

HIGHDEF .Org

Summer 2000

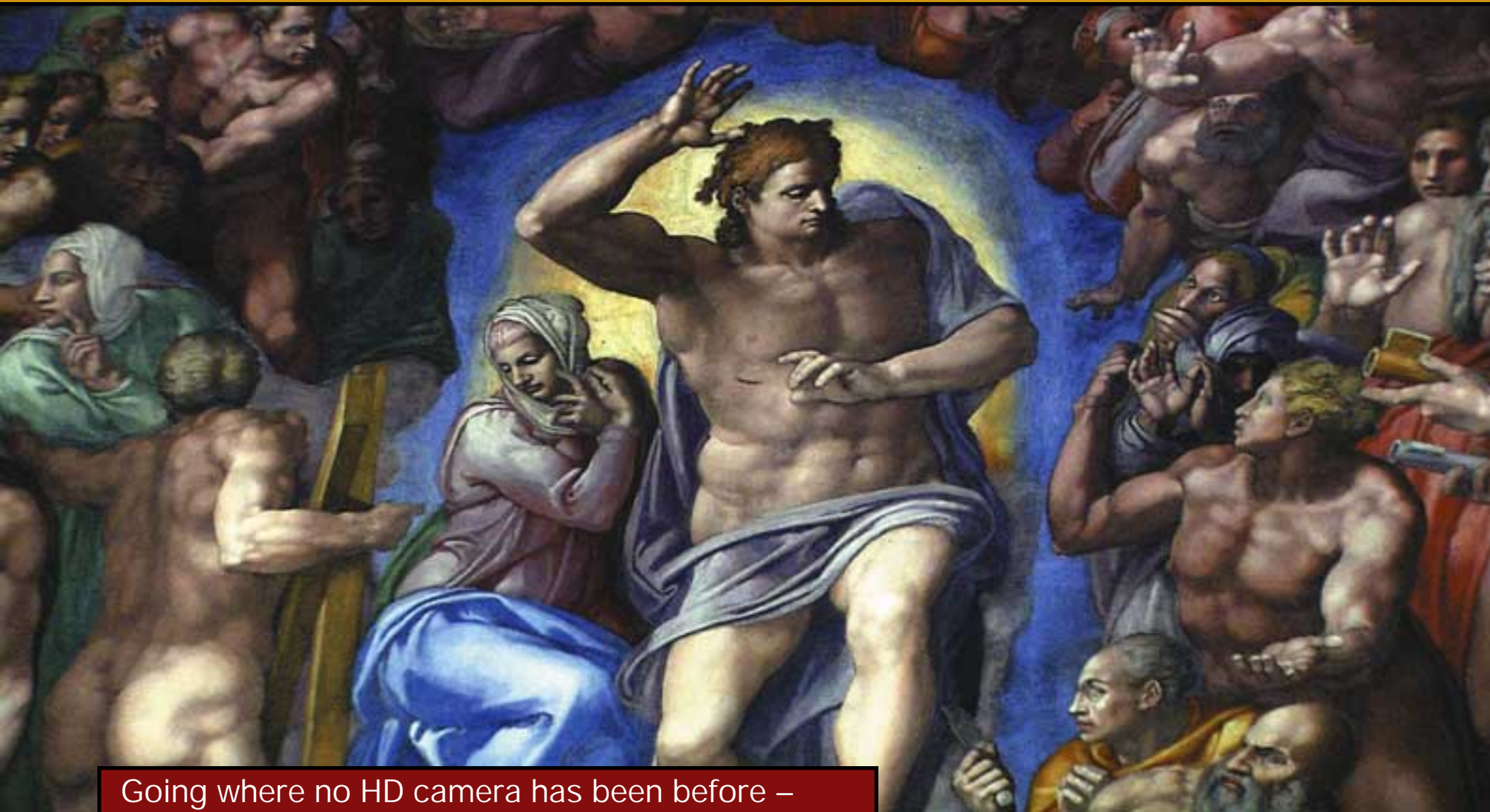
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Into the Deep with High Definition

Air Sea Land Prod. and Amphibico, Inc. take the challenge.



Going where no HD camera has been before –
WRAL-TV shoots Michaelangelo's masterpieces in the Sistine Chapel.



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at the movies?

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Editor's Statement

It is exciting to see the great strides being made in High Definition. We wish to especially acknowledge and thank the LA community for their support of our magazine's HD Symposium held at American Production Services LA this summer. Also, The International Electronic Cinema Festival held in Portland, Oregon was absolutely outstanding. Our congratulations to Director Jack Galmiche and the other organizers of the first IECF held in the US. All the HD projects shown at the festival were world class. How could anyone want to shoot in anything but HD after such a festival showing. Enjoy this issue and have a happy summer.

May all your shoots be in HD,

Laura
Laura Nielson
Editor

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Sistine Chapel, HD
cameraman, Jay Jennings

Plus8Video® Introduces New Base Plate and Matte Box System

by David Steinberg

Plus8Video® the first rental company to offer digital High Definition production equipment, has announced that its new sales and R&D division, Plus8Design®, will introduce two new products for the digital electronic cinematography marketplace. The custom Base Plate and Matte Box Systems were both developed and manufactured by Plus8Design®.

"Plus8Design® is our new brand of digital cinematography products. For years we have tried to push ideas upstream to manufacturers and, after much frustration, have come out with our own line that specifically addresses the needs of the film-style HD cinematography community," commented Plus8 President, Marker Karahadian. "We plan to introduce more production accessories and tools in the near future."

The first product, the Base Plate System (Model: SPB), offers unprecedented camera control, particularly when used with film heads which need complete accessorization. The system is a complex, solid, multifunction device that has in-

tegrated 15mm adjustable Iris Rods. The system replaces the Sony VCT-14 quick release, iris rod bridge plate, dovetail sliding base plate and tripod quick release plate and screws. The sliding platform conforms to the industry standard Arriflex dovetail dimensions. It has integrated mounts for accessories, monitors, and a swing away hook for the AC's tape, thus eliminating the need for a host of individual, cumbersome products.

Plus8Design®'s second product is a completely new Matte Box System (Model: CLMB). "The systems heretofore available for video cameras have been notoriously light and flimsy," continued Karahadian. "They also were totally inadequate on wide screen cameras with wide angle lenses." The new Plus8Design® matte box is full featured, with four stages of 6x6 square trays and a rotating 138mm pola stage for polarizers. The rear two 6x6 filters rotate independently an individually lock in place. All four 6.6 filters can be graduated, the rear stage is gear driven.

Plus8Video® maintains offices in Burbank, CA and New York City. For more information on Plus8Video® or Plus8Design®, call Milton Stern at 1-800-845-6480 or e-mail design@plus8video.com ♦

6th International Widescreen Festival, September 8th-12th

HD producers and directors from all over the world will gather in Amsterdam to rally for the Rembrandt Award. Production session and master classes are also available. For more info contact Mr. Jarlath O'Connell at joconnell@ibc.org

NATPE-HDTV Consortium

The NATPE HDTV Consortium is an email newsgroup where participants can post questions, share ideas and news, and communicate with other NATPE members regarding the development of High Definition programming and broadcasting. To SUBSCRIBE, send a blank email to: HDTV-subscribe@topica.com To POST a message to the entire list, send email to: HDTV@topica.com To UNSUBSCRIBE, send a blank email to: HDTV-unsubscribe@topica.com To search and read archived messages visit: <http://www.topica.com/lists/HDTV> ♦

High Definition Symposium

Over 800 members of the Los Angeles area television and motion picture production community attended a High Definition Symposium on June 14 at American Production Services' (APS) recently opened facility in North Hollywood, California. Sponsored by APS, HighDef.Org Magazine and the Los Angeles HD community, the event provided a concentrated look at the world of High Definition production, post production, distribution and exhibition

"The outstanding response to the symposium shows there is tremendous interest in HD," said Conrad Denke, President of APS, and the evening's host. From high profile creative talents and producers such as Steven Bochco, to a number of aspiring, young student filmmakers, the symposium drew a broad cross section of the industry."

Each company participating in the Symposium presented a different aspect of the production process in High Definition. Among the presentations were: HD live multi-camera production with NMT's 53 foot production truck which was on site for tours; demonstrations of cameras from Sony's newest 24P HD to Panasonic's DVCPRO HD; lighting for HD was demonstrated by Wexler Video along with a look at offline editing for HD on the AVID Symphony; Canon, Fujinon and Bandpro showed lenses for the new HD cameras along with other accessories; APS demonstrated its new 24P online suite; Plus-8 and E Film showed how to optimize the process of HD origination transferred to film; Kodak demonstrated film originated material transfers to HD; Dolby showed their new Surround headset technology and signal path control for HD audio; Graham Patten talked about the challenges and opportunities for sound in HD.

Graphics issues were handled by Discreet Logic and Chyron; JVC and Phillips showed their latest equipment to let attendees get a hands-on look; Modern VideoFilm showed uncompressed HD, companies including Sierra Design, Snell and Wilcox, Leader and Everts showed signal processing equipment for storage, up/down conversion and other distribution issues; and finally IVC, American High Definition, Minnesota Western, Panasonic, Face Broadcast, Stewart Screens and Michael Leader demonstrated the latest in display and presentation technology. Other sponsors included National Tape and Post Magazine.

In addition to the Symposium a S.M.P.T.E. meeting was held during the event. Speaking was Jim Gosney, Associate Director for commercial production at Procter & Gamble. Also speaking was Bill Feightner from E-film talking about HD transfers to film. ♦

HighDef.Org Congratulates the

The International Electronic Cinema Festival is the oldest and most prestigious forum for recognizing outstanding achievements in High Definition Production since 1987. This year's IECF Millennium 2000 was held in Portland, Oregon. The aim was to showcase new works produced or enhanced through digital production and to bring together top people in the industry to discuss and explore the possibilities of shaping the emerging future.

Final screenings and judging of these productions took place May 15th-18th, 2000 in Portland, OR. One production from each category was chosen to receive the Astrolabium Award.

Drama

Astrolabium Award—Drama
The Kreutzer Sonata, TV Asahi, Japan
Mayor's Award Toy Story 2,
The Walt Disney Company; Pixar
Animation, USA

Documentary

Grand Prix Astrolabium,
Astrolabium Award—Documentary,
UNESCO Award Satoyama,
NHK-Japan Broadcasting Corp., Japan
Second Place Citation Chihuly Over
Venice, KCTS Television, USA
Outstanding Achievement Tempest
from the Deep, Cinematography Team-
The Film Crew/National Geographic/
Crawford Communications, USA

Entertainment

Astrolabium Award—Entertainment
Grandpa's Ladder, NHK-Japan
Broadcasting Corp., Japan
Second Place Citation The Tonight
Show with Jay Leno-Show 1744, The
Tonight Show with Jay Leno, USA

Sports

Astrolabium Award—Sports
2000 NFL AFC Championship Game,
CBS Sports, USA
Second Place Citation Pike's Peak
International Hill Climb, NHK-Japan
Broadcasting Corp., Japan

Educational and Industrial Use

Astrolabium Award—Educational
and Industrial Use A Midsummer
Nightmare, Omnivideo Productions,
Canada

Short Programs

Astrolabium Award—Short Pro-
grams Threatened Ocean, Lightspeed
Design Group, USA

Commercial Advertisements

Astrolabium Award—Commercial
Advertisements Mosaic, Proctor &
Gamble Noxema-Leo Burnett, USA

Pioneer Award

Randall Paris Dark

Lifetime Achievement Award

Dr. Joseph A. Flaherty



Kreutzer Sonata



Grandpa's ladder



HD grabs for Toy Story 2
and Dr. Joseph A. Flaherty
not available at press time.

Midsummer Nigh

Winners of The International Electronic Cinema Festival



HD
Satoyama-grass



HD
Chihuly glass



HD
Tempest From the Deep



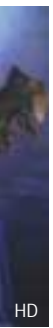
HD
Tonight Show



HD
NFL Game



HD
Pike's Peak



HD
tmare



HD
Threatened Ocean



HD
Proctor and gamble-face mosaic



HD
Randall Paris Dark



HD

Performers: Eddie Bracken and Ashley Judd. HD Cameraman: George Murphy

American Shorts: The Ryan Interview

by Ira Simmons

The young reporter walks through a yard filled with a century's worth of junk. She glances around in amazement, picking her way through the old bathtubs and pieces of cars, bicycle wheels and rusted bed frames. She walks toward the old farmhouse that lies beyond the junk, and now she notices an old man sitting on its porch. His head is bent over, and the reporter approaches warily. Is he asleep? Or dead? "Mr. Ryan," she says. "Mr. Ryan?" The man doesn't move. The reporter seems to gather up her nerve. She reaches out and touches the old man's shoulder. Suddenly he jolts awake. The reporter gasps and jumps back, both relieved and frightened.

The meeting is a pivotal scene from American Shorts: The Ryan Interview, a drama that premieres on PBS Friday, August 25, at 9 p.m. ET – check your PBS station for the local listing. One of the first dramas for PBS to be shot in High Definition, The Ryan Interview is adapted from a short play by Arthur Miller. Red-hot movie star Ashley Judd stars as a young reporter ordered to do a puff-piece interview with a centenarian, played by veteran actor Eddie Bracken. To the reporter's surprise, there is much more to the story than she had anticipated.

The drama is directed by Boston-based independent, Fred Barzyk, and produced by KET, the Kentucky Network. The one-hour program is the pilot of American Shorts, an anthology drama series with programs based on short plays premiered by regional theaters around the country.

"The sharpness of the HD image allows the setting to become part of the drama as never before in television," said KET producer Guy Mendes. "The clarity of the image is uncanny. It allows us to see the world in more detail than the naked eye can see it. So it makes you want to see a shot play out a little longer so that your eyes can take it



HD

all in. What we're seeing with HD is the emergence of a new artistic medium, one that combines the visual impact of cinema with the intimacy of television."

Director Barzyk started in public broadcasting in 1958, back before it even had videotape, back when every piece of equipment seemed to weigh five tons. "Shooting this drama in HighDef was a completion of the wheel for me," Barzyk said with a laugh, "from low tech to high tech." For KET, the decision to shoot the drama in HD was in line

with its tradition of technological innovation. KET has two open-broadcast channels, one digital transmitter in the Louisville area, and funding in place for 15 more digital transmitters across the state. KET also has three satellite channels for distance learning programming, offering schools hard-to-provide classes in science, math and the humanities. KET maintains the largest interactive state

Continued on next page...



communications network in the country, with 1,700 downlinks to schools, libraries, and other institutions.

The drama for the American Shorts project is supplied by regional theaters, now the country's main source of new plays and new playwrights. Actors Theatre of Louisville, for example - located just down the highway from KET - has premiered more new work than any theater company in the United States and has a library stuffed with several hundred manuscripts, many of which would make great TV dramas.

In tapping the cultural resource represented by regional theater, American Shorts is the first prime time project to originate from the "grassroots," rather than in New York or Los Angeles. This project establishes the the-

ater-television connection that nourished the early years of television, when the TV studios and theaters were next door to each other in New York and live TV drama was filled with actors steeped in theater. Many writers have told KET they consider theater and television to be complementary media and the transition from stage to TV much more natural than the leap from stage to movie.

Things fell into place after Arthur Miller gave KET the right to adapt *The Ryan Interview*, a play originally commissioned by Actors Theater of Louisville in 1993. The fact that the work was an Arthur Miller play led to the commitment of Ashley Judd, an intensely ambitious actress who wanted to play a role created by Miller. Daughter of singer Naomi Judd, sister of singer Wynonna, Judd also

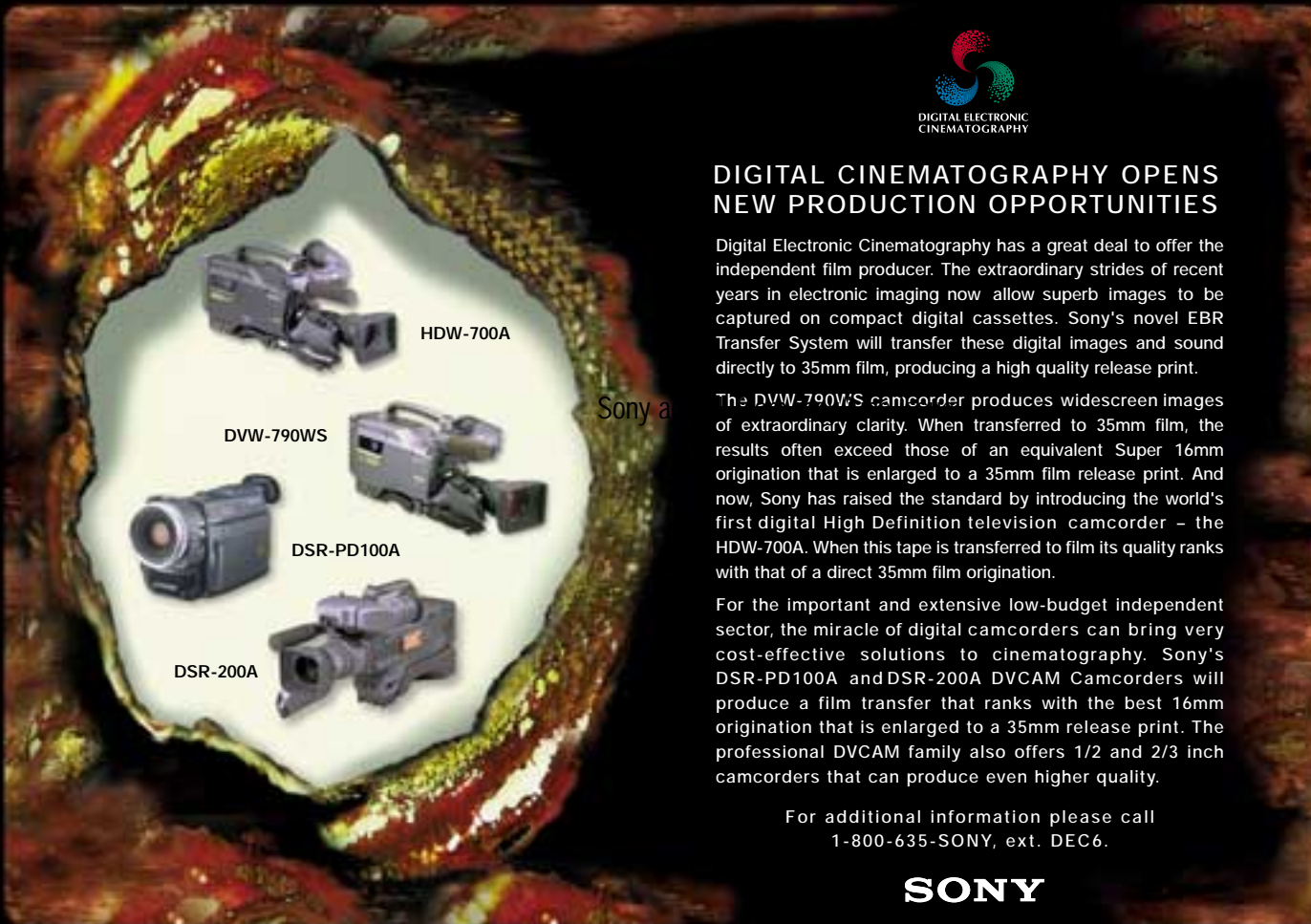
has deep roots in Kentucky, and she liked the idea of spreading the word about ATL and other regional theaters.

American Shorts was launched with an NEA grant in 1998, and the taping of the pilot on location was set for May of 1999. HD camera, monitor and on-the-set engineer were provided by HD Vision in Dallas, as was subsequent on-line editing. HD Vision also supplied the project with actor Eddie Bracken, who has done work for the company. While visiting HD Vision early in '99, Barzyk and Mendes saw tape of Bracken and decided he would be perfect in the title role of Bob Ryan. Now 84, Bracken starred in two classic Preston Sturges comedies, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and *Hail the Conquering Hero* (1944) and holds the all-time record for Broadway performances - more than 14,500 - calculated to be the equivalent of 33 years of daily performances. In recent years Bracken is best known for his roles in Chevy Chase's *Vacation* (he was Roy Wally of *WallyWorld*), *Home Alone 2* (the toy story owner) and *Rookie of the Year* (the owner of the Chicago Cubs).

"The shoot was wonderful," said Barzyk. "We rehearsed the crew several days before the actors arrived because we knew we'd only have them for five days. We even had the fire department from a nearby town come out and rehearse the nighttime rain scene. We also had a 17-inch monitor on location that proved invaluable for judging takes. I like to work quickly and being able to watch the scenes on the HD monitor really helped move things along. And having HD engineer Kevin Caddell on the set allowed us to color correct each shot, which, in the long run, cut down time in the edit suite."

At wrap time, Judd declared Barzyk's direction of *The Ryan Interview* the fastest, most-together production she had ever worked on. Eddie Bracken took it all in stride and went around bestowing hugs on the crew. After 82 years in show business, he's a veteran of Vaudeville, theater, silent movies, radio, talkies, television - and now High Definition drama. ♦

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For the important and extensive low-budget independent sector, the miracle of digital camcorders can bring very cost-effective solutions to cinematography. Sony's DSR-PD100A and DSR-200A DVCAM Camcorders will produce a film transfer that ranks with the best 16mm origination that is enlarged to a 35mm release print. The professional DVCAM family also offers 1/2 and 2/3 inch camcorders that can produce even higher quality.

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WRAL-TV: A Champion of High Definition

by Laura Nielson

Audiences sit spellbound, captivated by images of a mother bear guiding her two cubs across a wind-swept field. Eyes stay rooted to the sandy sights of Loggerhead turtles burrowing their eggs along the beach, under a luminous Atlantic moon. At WRAL-TV's digital theatre, located in North Carolina's Museum of Natural Sciences, people are amazed by their first High Definition experience, the viewing of *Wilderness North Carolina*. The clarity and intensity of the images makes it difficult to separate reality from the digital experience. The visuals are so true-to-life that it is not uncommon to see tear-stained faces emerging from the theatre. This HD outreach was extended to the community under the leadership of James F. Goodman, CEO and president of Capitol Broadcasting Company, Inc., based in Raleigh, NC.

Former HD Marketing Director Susan Dahlin started her HD odyssey at WRAL-TV. Always enthusiastic about the new medium, Susan promoted it unabashedly. However, as a co-executive producer with John Green for *Wilderness North Carolina*, she had no idea just how much HD would enhance the emotional quality of the seventeen-minute piece. "I had to see it with my own eyes. . . tears streaming down people's faces who were deeply touched as they watched the incredible detail of a caterpillar with little purple specks on its foot pads, shimmying up a leaf and chomping on the greens." With surround sound, viewers could hear the drip of icicles melting in the mountains and the silence of Merchant's Mill Pond, with only a distant fluttering from the Cypress trees that grow up out of the dark, mysterious waters. They could

experience the splashing of a drenched beaver poking his head up out of the waters. With footage so real, one could practically feel the wet fur. Later, audience members recoiled abruptly as they witnessed a Venus flytrap closing its jaws around an unsuspecting bug.

Susan commented, "You almost feel like an intruder invading their privacy. Sometimes, you feel like you are actually on a boat traveling through North Carolina, and then suddenly, you are on a plane, or jumping onto a train. The people are completely 'wowed' by their experience." Masterfully edited by Art Howard, this piece de resistance concludes dramatically with a crack of thunder. A deer stops eating and peeks up into the sky, an owl twists his head to peer up at the lightning flash. It seems that every living creature watches guardedly as the black clouds roll into the frame. "It was a combination of fabulous technology and the beauties of nature that tell the story," Susan muses.

WRAL-TV hired NAPRO Communications, owned by Art Howard and Nina Szolsberg, to produce and shoot the HD production. When presented with the shot list for capturing the animals on HD, Susan exclaimed, "No way!" North Carolina's Museum of Natural Sciences' naturalist, Mike Dunn, had compiled a shot list asking for specifics: a deer on a sandy path, an owl in a tree, and a myriad of other fine details-as if one could direct animal life. But Art, Nina, and Mike literally proved themselves miracle workers. The team seemed to have a sixth sense for finding wildlife at the right times. They spent 14 months capturing

Continued on page 14...





HD



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images in 40 North Carolina counties, spanning all four seasons of the year. At times, they even risked their lives.

While shooting the footage of the mother bear and her cubs, the furry matriarch stopped short, and locked her sights on Art with his camera, and Mike and Nina crouching low. The trio knew that mother bears are very protective and can charge at any moment, especially if they feel threatened. They were too close to the bears, by bear safety standards, and three lives flashed before three sets of eyes as tremors of fear rippled through them. Mike whispered, "Don't move a muscle." Art thought to himself, "The only thing I have for a weapon is a tripod." And at this point, Nina was wondering how important the shot was. Should they run for their lives? They held their breath, the bears passed without incident, and the results are brilliant. They are a talented-and lucky-triad.

With Loggerhead turtles still on the endangered species list, Art was not allowed to get too close. For three days he traveled up and down the beach in an all-terrain vehicle with a team from the Baldhead Island Conserva-

tory looking for a female Loggerhead ready to hatch her eggs. Just as all seemed futile, fate stepped in at the final hour of the third day. A female turtle began to enter a trance, signaling the birthing process of what turned out to be 175 eggs. Speedily, Art turned on his Lowell VIP lamphead, resting on a light stand, and one cine 60 battery belt light. The Loggerhead turtle finished her delivery, the trance ended, and the turtle followed the moonlight and Lowell light back to her residence in the sea. "We didn't have a monitor with us. We had a good idea that the HD footage would be terrific, but when we got back to the editing bay and saw this rare event, High Definition exceeded even our expectations," commented Art with amazement.

WRAL-TV, under Mr. Goodman's direction, filed for the first license in the nation to operate a commercial High Definition station, making them a permanent sentence in television history books. Owned by Capitol Broadcasting Company, Inc. Jim Goodman's mission and plight has been to get as many eyes on High Definition as possible. If that

meant sending Susan and her crew to speak at a Kiwanis or Rotary Club, he approved it. Susan has toted digital receivers, cameras, and TV monitors literally all over the country. "It has been a huge expense to WRAL-TV and CBC. We've carted Panasonic D5 machines and we've shipped to Denver and California just to help speed up the transition to HD." Many ask Susan, "What benefit is it to CBC?" Susan responds, "Certainly we have managed to capture the title of 'technology leader' in our community. But simply speaking, WRAL-Digital is extremely community minded, still producing local programming that focuses on our people." WRAL coordinates and funds focus groups and studies. "We are about giving back to the people who make us a success. This attitude comes from the top down. Jim Goodman is a man with a mission. He wants the best for our medium."

The Wilderness North Carolina production, plus the building of an entire digital theatre is only one of many HD projects and programs produced by WRAL-TV. One of the first documentaries WRAL produced in HD was called Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. When Jim Goodman heard that the lighthouse landmark was on the brink of falling into the sea and needed to be moved to safety, he committed eight HD photographers to film the event at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. For months they lived on location in what they affectionately called the "beach house." One day Jim heard them talking and corrected them, "Call it a double wide. We don't want your job to sound too glamorous!" he laughed.

When the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse documentary first premiered, there were only three HD receivers in Raleigh, and Jim Goodman owned all three. He invited the production staff over to his house for the groundbreaking presentation. As the show began, Jim himself was bowled over by the animation graphics introducing the documentary. He exclaimed to the crew, "I want to see that again!" Calling master control he said, "Tommy, rerack that tape." Then he looked back at everybody sitting in the room and said, "I've always wanted to do that." Jim Goodman admits that he is now spoiled with HD.

Whenever there is a traveling art exhibit stationed at the North Carolina Museum of Art, WRAL-HD is there.





HD Cameraman: Jay Jennings

Sinners and Saints, Darkness and Light, featuring artist Carrivagio and his followers, began a national tour in Raleigh. "The beauty of HD is that you can use primarily available light," Susan remarked. Anyone who has been to a museum and had to check their flash camera at the desk knows that artificial light is the ultimate taboo. On shoot day, Curator Dennis Weller was thrilled with the

clarity and sharpness of HD. Details that would have been lost on other formats were so crisp even brush strokes were visible. However, this benefit was also Dennis Weller's horror. Once in front of the camera, he realized that his freshly laundered shirt had a frayed collar. He panicked. Fortunately the cameraman was sensitive. It was no different than seeing Queen Elizabeth with a run in her

stocking. He focused on the beauty and detail of Carrivagio's paintings. The vivid detail of the masterpieces up close took center stage. The clarity of color and minuscule detail on HD was mesmerizing. Perhaps WRAL-TV's ultimate coup was the documentary called, Upon the

Continued on next page...



“No way. Hell would have to freeze over before you'd be allowed into the Sistine Chapel with your camera.”

– Vatican assistant

Rock, during which they were allowed to tread where no HD camera had ever been before. David Crabtree, news anchor for WRAL-TV, and cameraman Jay Jennings approached Susan with the idea of shooting Michaelangelo's masterpieces in the Sistine Chapel in HD. But how were they going to obtain permission from the Vatican? Standing at the entrance of the Vatican, the assistant assigned to them blurted out, “No way. Hell would have to freeze over before you'd be allowed into the Sistine Chapel with your camera.” David and Jay pleaded. Italian words sputtered and spurted in the cacophonous halls. Robed clergymen bustled back and forth pacing the ancient marble floors. The filmmakers needed a miracle and that's exactly what they got. The air cleared and suddenly they were ushered into the chapel. To this day they aren't sure how it happened, but they both agree that it was one of the most moving experiences of their lives. And thanks to HD, the detail is magnificent. The newly restored Sistine Chapel was captured in its entire splendor on the archival medium of the century, HD.



WRAL-TV has made dozens of programs and documentaries in HD, some with Randall Dark's HD Vision out of Texas. Out of generosity, and a sense of mission in furthering High Definition, WRAL-TV offers these HD programs to any TV station. All they have to pay for is the HD tape and duplication. “By cooperating with each other it brings leaders together from across the nation. That is part of the reason for the NATPE HD consortium,” explains Susan, an articulate and talented spokeswoman for High Definition. She is the first to tout its virtues, but also realistic enough to admit, “The price of the receivers needs to drop so that more people can afford it. It's starting to happen. But the quicker we can arrive at our destination, the better it is for everybody's pocketbook, and the quality of today's entertainment.” ♦

For more information on the WRAL-HD Consortium programs and duplication rates contact Randall Paris Dark at HD Vision. Tel: 972-432-9630, Fax: 972-869-2516, www.hdvision.com

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From Paris - Peter Way, Producer

From England - Geoff Dunlop, Director

From Ireland - Ed Kadysewski, DP/ Cameraman

From USA - Geoff Dunlap, DP/ APS #D Consultant



HD Cameraman: Anthony Lenzo

Into the Deep with High Definition

by Thomas J. Strodel

Recently, I had the opportunity to produce and direct one of the first underwater High Definition shoots for Air Sea Land Productions (ASL) and Amphibico, Inc. Our challenge was to put together a short video that would showcase the High Definition production capabilities of ASL, utilizing the new, state-of-the-art Amphibico Marine Video housing from Amphibico.

As a self-promotional piece, we also had to face a limited budget and tight timetable. The video would be shown at the Amphibico booth at the DEMA (Diving Equipment and Marketing Association) show in Las Vegas, less than one month away. In this early stage of HDTV, it's amazing to see the different types of productions being

shot in HDTV with what would usually be shot on film or NTSC video. Needless to say, I jumped at the opportunity to produce this video – one of the first to combine HD technology with the underwater world.

The Shoot

The team included award winning shooters Anthony Lenzo and Steven Miller of Air Sea Land Productions, and the Director of Research and Development of Amphibico, Val Ranetkins. After just a few days of preparation, we had secured the location, boat, crew, and talent from Stuart Cove's in Nassau, Bahamas - a facility known for its experience working with filmmakers. This location would provide us with a great diversity of dive sites and an ex-

perienced staff. Stuart also helped to identify two members of the staff we would later use as talent.

Anthony, Steve, and I left for Nassau on January 2nd, for the five days of scheduled shooting. Val met us in Nassau with two brand new prototype housings. One of the first things you notice about the housing is its large 100 degree aspheric lens. This lens allows you to get as close as nine inches to the subject and zoom-out to wide-angle shots – all with zero distortion. The SONY HDW 700 cameras we rented fit snugly into the housings, requiring only the removal of their handles. This allowed us to quickly move from underwater to topside shots in only

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HD

five minutes. Our initial dives were spent testing the prototype housings and perfecting operational techniques. As color is a major factor in underwater shooting, we wanted to see how the housing's optics performed at various depths. The deeper you go, the more red from the color spectrum is taken out of the scene. You compensate with

It was also amazing to notice that the camera captured subtleties and detail in images we couldn't even detect with our own eyes.

– Thomas Strodel

various color correction filters (accessed through the housing's pistol-grip controls) and repeated white balancing. Unfortunately, access to the camera's paint control and variable iris were not yet available on the prototype, so we ended-up doing a lot of color correction in post. The production version of the housing promises to have full access to all camera functions including iris, menu, and matrix. After the first day of shooting, we previewed the footage back on land and were amazed with the clarity, color, and sharpness of the images. It was also amazing to notice that the camera captured subtleties and detail in images we couldn't even detect with our own eyes. After the testing was complete, we focused on the simple storyline I had developed in preparation for the shoot. The theme involved six linked segments showing the talent exploring the undersea world.

My intent was to combine the scripted storyline with the unpredictability of underwater marine life. The images would be the stars of the show. This was made easier using experienced underwater talent from Stuart's; Pamela Christman and Michelle Cove. The final piece would showcase the artistic possibilities available with the film-like aspect ratio, and razor-sharp clarity of HD.

One of the difficulties in any underwater shoot is team communications. You can't exactly call out camera or tal-

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HD



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HD

ent cues underwater. And as much as you plan topside, things can go astray and improvisation becomes the rule once you get into the water. During the shoot, we used OTS underwater communication devices, simple hand gestures, and a slate board with a pencil. To facilitate complex scene descriptions underwater, I drew simple storyboards, laminated them, and brought them underwater with me.

Over the next four days, we logged more than 12 dives, capturing shipwrecks, sharks, and a number of topside shots, including interviews and beauty shots. The highlight was the unexpected discovery of a 100-year-old loggerhead turtle in the hold of a shipwreck. We ended up with over 13 hours of footage—more than enough for our purposes.

Post

Back in New York, we only had a few days to compile all the footage into a video that would run no more than 10 minutes. The first step was to log all the tapes into a custom database. The database allowed me to print out scenes on little strips of paper—complete with scene name, description, in and out timecode points. I then arranged them in the order I wanted, with alternate clips available for each scene. Next, I selected the music for each of the sequences from a library at the Creative Group, our edit facility. Then, Anthony and I spent eleven hours with the editor at Creative, Tom DeFeo, completing the final piece. As there's currently no readily-available off-line editing solution for HDTV, the video was edited and color correction proved invaluable. The finale was the conversion of a purposely-skewed 4:3 NTSC Amphibico and ASL animation ID to the 16:9 HD aspect ratio—it looked great.

The Final Say

For the DEMA show, Amphibico set-up a mini HD theater to showcase the video. No matter how much time, effort, and experience you put into your production, it's the audience that has the final say. Thankfully, the video won the rave reviews of visitors to the booth. The next step for the video was the re-editing of it for the NAB show, this past April. This task was greatly facilitated by



first converting all of the camera masters to letterboxed Mini-DV with burned-in timecode in the top letterbox. Alternate scenes were first selected using a Mini-DV deck with a FireWire connection to a Macintosh G4. This method proved a valuable timesaver, and could hold the key for cutting the cost of HD editing in the future.

ASL will be offering the Amphibicam housing for rental, paired with the new SONY HDW F900 later this summer. For more details about the shoot, including the complete streaming video, you can visit the ASL web site at www.airsealand.com or call at 800-ASL-LENS. Air Sea Land Productions is a full-service video and film production/production support company specializing in single and multi-camera production services, custom camera design, and camera system rentals. ♦

For more information about underwater videography, check out Steve Miller's tape: *Guide to Shooting Underwater* available on the ASL web site. For the more adventurous, you can also

check out the making of documentary: *UnderPressure: Making The Abyss on the Abyss Special Edition DVD*. See www.byssdvd.com

Tom Strodel is a producer and director in both the traditional and multimedia arena. You can contact him at www.strodel.com or tom@strodel.com





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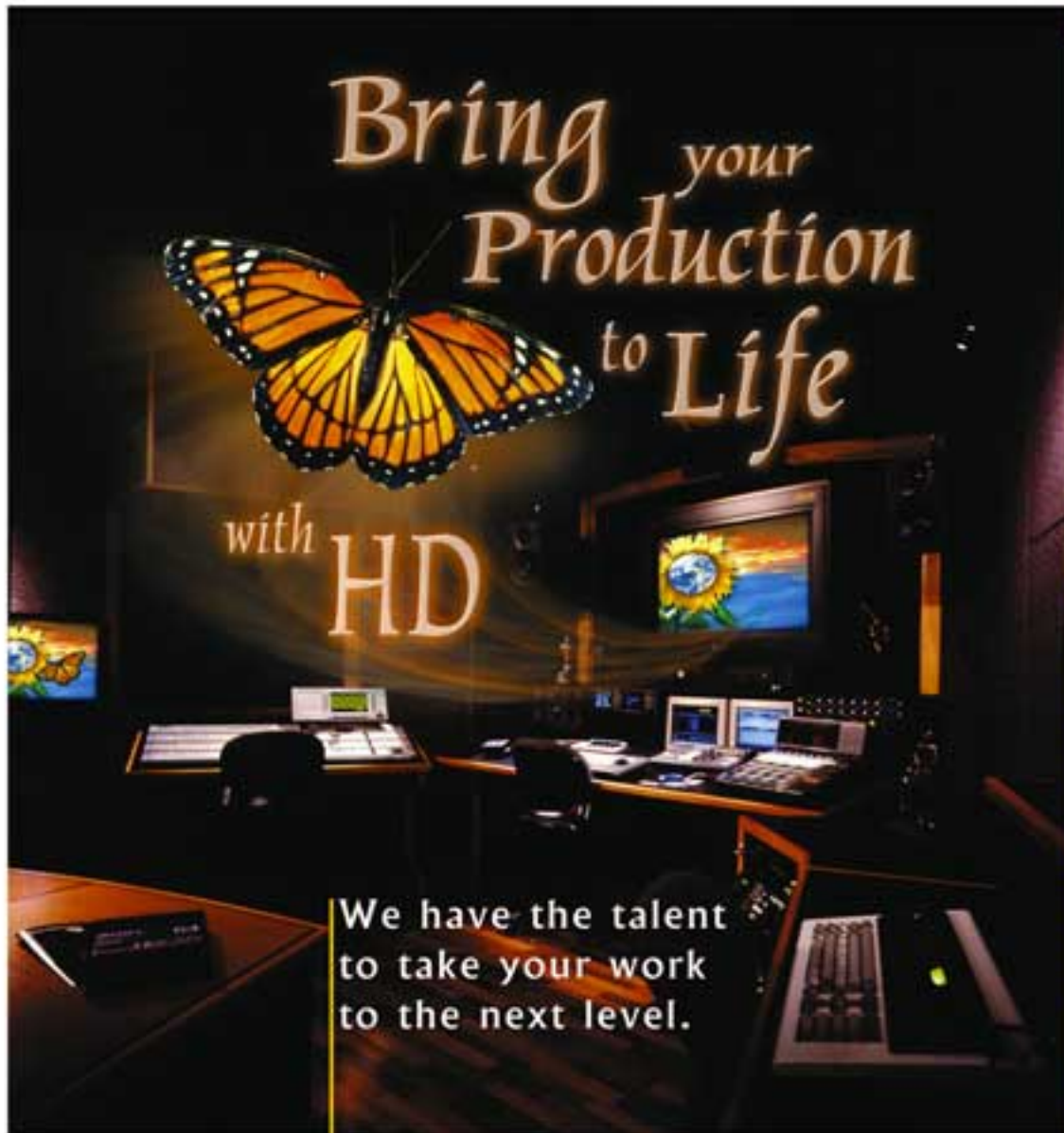
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