 'the look.'

We would start from the beginning of a project; what goes on when you're handed something and told, 'Here, would you like to shoot this? We're considering you for a job.' What happens when you meet the director and you're talking with the producer and everybody has their own ideas? How do they meld into something that has everybody rowing in the same direction? And then what does it take to actually make it happen? The main idea is to give people advice based on experience of how to approach this themselves.

Jack Green, ASC: Well, let me first start off with this little story, an anecdote about how when I was approaching the idea of becoming a cinematographer… Susan, my wife, knew that I was really, really nervous. Clint had asked me to move up on *Honky Tonk Man* and I asked him if I could respectfully decline; I didn't think I was really quite ready… He accepted that and I kept operating for a couple more pictures for him, but I knew that he was going to ask again. So one day I was sitting around reading…in the afternoon and…I hear a 'thump, thump,' on the front door. We were living in Palos Verde at the time, and I go to the door and my wife can't open the door because she's got books in her arms up to her chin [chuckles] so I grabbed them from her as quickly as I could and she says, 'I got more,' so she went back to the car and I took those in and they were art books. Every art book that she could lay her hands on. I hadn't thought of that as a way of learning about the potential of cinematography. I then placed those art books around… and these are classic art books, you know, Da Vinci and Michelangelo and all of the Impressionists, art and everything in these most beautiful books, beautiful pictures, and so I proceeded to just really immerse myself in these books. I had them stashed everywhere, in the little men's room library (and) right next to the television…switcher so you had to pick that up before you turned on the television, and everything just to make sure that I didn't leave anything out. I really found that there was a lot to learn from all of this art… I had loved art before, but I had never studied that kind of art from that perspective, of how it could educate me to apply it to my soon-to-be craft.

God, I learned so much, and it was from there that I learned more about what my job was, to try to emulate, than it was from seeing past films, although I did research lots of really wonderful films as well. Clint did ask me, in 1985, to move up to Director of Photography on *Heartbreak Ridge*…that was the

