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Working Insights: Cinematographer Discusses Discovery TV Project



Brad Rushing

Feedback from Brad Rushing

BY A SHOOT STAFF REPORT

LOS ANGELES --

Cinematographer Brad Rushing came from a feature film background before diversifying into commercials and music videos. He extended his reach further by recently lensing re-creations for the new Investigation Discovery TV series People Magazine Investigates.

"This was a new experience for me, and the creatives behind the show, including executive producer Chad Itskowitz, conceived a very sophisticated aesthetic for the project," related Rushing. "I was excited when they showed me a mood reel with dark, stylistic and searing imagery, many clips taken from David Fincher's work."

Rushing soon discovered "the budgetary realities of shows like this necessitate an unusually high amount of innovation and problem solving to make each day, let alone to achieve powerful lighting and camera movement. Fortunately I was paired with an ambitious and talented director in Stephen Schuster who had plenty of tricks and gadgets up his sleeve and was very good at knowing the time and tools he would need for our more elaborate shots and making those work within our time and resources. It also helped that I got my start working for Roger Corman where I had survival skills for this type of filmmaking seared into my DNA. Production worked hard to give us the tools and crew we needed and we were careful to be economical in our must-have requests."

Another prime consideration, continued Rushing, was that "for any shoot day we might have 10 to 15 different sets/times of day. The reason for this being that we shot almost as many setups and angles as you might for an hour long show...in three days! We weren't covering every narrative beat of the story, only key highlights. Both by story necessity and to create exciting and provocative imagery variety was essential. So there was tremendous turnover of sets. Lighting and camera were constantly on the move and I had to maintain clear and continuous communication with the lighting team and camera team while hopping back and forth from the set we were shooting to the one we were lighting and the ones coming up later that day - and the planning for the next day. Out of 30 shooting days we only had two walk away location days."

The basic camera package consisted of a Red Epic and a Red Scarlet which spent 75 percent of the time mounted to a Movi operated by Christine Adams. "The Epic especially," assessed Rushing, "was the perfect camera for us lighting and shooting so rapidly as I was able to use the HDR to control the luminance of windows and other extreme highlights. We also shot a large amount of coverage at 48 fps all the way up to 240 fps. I got to the point where I would light every set to be able to run at 120 fps, even if it wasn't planned, to allow for spontaneous inspiration!"

Gaffer Alberto Vega brought on a combo lighting and grip truck. The go-to lights were 1 X 1 Bicolor LED Light panels, 4 X 4 Kino Flos, Lekos, some tungsten fresnels from 2K Juniors to Peppers, a couple of 1200 W HMI Pars as well as an 800 W Joker with Jo-Leko attachments. Much mileage was gotten out of the basic package and supplemented as needed with items like Arri M18s and such toys as the CFG ProPar, a DMX controllable color-shifting LED fixture which was used for a nightclub setting.

"At the end of the sprint which was this project I am very satisfied with what we have achieved and I am content knowing my expectations and hopes were most often exceeded," noted Rushing. "The number of shots I'd be tempted to revisit are few. The experience reminds me to always follow my instincts when time is short and have faith my years of experience will percolate up solutions to every challenge, to choose excellent collaborators and to trust them and that if we plan well and remain mentally and creatively nimble we will overcome Murphy's exellent against us and achieve something special which we can all be very proud of. Looking back we may marvel and wonder 'How on earth did we pull that off?' But I know it's within ourselves and all it takes is preparation and then to jump off the cliff one more time!"

Helping to make that leap of faith is being up to speed on the tools available and evolving in the marketplace. In that vein, Rushing worked with the Phantom 4K Flex recently for a commercial client who needed 1000 fps photography in 4K resolution. And though he hasn't yet deployed the Sony A7s II, Rushing is intrigued by its capacity for "wide shots under low light and night conditions where time and money are short" (providing a more expensive and elaborate traditional lighting scheme). "I have always loved being able to incorporate natural and in situ illumination sources in my own lighting design and the extremely high ISO capabilities of this camera afford me so many options in that regard. I also find the ability to shoot as unobtrusively as possible in sensitive locations compelling."

Rushing even used his iPhone 6s as a professional cinematography camera. "Recently I was in the edit of a project I shot on Red Epic and the director opined that he wished he had captured a certain insert shot while we were on set. I pulled out my iPhone and exclaimed: 'Let's do that now.' He thought I was joking. I proceeded to assure him and we photographed the insert, cut it in and by the time we were done with it in Da Vinci Resolve I challenge anyone to pick that shot out of the film!"

With respect to lighting instruments Rushing recently worked with the programmable color shifting Zylight IS3c systems on a music video for Cash Cash and Sofia Reyes where he was able to achieve very nice exposure levels at ISO 800 in a rather large space, quickly and easily without needing to resort to much more expensive and cumbersome traditional club lighting fixtures. What's more he was able to program and modify the IS3s instruments very quickly via an iPhone app.

Rushing also recently used the very bright, but cool Hive Plasma lights for a Blue Diamond Almonds spot which was shot high speed. The cool burning Hive instruments gave Rushing the stop he needed to shoot 120 fps while not wilting lettuce or melting ice cream!

Rushing concluded, "Now comes VR and a whole new way of telling stories and lighting and shooting. In my heart I am both an artist and an irredeemable gear head. I bow down before the alter of technology and accept with gratitude and joy the beneficence bestowed by the film gods (a.k.a. the engineers and designers at RED, ARRI, Sony, Zylight, Blackmagic Design, Hive, etc.)."

Rushing is repped by APA (Agency for the Performing Arts).

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