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In Production

Baby, You've Changed

Cinematographer Jendra Jarnagin Shoots Digitally to Save Money in Post

Every year, as part of the Coca-Cola Refreshing Filmmaker Competition, students from prestigious film schools around the country are invited to participate in making a 50-second narrative film involving the popular soft drink. From the submitted scripts and storyboards, 10 finalists are given a modest \$7,500 grant, plus \$1,000 in film from Kodak, to bring their ideas to life.



The ten finalists are judged and the winner is screened on 21,000 screens across the country for a year, which can be a big boost for any aspiring filmmaker.



While the competition organizers prefer the winning finalists shoot on film (Kodak is a sponsor), a director of photography for one of the finalists had another idea. Jendra Jarnagin, who graduated film school 11 years ago and is an experienced professional cinematographer in her own right, was hired by Julia Kots, an aspiring screenwriter/director and current Columbia University Graduate School student, as the cinematographer to shoot Kots' entry.

Although Jarnagin has shot most of her work on film, she took one look at Kots' Diet Coke script, and recognizing the complexity of the effects-driven plot, decided to shoot with the Grass Valley Viper FilmStream Camera. The Viper is a digital cinematography camera that offers four modes of operations one of which, FilmStream, closely replicates the look and workflow of shooting on film. That's what Jarnagin was after and the mode she selected for shooting with the Viper camera.

In the engrossing piece, entitled *Baby, You've Changed*, the main character steps out of a black and white film noir projected on a movie screen in a theater, and walks up to a girl in the audience who offers him a Diet Coke. He takes it from her and immediately fills up with full color when he drinks it. The audience members look on, amazed. The actor then re-enters his cinema world retaining his color, where his astonished (and colorless) leading lady eyes him suspiciously and says, "Baby, you've changed."



The project shot in New York City for two days; one inside Columbia's insert stage to capture greenscreen elements and the black and white movie scenes, while the second day was spent inside the Regal Cinemas Battery Park City Theater. The black and white scenes were shot full color with the Viper camera, and then the color was removed in post. The



scenes were lit as they would be for a film shoot. The disparate scenes were then edited together on an Apple workstation running Final Cut Pro software.

"I immediately wanted to use the Grass Valley Viper for this, since I've been looking for a project that was a good fit," Jarnagin says. "When I first mentioned the Viper as an option, the producers said they wouldn't be able to afford the post-production costs. After some research, we developed a workflow that proved we could do it cost-effectively and still get the results we were after."

Part of that result was making sure the project would look good after converting the digital master to a film out and having it projected in theaters. Others on the team had initially wanted to shoot with a Sony F900 high-definition video camera, but in Jarnagin's mind, the look of the resulting HD video was not high enough quality when compared to others entries shot on film.

With a cost-effective plan in place, they decided to shoot with the Grass Valley Viper digital cinematography camera and record to a Sony HDCam SR videotape recorder.

Working with John Fishburn at Plus8 Digital in New York, Rob Strait, at Panavision (which recently purchased Plus8) and Joe Beirne at PostWorks New York, the team came up with a digital post-production workflow that enabled them to down-convert footage and color correct on the set. This helped them to save time (and money) in a colorist suite at PostWorks and allowed them to stay on budget, which was a strict requirement of the

competition. A good deal of rotoscoping was performed by experienced visual effects supervisor Geoff Bailey and Bruce Chen – both directing students at Columbia – under the same budget limitation to process and marry the black and white and color elements.

On the set Jarnagin also used HD video monitors, a waveform/vectorscope, and a Panavision Gamma Display Processor to develop individual color-correction Look Up Tables (LUTs) and help evaluate the look of the scenes as they were being shot. These down-conversions were laid off to DVCam tape for use in the offline edit.

This process saved a lot of time in post as Tim Hedden, the colorist at PostWorks, could simply begin by referencing the LUT settings that were saved by Jarnagin on set.

“The thing I appreciate about the Viper the most is that the images you can capture with it can be very subtle and the highlight detail looks remarkably un-digital,” Jarnagin says.

Julia Kots’ digital project did not win, and thus was not selected for nationwide distribution in theatres. However, the filmmakers feel their project was a success and plan to use the highly efficient digital workflow again in the near future.

“The main thing we proved was that the reputation that the Viper has of being expensive to use is not true at all,” Jarnagin says. “If you think through your entire post process and understand exactly what you are going to do with it [depending on the resources available to you] you can minimize the expensive parts of the process.”

She says the workflow that they’ve figured out for their 50-second production could easily be used to cost-effectively produce a small independent feature. In fact, Jarnagin has since used the Viper again capturing additional photography for an independent feature called *The Wreck*. They shot 30 pages in ten locations in three days.

The good news for Jarnagin and other independent filmmakers like her, with the emergence of new post-production software tools and proper planning, where the Grass Valley Viper FilmStream camera is concerned, budget is not a limiting factor.

Thomson Grass Valley www.thomsongrassvalley.com

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