

HD TODAY

A VMI PUBLICATION | LEADING THE WAY IN HD

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HOW HD GETS UNDER THE SKIN

Writer-producer-director Hugo Blick's work "tends towards the experimental," he says, "so any creatively-ambitious project I contemplate for BBC2 is very much influenced by the way I cut the cost-cape. In this case, looking to shoot a metropolitan comedy entirely on location in London, I wanted to capture a filmic quality for the project whilst not breaking the bank."

"Sensitive Skin had a very large cast and 44 different locations in London. I thought DigiBeta would not give me the lustre, the filmic quality I needed and I discovered HD's brilliant light-tolerance." Adds DoP Patrick Duval: "We did remove the white clip, or limiter, which enables you to take the highlights above 1 volt, giving you greater contrast. They cannot be legally transmitted like that, so you simply amend them in post-production."

"Also, HD's detail and resolution are excellent -valuable in wide shots - and its shadow performance is very useful in night-shooting. These qualities were ideal for *Sensitive Skin*, where our lighting budget was extremely modest." Continues Hugo:

"I went to The Farm for post-production. They used the 25-frame Progressive version of HD, which gives a genuine framed effect superior to DigiBeta's. HD really came into its own during colour-grading: with its wider spectrum, I was able to knock out all the orange colours, and bring forward the dark blues."

"Also, because you are using an EDL all down the line, you don't lose any of the original material. One process reads the previous one effortlessly, making editing more efficient, less costly."

"But I wouldn't use HD all the time. It depends on the creative style demanded by the project and the cost implications. Film is still a far superior format on which to manipulate light. But if your budget means you can either afford using film or an actor, go for the

actor (or there'll be nothing to shoot) and use HD."

"HD isn't always the right choice creatively. When we made *Marion and Geoff* I used a very basic digital DV, which was absolutely right for a video-diary confessional. HD would have been far too sophisticated."

"But HD is a very exciting format. Making *Sensitive Skin* was all about finding the right tone for the story. HD helped us achieve that. I use a minimal, non-intrusive camera-style, and often shoot a scene in a single master shot where the camera follows the actors, allowing them greater freedom of performance."

"The intention is to make a world that is real, not contrived, but also quite beautiful. More sensitive."

HOW WEST DIGITAL FOUND PARADISE WITH HD

"Paradise Found, recently aired on Channel 4 as part of its *Hidden Civilisations* strand, was the perfect documentary to demonstrate High Definition's superior qualities as an acquisition medium," says Peter Zacoroli, MD of post production house West Digital.

"Its narrative detailed the story of Islamic art and architecture over the last 1,400 years. Filming throughout the Islamic world, we saw inside its most beautiful mosques, its grand squares and civic centres, plus its intricate jewellery and artefacts."

"The documentary was shot on three formats: HD-Cam at 25P (progressive scan); the more discreet HDV at 50i (interlaced, a different system though still a derivative of 25fps); and standard DigiBeta (50i). But the proliferation of so many HD formats created problems that could only be

resolved in post-production, which was why West Digital was approached."

"The producers were aware that the look of these three source-media, when intercut, could detract from the subject-matter's inherent beauty." Says Mike Lerner of programme-makers ZCZ Films: "This would have caused us real heartache. Yet no-one seemed able to solve how we would conform all these sources into the HD-DS Nitris. Fortunately, Peter knew just the right piece of 'bridging' kit, and he had the technical nous to make it all happen."

"I'm very happy with what he did for us, and the final show looks every bit as beautiful as I'd hoped. Thank you, Peter." Zacoroli adds: "Shooting on HD is the most cost-efficient way to future-proof your work. Since 25P gives you a wonderful filmic look producers have the choice to either continue HD



in post-production, or they can down-convert to Standard Definition and still maintain higher image quality than if it was originally captured on DigiBeta - and they keep the original HD footage to be repackaged for another day."

"Furthermore, HD post-production costs are coming down all the time. Soon the economics and the sheer quality of HD will merge to the point where it becomes the standard format for the future."

For queries regarding HD or other post-production issues, call Daniel at West Digital, 020 8743 5100. www.westdigital.co.uk

INTRODUCTION

It's that time of year when production work usually calms down; but we here at VMI have found exactly the opposite. With the HD Market in Europe really taking off, Production Companies are taking advantage of the possibilities that HD brings in terms of international sales and tying down shoot dates through to 2007. In this issue we are delighted to be running a story on Medb Films who won the "Outstanding Achievement in Production" Award at The British Independent Film Awards ceremony. We would like to wish everybody a very Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Richard Litchfield,
Head of Marketing, VMI Soho



WEEKLY SEMINARS

HD FOR PRODUCERS
Date: Every Tuesday, Time: 10am - 11am,
Location: Soho

These are hour-long seminars to introduce the concepts of HD production, post production and delivery. They are non-technical, image-based seminars drawing on the huge range of HD programmes that VMI have been involved in to demonstrate the advantages and ease of HD acquisition using both HDCAM and Varicam.

To reserve your place on a seminar, please call our Sales team on: +44 (0) 870 850 1444.

HeadY STUFF!

Gypo, the £300,000-budget feature film that you read about in the last edition of HD Today, won this year's "Outstanding Achievement in Production" Award at The British Independent Film Awards ceremony.

The rank outsider team of producer Elaine Wickham and writer/director Jan Dunn were stunned by November's announcement at the Hammersmith Palais award ceremony. *Gypo* will be released in the UK by Redbus in June 2006, and in the US -also in 2006 -by Wolfe Releasing.

Originally made in ground-breaking Dogme style as a calling card for the two newcomers, *Gypo* stunned critics at this year's Edinburgh Film Festival and has been winning accolades at film festivals

all over the world, including "Best First Feature" at the San Francisco Frameline Film Festival. The pair are represented in the UK by Sean Gascoine at Lou Coulson Associates, and by top LA agents William Morris.

Says Elaine Wickham: "They told us you couldn't shoot a feature film on a SONY 750 at 25p and still get a theatrical release. Well, that's exactly what we did, thanks in part to HD technology, and to VMI, who gave us newcomers an extremely good deal on hire-charges and a massive amount of advice and support."

All heady stuff: no wonder their company is named after Medb (pronounced "Maev") the Celtic goddess of intoxication.



Paul McGann in *Gypo*

HD RATINGS FAR FROM BLEAK!



Picture courtesy of BBC

When Nigel Stafford-Clarke produced his epic *Bleak House*, there was only one medium to consider. High Definition helped to create a return of the popular classic unknown since the *Forsyte Saga*, with startling ratings of up to 7 million per episode, and up to 10 million with the inclusion of the Sunday omnibus edition.

Says Stafford-Clarke: "We targeted the same mainstream audience that Dickens did, using multiple characters and storylines, showing 1/2-hour episodes twice weekly after *Eastenders*. The traditional 9pm slot on a Sunday would not have reached them."

"They needed to watch with no preconceptions, so the look of HD, which is unlike 16mm film or tape, was distinctly helpful. As we were shooting with two handheld cameras, our stock ratio was very high. So HD was also more economical than film: we could shoot many angles on each scene, to give us the best possible cutting options."

"The right DoP was essential. I think no-one had done a period show in HD before, but there was no shortage of anecdotal doom-mongering: HD was 'unforgiving', viewers would see all the wig-lines, even the brush-strokes on the sets. However, director Justin Chadwick introduced me to Kieran McGuigan, who had shot a promotional film with David Beckham on HD. Right from the start he was entirely positive."

"We shot days of lighting tests with our Sony 750 cameras in all lighting conditions, from candles to bright sunlight. We also tested fabrics, patterns and colours for the costumes, and did extensive tests on the make-up - particularly on the prosthetics we would be using for Esther's smallpox."

"The predictions were wrong. You didn't see a wig-line; we went right in on Esther's complexion. Kieran simply lit the faces, letting the background fall away. HD handles blacks wonderfully. When you pull the shot up, you find beautiful detail in the shadow."

"We linked both cameras to a grading system with a high-resolution monitor, to grade the images as we went along, so we could get close to the look we wanted. It cut the complexity of grading a stream of intercut images generated by two separate cameras in post. But everything had to be cabled: more doom-mongering. So we put the cables on looms, replacing the whole run when a fault occurred, so shooting continued. Mobility was fine - cameras walked backwards down streets, with an assistant feeding cable out and another reeling it in. It's just logistics."

"We found HD performed least well in bright sunlight - it could be tricky stopping exteriors from looking flat, like a traditional video image. And the cameras need to be more robust. You can drop a 16mm camera, pick it up and carry on. With HD, an impact can alter the colour balance. And the cable attachments often needed repairing. Otherwise, both the cameras and the whole HD concept worked brilliantly. No wonder it's seen by so many broadcasters as the medium of the future."

Production: A BBC/WGBH Boston Co-Production in association with Deep Indigo. Directors: Justin Chadwick & Susanna White. Costume Design: Andrea Galer. Make-Up and Hair Design: Daniel Phillips. Equipment hire: Arrimedia.

ROME WASN'T SHOT IN A DAY, IT WAS SHOT IN HDX!

Rome wasn't shot in a day, it was shot in HDX! Following their success with *Genghis Khan*, shot last year on HDCAM using VMI's HDW-750s camcorders, BBC History are currently shooting a new programme, also on HDCAM, on location in Bulgaria.

HDCAM was also considered for a new series on Rome. Following extensive camera tests and discussion, the production team wanted to replicate the 'gritty' look achieved with *Space Race*, shot last year using VMI's Panasonic SDX 900 DVCPRO 50 camcorders in 25P progressive mode. So they considered this to be the most appropriate camera, both to achieve the look they wanted and to keep to the speedy shooting schedule that they had planned for the production. "The Panasonic SDX

900 DVCPRO 50 Camcorder produced a significantly better picture than DigiBeta, and also enabled us to make a significant cost-saving on HD", says Mark Hedgecoe, Series Producer. "It is worth knowing that due to its higher resolution, shooting HD in low light means that camera focus becomes critical, requiring the use of a monitor at all times. This can slow down shooting. But the SDX 900 doesn't have these problems and is significantly better than DigiBeta; so we chose this camera for the series. We're delighted with the look the SDX900 has given us. It has a rich, filmic feel which is well-suited to capturing the gritty reality of the Roman Empire. I feel it has a look which compares very favourably with HD."

The new series on Rome and Hannibal will be screened in 2006 on BBC.

HD SCREENING ROOM



VMI's move to a premier West End venue has led to an increasing amount of interest in our new state-of-the-art screening facility. The luxury screening room is designed with HD in mind: using the latest technology in HD Projection it boasts the new High Definition Projector from JVC - an HD-2K full 1920 x 1080 HDTV. The facility can host 19 people in raked 'theatre' style seating with comfort in mind. The reclining luxury seats make viewing beautiful HD footage a real treat. The facility also has a reception area where guests can enjoy refreshments and network in comfortable surroundings before or after their screening. For more details, or to book a screening, please call VMI 0870 850 1444.

To download a PDF copy of HD Today, please visit our website www.vmi.tv

WIN AN IPOD



For an opportunity to win an iPod all you have to do is answer the following question:

How many seats does the VMI Screening Room in Soho have?

A) 18 B) 19 C) 20

To enter please visit our website: www.vmi.tv
The winner will be announced in the next issue of HD Today. Winner of last issue's competition is Mike Hamill from Bristol. Question: Which camera does not shoot 23.98? Answer: HDW-750P

IN PRODUCTION

Lost Worlds, Documentary; Atlantic Productions
New Street Law, HD Drama; Red Productions
Totally Frank, HD Drama; Endemol
Hannibal, HD docu-drama; BBC History
Caerdydd, HD Drama; Fiction Factory
Dolphins, HD Feature; Full on Films
Kids, HD Feature; Bertie Films
India, HD Documentary; Maya Vision
Sensitive Skin, HD Comedy; Baby Cow
Living on Neon Dreams, HD Feature

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