HARBOR

THE
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ISSUE
44

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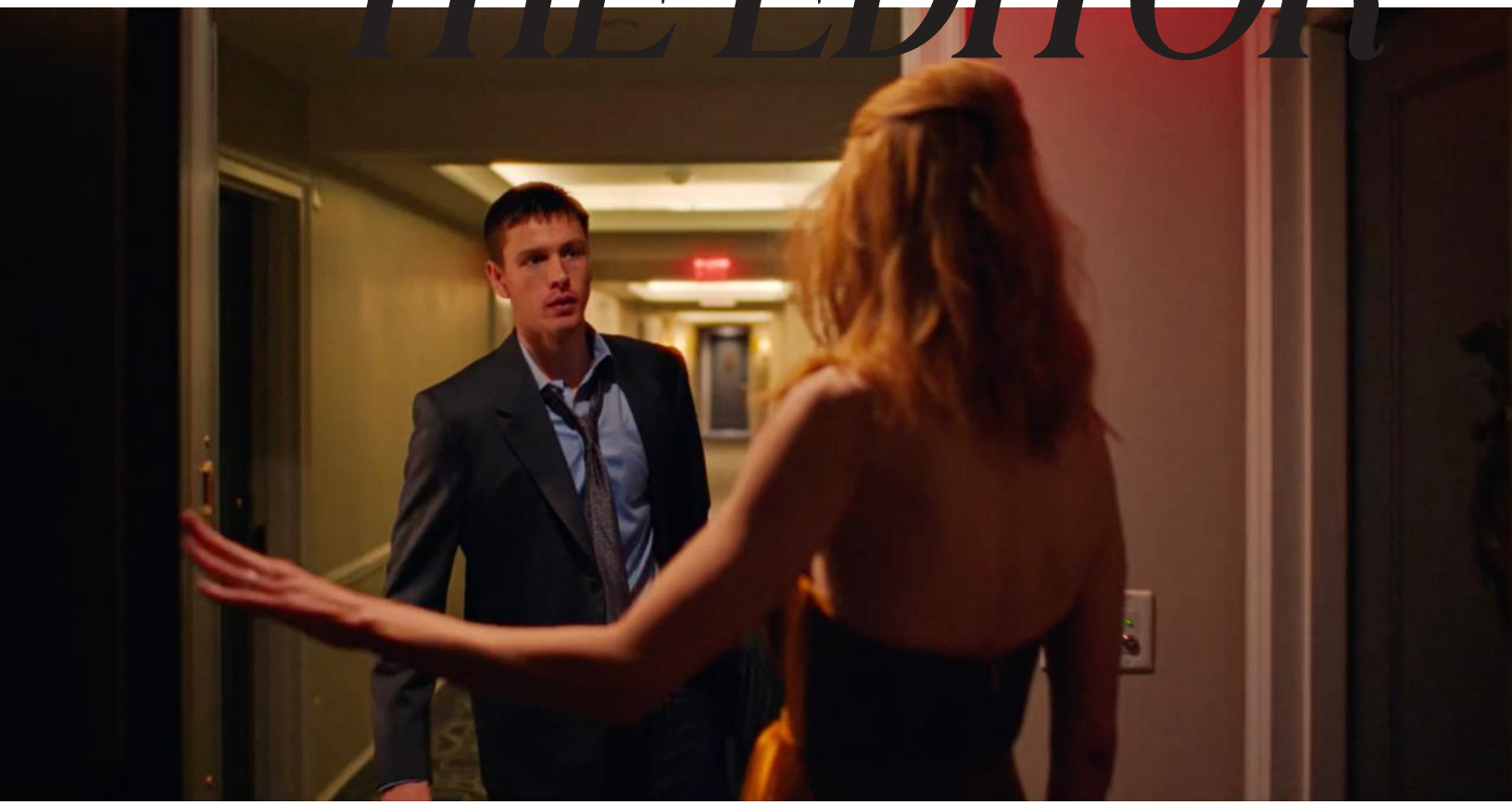

"I am here to give film artists runway to talk about their craft. If you like to geek out about finding *the* sound effect or what color does for character or bedazzling your Chekov's gun, you've come to the right place.

After three years of digital publication, we're due for some cosmetic procedures (fillers, tasteful Botox, light Ozempic). Nothing major, just enough to level up our game. Once upon a time, this magazine was called *The Harbor Monthly* and was released, you guessed it smartie, monthly.

Now, *The Harbor Magazine*, the gold standard in print collateral by a post-production studio, will be released quarterly, in print as well as digitally. We will continue to bring you insights on film craft in its many forms. But we might sprinkle in a few surprises.

Email me what color you would bedazzle your Chekov's gun at ellie.powers@harborpicturecompany.com.

KEEP READING,

ELLIE POWERS

COVER IMAGE BY EDWARD NOUEL ; BTS IMAGES BY ELLIE POWERS
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WARDROBE CREDITS: PENCE, PONY

SCRATCHING THE ITCH:

Ed Burns on Film, Family, and Writing His Debut Novel

By: Ellie Powers

It's the day of our cover shoot. Ed Burns shows up on time, alone, with a put-me-wherever-you-need-me attitude. He shakes the hand of every person on set before taking his coat off and introducing himself as "Eddie." While being directed to set, he politely interrupts our producer to make sure he got the name of a crew member correctly. I get the pleasure of speaking with Ed in this context, while we sit together on a mod white couch, and the photographer sets up the next shot. Ed's shocked that I took the time to read his book. I tell him, that's why we're here isn't it? He shrugs. One trait that defines Ed Burns as a writer/director: he's still scratching an itch. The themes that Ed has wrestled with in almost every work from his career – mainly marriage, love, sex, and religion – can be traced through his filmography from *The Brothers McMullen* (which turns thirty this year) to his recent, *Millers in Marriage*, and through his budding literary career with his debut novel, *The Kid from Marlboro Road* (book one in a trilogy, I'm told). He describes what he's chasing as "the enormous tininess of everyday life," a phrasing

someone recently gave him that he's latched onto. Ed found this idea exemplified in the works he discovered in film school that fit into the genre "people sitting in kitchens talking about life," as he describes it. Films like *The Apartment* (1960), *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), *400 Blows* (1959), and *The Last Picture Show* (1971), to name a few. He says after you watch them, you emerge a different person.

He feels similarly about literature (and Bruce Springsteen songs). Which makes sense given writing was the filmmaker's first love. With encouragement from his parents, his love of reading inspired him to find his own style at the keys of his typewriter. Ed recently released his first novel, *The Kid from Marlboro Road*, based on his childhood growing up in an Irish American family on Long Island. Bookended by the funeral of his grandpa Pop, the story follows a twelve-year-old boy who struggles to understand the melancholia of his mother, the teenage angst of his brother, and the unyielding stoicism of his cop father over the course of his last preteen summer. In one of the novel's opening scenes, the main character wins a poetry prize from the Catholic Daughters of America for his poem that equates Jesus to the maple tree in his front yard. This anecdote was pulled directly from Ed's life, and he reflects on the win saying, "I guess there wasn't a lot of competition in Nassau County in 1978 for a poetry contest."

Writing the novel opened a medium that Ed had long wanted to explore. As a writer, he found the process freeing: "You don't need to ask anybody to cut a check." He explores anecdotes from his own life mixed with fictitious additions (what I would argue is the definition of creative writing), or as he puts it, he's "the kid in the book and the dad in the book and the mom in the book." The novel for him is another piece of a larger narrative puzzle, or—hopefully not belaboring the itch scratching metaphor—a means to never let his career scab.

Ed, the writer, is disciplined and regimented, influenced by a pivotal moment adapting William Kennedy's *Legs* for the silver screen alongside the Pulitzer-winning author. Kennedy's number one lesson: write every day (yes, even on Christmas). Ed summarizes the process as this: "You sit down, thread the paper into the typewriter, and write one line (typically you don't write only one line)." Ed spends three hours daily with the WiFi shut off in front of his typewriter and commits to "writing what I would call the shittiest version of the scene knowing no one needs to read this." And then, every draft he writes goes past his "script doctor," longtime producing partner Aaron Lubin, who Ed notes is brutally honest with his edits and excellent at polishing scenes.

Ed, the filmmaker, enjoys the collaborative nature of the process and operates based on trust and loyalty. When he has a finished script in hand, his next stop is a conversation with another longstanding collaborator, Cinematographer Will Rexer, ASC. They discuss the overall look, the color palette, the position and movement of the camera. On his recent project with acclaimed actors such as Patrick Wilson, Minnie Driver, Julianna Margulies, Morena Baccarin, among others (including Burns himself), *Millers in Marriage*, which follows three siblings as they navigate the challenges of long-term relationships in New York City, he discusses how he wished to honor the film's intimacy.

The trust he places in his crew extends to the post process, where he sees finishing as just that, getting it done. He's not one for overcomplicating and focusing on unnecessary minutiae, as Harbor Colorist Roman Hankewycz notes. "It's refreshing. Eddie trusts me

WARDROBE CREDITS: PENCE, WANGDA

to handle the grade and, because we've done so many projects together [Roman has lost count], he's relatively go-with-the-flow. He's unpretentious and wants to focus on performance and honoring the stories he wishes to tell." When I mention that this piece's central theme is about Ed's itch scratching, Roman enthusiastically agreed. "Yes, that's a good way to put it. He makes movies about the real world with real people, typically they're also Irish Americans." Roman notes as well that he has a soft spot for Eddie, as *Newlyweds* (2011) was Roman's first solo feature film credit.

In Ed's words, his approach to post production is simple: to make everything "feel and sound natural and authentic. These are slice of life films. I'm not looking to add atmosphere through sound design or color." Supervising Sound Editor Ian Cymore, who has worked on countless projects alongside the filmmaker, agrees. "He really focuses on what matters most; the dialogue, the performances on screen, and the music," Ian comments. "He trusts me to peel back the layers and deliver an unembellished, intentional mix. In an industry full of overly complex projects, Ed continues to write honest films that reflect life itself."

While his approach to post favors a more naturalistic feel, Ed loves a needle drop. His biggest inspirations being Scorsese's *Mean Streets* and Lawrence Kasdan's *The Big Chill*. But when dealing with "a little budget film, there are no guarantees with anything and certainly no guarantee that you'll be able to afford licensing anything." Therefore, Ed finds ways to be flexible in his approach. Ian plays a pivotal role in seamlessly incorporating music into Ed's films, commenting: "I love working with him to make a needle drop play delicately throughout a scene, or to find that perfect balance between score and dialogue. We don't get bogged down in the details, because at the end of the day he just wants the soundtrack to feel real and authentic without any excess." For example, in *Millers*, Ed found a score from an Italian pianist that fit perfectly with the film's subject matter. For *Bridge and Tunnel*, his Epix series about, you guessed it, growing up on Long Island (though not necessarily Irish), he noted that with a bit more room in the budget, he was able to write with music in mind and had fun playing with when and how the music would fit into the story.

WARDROBE CREDITS: PENCE, ALÉO STUDIO, FLORSHEIM

BTS Image by Elle Powers
WARDROBE CREDITS: PENCE, PONY

An interesting method to understand Ed Burns, the artist, would be to examine his *Madeleine de Proust* (the reason I bring this up is that Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* is mentioned as a pivotal book for the protagonist of *The Kid from Marlboro Road*. If you are unaware with the idea of a *Madeleine de Proust*, it's a sense memory, but esoteric and French).

When asked what would be his *Madeleine de Proust*, his answer was the salty aroma of the ocean, a smell that harkens back to his childhood summers near the beach. That's his itch: what it meant to be a kid growing up in an Irish American community on Long Island. He'll let us know when the itch has been sufficiently scratched.

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VISUALIZING THE INVISIBLE:

MOTHERHOOD IN MARIELLE HELLER'S NIGHTBITCH

BY: ELLIE POWERS

Marielle Heller labors over creating realistic portraits of human behavior. Yes, even in a film where a woman believes she is turning into a dog. I speak with Marielle via Zoom where she sits in her living room on the couch. Even though she had an interview just preceding our conversation and one directly after, she's casual, relaxed with her legs folded under herself. Her responses, however, are precise; she is mindful to properly convey her intentions with this film.

Nightbitch, the filmmaker's third feature, adapted from Rachael Yoder's 2021 novel of the same name, stars Amy Adams as a nameless "Mother" who struggles with reclaiming her identity amidst the repetitions of stay-at-home motherhood. And, eventually, finds herself running through the streets at night in her canine form.

Sounds like a horror film. And certainly, there are elements of body horror present in the film, but overall, the film is a family drama that finds moments of comedy. What is funny about a mother turning into a dog? If you ask Marielle, quite a lot. "I find humor in everything and there's a different type of humor when you're laughing because you feel seen," she states. "I don't think any of my movies fall generally into one genre. I like to elicit a surprising feeling or emotion, laughter amid darkness.

Life is not a comedy or a drama." Personally, I like how Director of Photography Brandon Trost interpreted the film: "For women, it's a comedy. For men, it's a horror film."

Marielle does not intend to bash men, regardless of how horrified some may feel by seeing "Husband" utter phrases they may have stated themselves (e.g. referring to looking after their own children as 'babysitting'). Instead, Marielle hopes that "the experience of watching the movie has a voyeuristic effect where men put themselves in the perspective of a woman and realize this is what it feels like to go through this change in your life."

The film distills some of Marielle's frustrations with being a mother, an artist, a woman and feeling invisible. She points out specifically how she kept Rachael Yoder's choice to leave all the characters nameless, "Mother" and

"Husband" and "Son." And how she infused some of her own experiences. Again, she stresses, she is happily married to a man (writer/director Jorma Taccone) and is raising a young boy as well as a girl.

The anonymity of aging women became a guiding light for Marielle's directorial approach. Her background in acting (a graduate of UCLA's drama program) compels her to begin always with character, finding ways to externalize the struggles of a sleep-deprived first-time mom and focusing on performance rather than leaning on an encyclopedia of film knowledge.

First, she needs a stage. She wished for the setting to be

"...you have a slightly unreliable narrator. You're going to be in a very subjective version of the world..."

ambiguous, an unnamed suburb outside a big city during an unidentified decade. The teams looked at approximately sixty houses before they found the one. Marielle needed a "cool house with good bones and interesting choices. Maybe it was a house other people overlooked. That's why they could afford it. And then there's a layer of baby crap on top of their good taste."

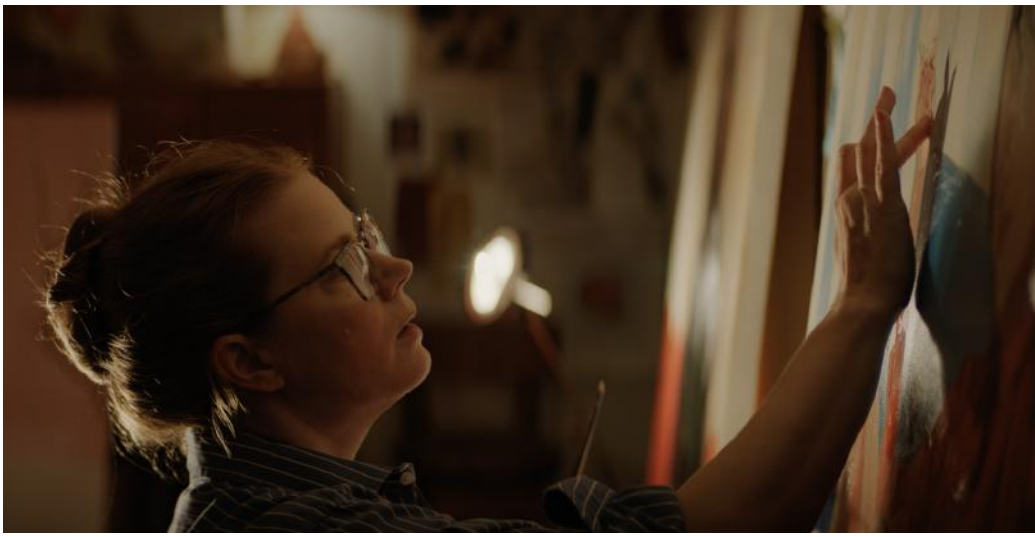
The emotional motivation of the character then informs the setting, the look, the soundscape. Take for example the opening montage which Marielle notes in a film as genre-bending as *Nightbitch* is crucial to teach the audience how to watch the movie. "Are we signaling to the audience that this is fantasy or are we keeping it more ambiguous? I tend to like to keep things less clear. I like the ambiguity and letting audiences have to kind of figure out what's happening. I don't know why clarity is always our value." In this scene, Mother makes breakfast for her son with quick cuts of the same hashbrowns flipping in a pan over the course of countless days. Marielle shows us the monotony of Mother's daily life with repetition to the point of insanity. She uses this moment to "introduce this idea that you have a slightly unreliable narrator. You're going to be in a very subjective version of the world where you're seeing how it feels to her. And how loud the clink of the pan is

and how much that feels like she's done it a thousand times and how she experiences the feelings more than the reality."

Director of Photography Brandon Trost used a Panavision anamorphic zoom lens (which he didn't even know existed) to capture the emotional intention of this moment. He begins with a wide shot of Mother in the kitchen cooking and playing with her son and then "pushes in and pushes in and then goes beyond where you think a normal push shot would go and keeps going and going and going until we just see her eyes, burning with this quiet fire that was part of the macro of this movie. We were interested in close details like that." Brandon employed these slow zooms throughout the film to further the feeling of entering the mind of "Mother" and exposing the unseen. By putting this lens, which was designed for a smaller sensor camera, on the Arri Alexa LF, he discovered a resulting "cinematic veil" with a sharpness in the center of the frame.

While Brandon chose these anamorphic zoom lenses to portray daily life, for the flashback sequences and the scenes in which "Mother" begins her transformation from human to canine, he used a Petzval lens (old portrait lenses, often over 100 years old). He intended to evoke a sense of memory with "a swirly Boca around the center of the frame and a very shallow depth of field to enhance that effect." For the dog's POV, Brandon experimented with glass filters thanks to Panavision that he turned the wrong way which rendered the image "smeared and out of focus on the outside edges with only a small part in the center that was in focus." He used this filter to mimic the look achieved for the flashbacks with the Petzval but pushed even further.

The overall look leans into high contrast with rich shadows and saturated colors to emulate a film print. Brandon engaged Colorist Andrea Chlebak from the very beginning and gave Andrea the unique challenge of creating the initial moodboard. She hadn't read the script yet, only the book, and recalls "drawing inspiration directly from the book's rich details and emotional layers plus my own lived experience as a mother and artist. The look we built was deeply rooted in a distinct texture and mood that felt authentic to the narrative. It was a rare and special opportunity to help shape the film's visual identity from the ground up, in collaboration with Brandon, by interpreting the source material in a way that felt fresh and aligned with our collective artistic direction." From there, they developed a LUT that Brandon stuck close to. During the grade, therefore, the biggest lift was "fine-tuning the tonality to match the various storytelling styles. This gave us the freedom to subtly enhance key narrative elements—like the inner monologue, daydream sequences, and altered flashbacks," says Andrea. "With a bold foundation in place, we adjusted contrast and brightness as needed to amplify the raw, emotive feel that we carried throughout the story."



The sound design and mix were another aspect that Marielle carefully considered to craft her subjective portrait. Working with Supervising Sound Editor Damian Volpe, she considered how the different worlds —society, her internal life, nature, and animals—should interact. How do you use sound to expose the invisible? For Marielle, the answer is a spoken aloud monologue in

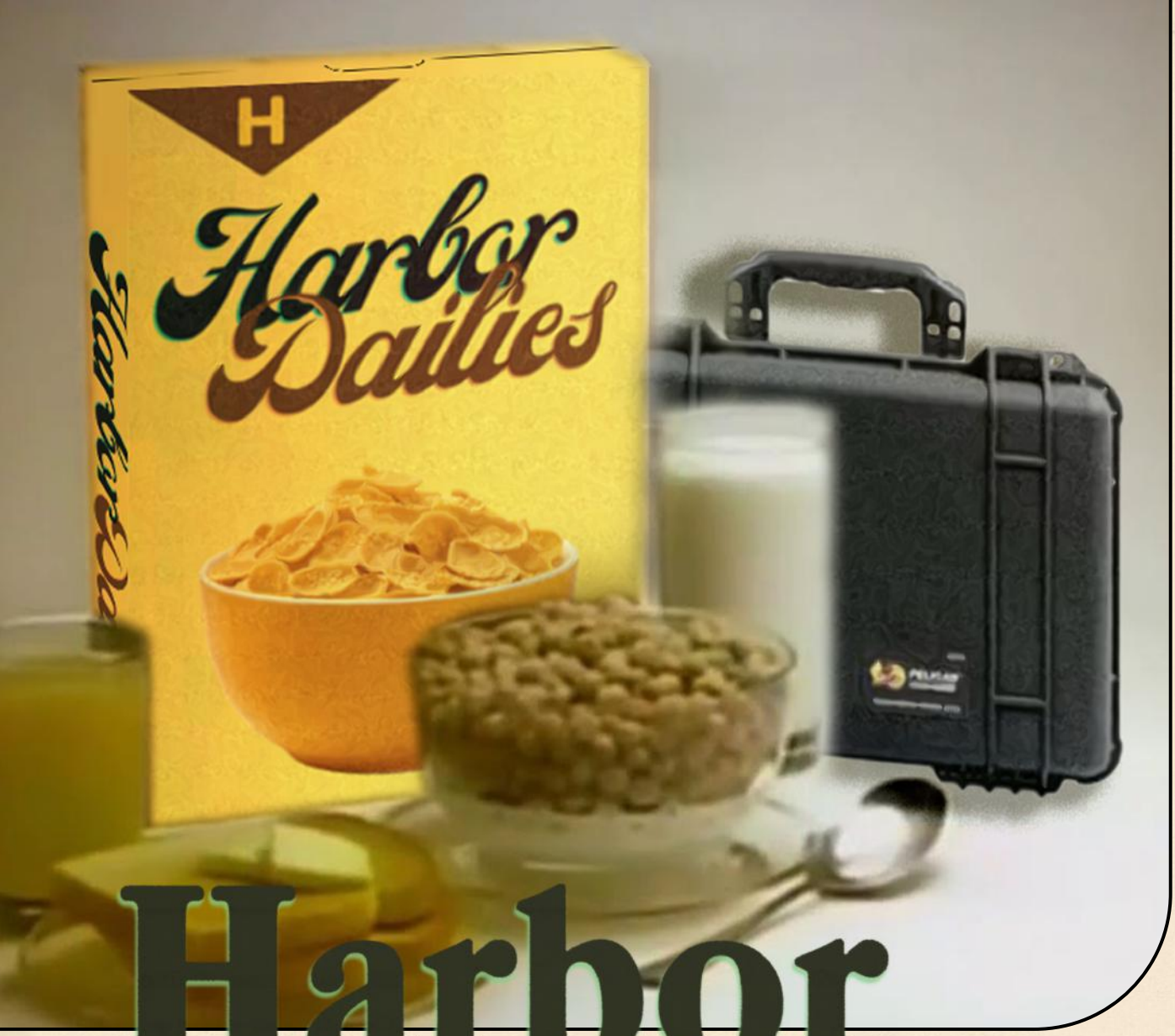
Images courtesy of Searchlight Pictures

addition to the voiceover. A choice she made to "try to reflect how invisible she feels in the world and how much she feels like nobody is listening to her." This internal, sometimes externalized, monologue is juxtaposed with the loud, dissonant, overwhelming noise of parenthood and the sounds of the natural and animal worlds. Whether it be cicadas or the growls and barks of dogs (or those that Amy Adams added), Marielle uses sound to reflect "Mother's" emotional state and eventual transformation.

Specifically for "Mother's" transformation from woman to dog, Damian experimented with vocoding, a process which breaks down the voice into frequencies which he manipulated to blend Amy's performance with various animals. Damian expresses how he "likes to start with something organic, so I took Amy's performances from the ADR session—all sorts of animalistic sounds from growls to barks to wines to heavy panting and breathing—and melded them with various animals, wolves and dogs, to create a hybrid. Sometimes, that was successful. Often, it was easier for me to super carefully edit Amy's voice to end with something canine, or the reverse, start with a scream and then add a high-pitched dog in the middle of the sound to the end." Damian also used this technique to clearly delineate between Mother's transformation and the other dogs whose personalities were created using recordings of real dogs.

Beginning first with the often swept under the rug realities and emotions of motherhood, Marielle intends *Nightbitch* to be the beginning of a conversation about the balancing act of having children and remembering who you are. She tells me that the main reason she made this movie was that she had not seen other movies that had done what this movie does.

Unrelated, she thinks men should apologize more. "Men apologizing should be the new Bechdel test," she jokes. "I'm raising a young boy as well as a young girl, and I'm married to a man. I see how much our society does not teach young men how to apologize." When I first jumped on the call, Marielle apologized for being late and for having issues with the Zoom link which caused me to apologize for her technical difficulties. She may have a point there. Here's hoping I don't grow a tail.



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HALINA REIJN'S

BY: ELLIE POWERS

PERSONAL FEMALE GAZE RULEBOOK

FOR BABYGIRL

A man walks into a bar and buys Halina Reijn a glass of milk. Years later, on set, Halina has an embryo of an idea about power and sexuality. Incorporate the former anecdote into the latter concept, mix in Nicole Kidman, Harris Dickinson, and Antonio Banderas, add a splash of *Hedda Gabler*, bright reds, and a voyeuristic camera, and you get *Babygirl*. It's a story about a powerful woman who discovers what occurs at the crux of the civilized and the animalistic with, why not, milk as a connective tissue.

Halina joins me via Zoom, her backdrop a typical New York kitchen, condensed and linear. She's bubbly, open, kind, complimentary, and overall excited to dive into her process. She's willing to look (American) taboos in the eye with a wide grin, shameless and ready to shed light on parts of ourselves we may wish to shun. To give you an idea, her first feature, made in the Netherlands, *Instinct* (2019), follows a psychologist who becomes infatuated with a sex offender. Her European sensibilities mean she's keen to embrace suggestion, ambiguity, and the darker aspects of sexuality. Her welcoming personality invites you to feel comfortable accepting those desires.

Through all of her films, she wishes to explore "juicy parts for women in which they can explore all the different layers of themselves."

Halina finishes editing *Bodies Bodies Bodies*, the writer/director's first American feature for A24, attends SXSW, and moves on to spend the next year writing *Babygirl*. She first has to tackle a formidable question.

MINDING THE FEMALE GAZE

What is the female gaze? If you ask film scholars, you immediately bump into an issue: how to define the female gaze without relating it to the male gaze. Laura Mulvey, in her seminal 1975 essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," offers this description of the woman's place in cinema:

a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning (15).

I promise I won't bring up any more film theory; you won't be quizzed. But I think of the idea of a 'maker of meaning' when Halina recounts her struggle to do justice to female desire, given that, in her words, she's "internalized the patriarchal gaze completely." How do you offer a woman's POV when your available vocabulary relates to its lacking? In other words, how do you set out to portray the female gaze without saying "well it's not…"?

Halina wrestles with this question for the entire process of development, writing, production, and post. She leans on the younger women in her life, notably the cast of *Bodies*, whom she notes are still her "guiding light," to inform her approach. She resolves, "I can't shy away from that truth, and I have to show the old and the new, if you will. I wanted to show how [Romy's] oldest daughter, her assistant, and Samuel [Harris Dickinson] carry a torch that I find more interesting than what Gen X had to say about feminism. The movie even more than sex and power is about generations."

What to do then with the 'old' vision of the female gaze? Halina says flip it on its head. She took a scene from *9 ½ Weeks* in which Kim Bessinger strips for Mickey Rourke to the Joe Cocker song, "Leave Your Head On," but mirrored it. So, in *Babygirl*, it's Samuel (Harris Dickinson) who dances for Romy (Nicole Kidman) in a motel room to the George Michael song, "Father Figure."

Her intention here is to take the existing framework of the patriarchal or male gaze and "completely switch it around, which is of course not feminism, but it's something I want to show in my movie—that we are aware of all the different aspects of what is it to be equal. Is there even a possibility of equality when we are also driven by things like biology? What is nurture

and what is nature?"

When she discussed filming this dance with Director of Photography Jasper Wolf, NSC Halina valued capturing exactly what a woman would focus on. She guided Jasper to capture the dance by moving along with Samuel.

For Halina, female desire is more complicated than bodies slapping together. She's more interested in story and suggestion which is why she incorporates details like close-ups of hands or when Romy spreads her legs, "the idea is more than enough for us. We don't need to see anything. We need suggestions which is why we also don't have that many inherently sexual acts in the movie. Witnessing somebody licking milk out of a saucer or eating candy out of someone's hand can be shocking, but it doesn't have a lot to do with actual sex." Halina summarizes her female gaze as "sensual. It's erotic. It's storytelling."

CIVILIZED VS. ANIMALISTIC

Halina invested a lot of time into prep and how to express the animalistic versus the civilized. She explains how she wished to infuse this theme "in the story itself, in every character and every scene, but also through the cinematography—the beast being the handheld operated by Jasper himself and the civilized being drone shots, overhead shots, wide shots of the city, the beauty, the seduction, the robots, all of that."

To paint her portrait of a corporate boss who explores the darkness of her repressed desires, Halina chose to "be very open with the audience." When it came to color, Halina engaged Harbor Colorist Damien Vandercruyssen to further explore this contradiction. Referencing *Paris, Texas* for its rich, warm colors, Halina aims to show a corporate world in a more classically feminine light, not a masculine robotic world. She tells me that she decided to lean into "the cliché of feminine beauty through color with a lot of red." But moreover, she looks for humanity. She references the opening scene of *Bodies Bodies Bodies*, in which two of the main characters kiss. She's intentional to show a birthmark and some acne in that moment, and notes that this search for humanity has a constant presence in the world of *Babygirl* as well.

This juxtaposition between civilized and animalistic is exemplified in the setting of the motel room. Along with Production Designer Stephen H. Carter, Halina had a vision for the motel room to signify the womb while still being realistic for its setting and encapsulating the filth and beauty of New York. Or as Halina puts it, "you have a beautiful room, but at the same time, there's stains on the carpet

and hair on the bed." Halina enlisted Damien to shape the color to match the progression of Romy and Samuel's relationship.

Damien notes that "many scenes in the movie are bathed in warm tones. Pinks and reds define Romy's palette, but when they have their first romantic encounter, the setting shifts. We're pulled into a grimly lit room, where the yellow light skews green—an unsettling contrast that makes us want to flee, just as it clashes with Romy's expectations." Then Damien explains how, "on the second encounter, we feel that Romy has now taken control, and the room is drenched in warm tones which clash with the cold world seen through the windows."

HEDDA GABLER AS VEHICLE

Within the film, Romy's husband, Jacob (Antonio Banderas), is directing *Hedda Gabler*. Halina explains the importance of including this play: "The whole story is *Hedda Gabler*." During the mix, she lamented not having enough coverage to show a close-up of Hedda on stage leaning into the barrel of the gun, a pivotal moment in the play. Re-Recording Mixer/Sound Designer Mixer Jacob Ribicoff had a solution: a heartbeat. Halina recalls how "he took away all the other sound except for a *boom boom boom,* and it makes the whole moment. You might not be satisfied with the material you got on the shooting day, but you can tell the whole story with sound." She notes as well how "once everybody's on board to think like that, it's just one big feast of creativity."

Jacob recalls experimenting to arrive at the most tension-inducing sound design for that moment, auditioning "a handful of sounds to convey Romy's rush of emotion as she breathlessly enters the theater, including whooshes, vibrational tones, exaggerated door creaks and a ballast buzz coming from the stage lights. In the end, we arrived at her breathing and her heart pounding. The heart pounding lives at an audible level to be felt as a tension but not too over the top. The sound crescendos until Jacob suddenly turns to notice her and speaks, at which point it abruptly stops. The effect for the viewer is of a tension released." Jacob explains how the heartbeat is an example of "how sound can abstractly bring some of the characters boiling undercurrents to the surface. So, after the heated conversation out on the street with Samuel, Romy is plunged into a panic attack as she heads to the theater to visit her husband Jacob during rehearsals."

The *Hedda Gabler* of it all harkens back to Halina's theater background which taught her (among many other things) to protect the words of the script. She tells me that for certain scenes, like a pivotal meeting between Romy and Samuel in which the power dynamics shift drastically, she needs the actors "to say the line exactly how I wrote it." However, her scripts are not set in stone, and

she (with permission) "feeds off real humans to make the writing more specific, modern, and alive." Examples include the iconic quote in *Bodies* from Alice (Rachel Sennott) who says "I have body dysmorphia," which was something Rachel said to Halina at their first meeting before production. Or Harris Dickinson, on the set of *Babygirl* told Halina that she shouldn't drink too much coffee. To which Halina thought, *huh, what a strange thing for a young man to say to a director? Put it in the script.*

Yes, a young man did walk into a bar in the Netherlands and buy Halina a glass of milk, but no, he did not stick around long enough to call her a 'good girl.' But, the act sticks with Halina, and she takes this real moment, turns up the volume, adds power, suggestion, and intrigue to create a dynamic portrait of a woman who discovers what happens when she ignores parts of herself, uncomfortable as they may be. I won't argue that Halina has given a definitive definition of the female gaze, but she's working on her own rulebook. It includes flipping the male gaze around, zeroing on the details women notice, and embracing some clichés like traditionally feminine colors and milk as a manifestation of the intersection between civilized and animalistic. When it comes to sexuality, even when Halina doubts her own preferences, she urges us to think beyond male constructs: "you can be whatever you want to be. If you want to dress up as a giraffe, that's fine too."

Images courtesy of A24

ACTION VS. INTIMACY

IN PRIME VIDEO'S MR. & MRS. SMITH

BY: ELLIE POWERS

Prime Video's reimagining of the 2005 film, *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, the series from Donald Glover and Francesca Sloane, takes a new approach to dissecting the marriage of two spies, John Smith (Glover) and Jane Smith (Maya Erskine). While the original film leans heavily into the action genre, this new take prioritizes the nuances of marriage and intimacy over its eight episodes.

Sloane in an interview with *The New York Times* said, "Even though it was this spy thriller, we thought there was an opportunity to lean into the parts that were about what marriage means. The awkward in-between moments, the idea of loneliness and true vulnerability." Through color and sound finishing, Harbor artists paid careful attention to create a world of action with enough space for the inter-personal highs and lows of

Jane and John's relationship. The show sees the couple travel around the world for missions, however, nailing a New York look and soundscape became paramount to illustrating the lives of the two spies.

Colorist Damien Vandercruyssen worked alongside Director Hiro Murai and Director/ Cinematographer Christian Sprenger, ASC to establish the look of the first four episodes. The goal was to recreate a seventies/ eighties New York aesthetic à la *The French Connection* (1971), *Marathon Man* (1976), and *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three* (1974). That stylized quintessential city look then informed the look for other locations in the show (the slopes of the Alps, Lake Como, and an unidentified jungle).

The series was shot on an Alexa Mini LF, and to achieve the desired grain and imperfections of their references, the camera team compared test footage shot on film and digital to hone the show's look. Once they had established a LUT, Vandercruyssen explains, "The process was simple. We treated what was captured like film stock, and then we adjusted when needed, but we didn't drift too far from where we started. For some scenes, I had to modify the LUT on some specific colors, but most of the show uses the same LUT from set."

Vandercruyssen notes that it seemed everyone was content with what they were seeing on the dailies, and the team primarily used the DI process to push "what we

couldn't do during dailies—adding back in the grain, the halation, a little bit of the gate weave of the film. The other change in the look from the dailies was switching to HDR. For that, we established a dynamic, not too far from filmic look that was not a super bright HDR look and kept the grain more in the midtone range and less in the highlights."

To even out the filmic look across scenes, Vandercruyssen recalls that "sometimes we had to ride the grain a little less in scenes with lots of action and push it further in the

Images courtesy of Amazon Studios

night scenes to mimic the film one would use, with a higher ISO film stock that shows more grain."

Supervising Sound Editor Glenfield Payne and Re-Recording Mixer Ryan Billia worked with Picture Editor Greg O'Bryant and Producer Kaitlin Waldron to show two different cities—the hustle and bustle of every day including a Chinatown mall, the subway, city parks (which were all shot on location) and the silence of luxury, mainly the Smith's townhouse. John and Jane live on a quiet street without many of the sounds New Yorkers are accustomed to—sirens wailing, dogs barking, horns honking – only the subtle sounds of advanced technology. In Payne's words, "I wanted it to sound sexy." For example, in the pilot, when Jane and John first enter the home, we see them separately take the elevator up to the second floor. Payne recorded the sound for the elevator himself while on vacation in a resort where he found an elevator without a fan. As Glen explained, "at three o'clock in the morning, I'm riding up and down, recording this elevator, and I'm confident: that's the elevator we're using."

For the action scenes, Billia faced the challenge of deciding how prominent the various elements should be, saying: "Because there are fast cuts, a lot of action, a big score, sound effects and loop group, we would have conversations like, 'what should be at the forefront here. Is this music heavy? Is it effects heavy?'"

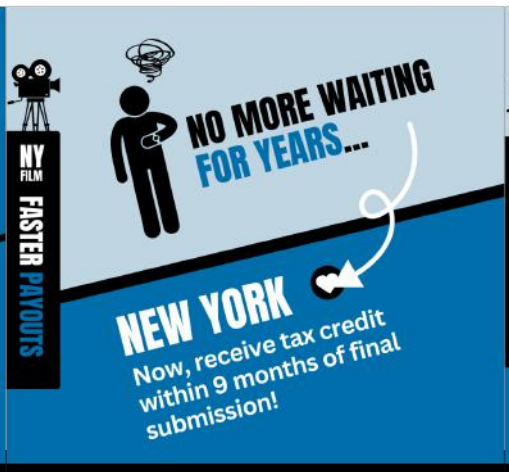
In quieter moments between John and Jane, Billia found ways for "the ambience to add to the tension, while allowing all the dialogue to stay crisp and easily understood. I was thinking about those juxtapositions between when it could be funny and when it needed to be serious." Payne added that the team "built this world to support the performances."

With color and sound, Vandercruyssen, Payne, and Billia supported the filmmakers' ambitious combination of guns, bombs, and hand-to-hand combat and stolen moments of peace between spouses against a bustling and a secluded New York.

EXPLAINING THE NEW YORK POST-PRODUCTION & VFX TAX INCENTIVES

New York State offers some of the most competitive and accessible tax incentives for post-production services in the film and television industry.

With a 30% tax credit on qualifying costs, New York provides direct cash payouts, unlike other states where credits must be sold to monetize them—often reducing their value due to broker fees. The program covers a wide range of roles, including sound editorial, visual effects (VFX), music editing, and even apprenticeships. New York also boasts world-class talent, award-winning facilities, and unmatched locations, all complemented by an easy and affordable commute for crew and talent. Payouts are expedited, now processed within nine months of final submission, ensuring timely support for productions. Even projects filmed in neighboring states like New Jersey can maximize these benefits by conducting their post-production in New York. With an easy and free application process, New York is the ideal choice for post-production work. Learn more at **POSTNEWYORK.ORG.**



MEET YANA

Yana Collins Lehman, CEO of **Trevanna Post** and Chair of the **Post New York Alliance (PNYA)** played a pivotal role in establishing the tax incentives for post-production and VFX in New York with lots of lobbying trips to Albany. She helps us understand how these tax credits help our industry and why you should consider posting in New York. (Also, fun fact: she's a triathlete.)

TIMELINE

2004: Production tax credit implemented in New York.

2004-2009: Paul Moore, leader of Local 700, tries to get people to consider a post-production tax incentive.

2009: Post New York Alliance founded with one purpose: lobbying for the post-production tax incentive.

2010: Post-production tax credit established in New York.

2013: VFX tax credit passed in New York.

2023: New York State changed the tax incentive materially to include above-the-line payments as eligible for the tax credit.

YANA'S WORDS OF WISDOM:

"In post, we have permanent jobs. We give our people insurance and maternity leave. We sign ten-year leases on expensive properties in New York. The economic impact of having a legitimate post industry in your town is significant."

"We spend a lot of money in New York educating people. We have incredible universities, and a lot of graduates who want to work in entertainment in some capacity. And not just as writers, directors, actors. There are so many jobs and so many personalities that make up post-production – like the introvert who tucks themselves away in the edit room or the post producer who's more extroverted. You want to have an industry, so people stay after they're educated here."

"One of the big downsides for shooting in New Jersey? The hidden fees of traveling your crew and cast from Brooklyn. The fees don't hit your bank account until far later and I've seen production incur $50,000 in tolls."

What's Next?

Looking forward, Yana acknowledges there is work yet to be done. Given that the post-production tax credit has not been evaluated in ten years, she has been working alongside the PNYA and the State of New York to continue to improve the program and bring more post opportunities to our great state.

BALAN
VERITÉ
EMOTIO

Director Alex Gibney,
Jigsaw Productions

Re-Recording Mixer
Tony Volante, Harbor

CING
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ON

A Conversation Between Alex Gibney & Tony Volante

By: Ellie Powers

Documentarian Alex Gibney and Re-Recording Mixer Tony Volante have been working together for almost two decades. The duo met in 2006 on the documentary, *Herbie Hancock: Possibilities*, which Alex produced. When I asked how they first met, Alex said, "I feel like I've always known Tony."

The fact that Alex agreed to an interview at all speaks volumes about the rapport he shares with Tony, but more telling perhaps, was Alex's choice of attire. Sure enough, Alex joined our call in a Harbor sweatshirt.

In Alex and Tony's capable hands, sound guides audiences to better understand and sympathize with the story. In pursuit of truth, they carefully consider how to maintain emotional impact while striving for verité. The conversation delves into several of Alex's films, offering a new perspective on Alex's prolific filmography.

Alex and Tony reflect on the trust that fuels their partnership and begets the soundscapes for dozens of films. For music or sports, religion or corrupt billionaires, every subject requires its own delicate care to extricate truth from emotion.

Ellie: I'd love to hear about your working relationship and how your creative process has changed for sound, starting with your collaboration on *Taxi to The Dark Side* (2007), all the way to In *Restless Dreams: The Music of Paul Simon* (2023).

Alex: It's hard to say. It changes from movie to movie depending on what we're trying to accomplish. I've always valued Tony's ability to create a soundscape that meets the creative intent of the movie and his ability to dig deep into the aesthetic and editorial aims of the film. Also, his ear, which becomes increasingly important to me as I get older and certain frequencies tend to disappear.

Tony: Right, one shoe doesn't fit all as each film has its own technique and style. But I think that the overview of the process probably hasn't changed all that much throughout the years. We attack them the same way and we're used to adjusting our approach together to match a given film's creative intent.

Ellie: What role does sound plays in your documentaries or what role should sound play?

Alex: I like the idea that you can create a soundscape or a kind of a mood that may not always be utterly evident in a conscious way to the viewer or listener. Something you feel subconsciously.

For example, in *Taxi to the Dark Side*, there was a plan to unite in visual space all the people who had been at the Bagram Air Force Base. We used the same backdrop and lighting scheme for the all the interviews, from New York to Birmingham where Moazzam

Begg was. So, when it came to the soundscape, we worked hard to also create that feeling like you were really in Bagram, no matter where the interview was recorded.

The whole idea was to create a purposefully realistic sound. Sometimes, you want to feel like it's the verité sound, and you don't want to mess with it. Other times, you want to create a mood, a kind of a mindscape or a soundscape that takes you to a certain place. The intent was to create soundscapes that complimented the visual and enhance storytelling.

Ellie: Does the visual come first and then you're figuring out the sound? How intertwined are those two disciplines for you?

Alex: Sound is important from the get-go. I've been lucky enough to work with editors who are invested in sound and understand that. We make changes along the way, but a lot of the intent comes from there. Yet, documentaries are funny in that way, in the sense that they're like fiction films, but you write the script at the end instead of the beginning. As you hone the script and the structure of the film becomes more defined, you begin to see and hear things that become more evident. Its a process of discovery.

Ellie: Let's talk about your more recent collaboration, *In Restless Dreams: The Music of Paul Simon*. How did you approach the sound and blending music into the soundscape?

Alex: I wanted to find a way, particularly in some of the present-day performances in Paul's studio, whether it be in Austin or New York, to maintain that intimate off the cuff sound while preserving enough of

an allegiance to the final record. It was important to feel both. We had all these great performances from Paul throughout the years. So, we tried to deliver to Tony as much of the multitracks as we could. That way he could really work his magic and give them the sort of richness they deserve. We knew from the beginning that we were going to let some of this music play at length.

And if you're going to do that, you have to commit to a richness of sound that's going to take the viewer someplace special. Because that's what music does. It takes you someplace special.

Tony: It's always particularly fun with Alex when we mix music together. I might do an initial pass on some of the music, but Alex and I really get the creative juices flowing when we start mixing together and making choices. Pulling some stems, maybe moving some music around. We always end up discovering pleasant surprises during the mix.

Ellie: Alex, can you tell us a bit about your process for archival sound specifically and how you weave that into the narrative?

Alex: Again, I would say it kind of depends on the film or even a given scene. There are times you might feel motivated to make it breathe as if it's real and compromise or silence the sound. Other times, you might want to emphasize that the archival is kind of a memory or almost a dream, and don't really want to recreate sound as if it's real.

Crazy, Not Insane comes to mind as well. Rather than lean into the actual sound of the archive, we chose to take it to a very dreamlike place. We used pieces of archive that weren't necessarily related to the subject at hand, but were just trying to create dreamscapes. So, it was intended to connect you unconsciously and give you a feeling of free associating almost.

This is really where Tony, Dan, Bill Chesley, and I work together to determine what sounds should be rigorously real and key to the to the archive and what sounds should have a kind of more dreamlike or metaphorical vibe. And that is a more intuitive process.

Tony: I'm enjoying listening to you talk. I think you're nailing everything, and I'm also learning. I also see the archival layer like a movie within itself.

The archival has been produced and a lot of it has elements you can't revise. So, you're taking that layer and either playing it as it is, just as it was intended to be from the original source, or manipulating it in a way that it becomes a sound design element. That also comes in various shapes and forms of quality that we have to deal with, so it can be challenging.

Ellie: Are there any specific scenes or projects that stuck out for either of you as especially challenging or interesting mixes?

Tony: The whole process of sound for documentaries is challenging and interesting because there's this fine line between enhancing the film, while making it still feel real and not overdone. You can't over sound design it to make it sound like a Hollywood movie. Yet, you want it to be cinematic and powerful enough. I think that's the real trick and the real mastery producing sound for


Stuhf
Canon
VIDEO 18.5

documentaries.

Alex: One example that was interesting in an unexpected way was our recent film *Boom! Boom!: The World vs. Boris Becker*. I had requested that the sound department pull together a bunch of different tennis ball sounds, depending on the era and the racket, and who was hitting and from where.

That turns out to be tricky because you're creating a movie and it's not just trying to represent reality. You're creating a moment and a lot of tennis is very psychological. There's also a rhythm to the game, and the sound of the ball contributes a lot to a sense of rhythm.

But if you enhance it too much, it feels phony and over the top. If you enhance it too little, you don't get any of that emotion.

So, at what point do you lean into a sound and exaggerate it and other times pull it back? We made a choice to invest in those sounds, but to do so in a way that that really fit the character, the player, the rackets, and the psychology of any particular moment. It ended up contributing greatly to the narrative in ways that were unexpected.

Ellie: How do you approach incorporating silence into your documentaries?

Alex: Super good question. Sometimes I think I should incorporate it more than I do, and my composers will agree. I recall we played with silence a lot in *Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God*. It's a film about deaf men and we didn't want to invest too much in the idea of what does a deaf person hear, but to really convey the idea that that there is a barrier between the hearing population and the deaf population. For some of our deaf

heroes in the film, it was a little bit difficult for them to understand why we were mic-ing them, but we wanted to capture their hands, movements, some of their voicings.

I remember we first introduced the main character of *Mea Maxima Culpa*, Terry Kohut, in a direct address interview. He was signing directly to camera but we intentionally left it raw and didn't translate it so that you would have a sense of that gulf between the hearing and the non-hearing.

If you didn't understand or recognize any American sign language, you wouldn't know what he was saying. We then translated what he had to say afterwards, as we went to imagery. That felt like a powerful sound choice. But as you mentioned, I'd like to investigate silence a little bit more in the future. It's disquieting.

Tony: I think silence was used powerfully in, *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief*. There were moments where we put in space to enhance some of the tension of them being questioned. Sometimes the silence, even a minute amount, makes a huge difference. It doesn't have to be several minutes of silence. It can be these brief little moments that let the film breathe.

Alex: And sometimes we consciously leave them. But sometimes in interviews themselves, silence can be super important. You'd be surprised how much more people tend to offer when they feel that uncomfortable silence that everybody seems to have a need to fill, but you can't get there without feeling that uncomfortable silence.

Ellie: Speaking of – Wish to say anything else to fill this uncomfortable silence?

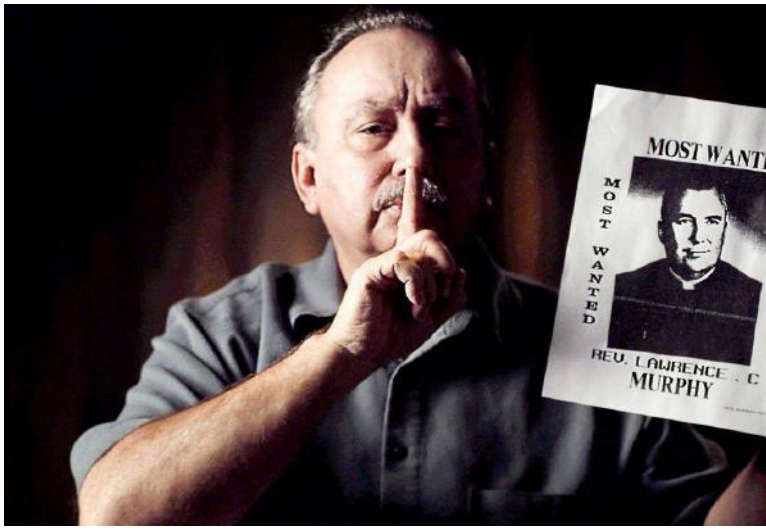
Tony: Just, thanks to Alex. This has been great. Your loyalty has meant so much to me over the years. There's a lot of it in the business and for a reason. It pays off. Once you have that trust with someone, it just opens the creative process up that much more.

Alex: Right. I trust you to go through and do those first passes that I don't really have to be there for. So, working together for so long has allowed us to focus on the creative challenges of the film when we get together.

Tony: Well, looking forward to the next one.

Alex: Me too.

Harbor extends its heartfelt gratitude to Alex Gibney and Jigsaw Productions for their unwavering support and loyalty. We are deeply grateful to Alex for generously sharing his time and invaluable insights with us.



Images courtesy of Jigsaw Productions

HARBOR ADR WORD SEARCH

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HAN SOLO
KENDALL ROY
WOLVERINE
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BUSTER SCRUGGS
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MARY POPPINS
DARTH VADER

Can you find all the iconic characters that our ADR artists have recorded?

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V Y M C Z C B E H B G G C V B K L Q X Q
V R R L V G J E M S I P T W T U X S J U
O B S S B D P M C K W C V I L T O T S F
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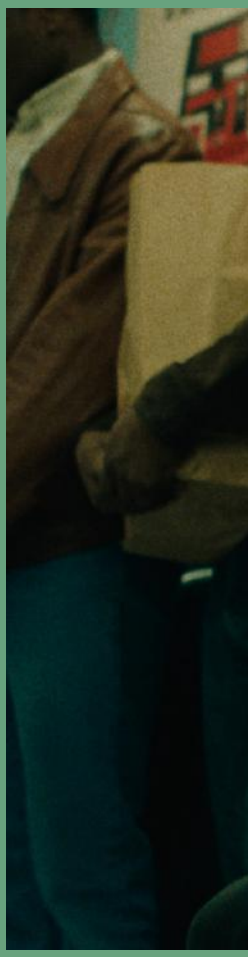
NETFLIX'S ERIC



Creating Impressions of '80s New York

By: Alli Albion

Photos Courtesy of: Netflix

If you haven't met Benedict Spence, BSC before, you're in for a treat. And if you have, well, you already know what a treat it is. Full of energy, even after a "terrible day," he arrives at the suite Toby's been grading in all day. "Oof that's looking nice Toby", Benedict says looking at Toby's monitor, which is displaying a still from his latest project for Sky. "I used the LUT from *Eric*," Toby jokes as they sit down.

The latest fruit of their established relationship is *Eric* for Netflix – a six-episode limited series starring Benedict Cumberbatch, written by Abi Morgan (*The Hour*, *The Iron Lady*, *The Split*), and directed by long term collaborator and good friend, Lucy Forbes.

"I've worked with Lucy for 20 years, which makes me feel a bit sick," Benedict laughs, "throughout all the iterations of our careers. We both started in factual entertainment, I moved into commercials, and now we're in drama. So, working with her is always a joy. And then obviously, I was like, what about Toby? Let's get him on board."

The trio has some previous successes. Most recently on the BAFTA-winning mini-series *This Is Going To Hurt* (also by *Eric* producers SISTER Pictures), and before that, on *The End of the F***ing World*, which received a Cinematography nomination at the Emmys.

SETTING THE SCENE

Being set in 1980s New York meant a creative approach to locations was needed, because "New York is obviously incredibly expensive to shoot in, and it doesn't really look like the eighties anymore," starts Benedict, "so we shot three quarters of the schedule in Budapest for the interiors, which were either set builds or existing locations changed to look like 1980s New York," before finally heading to New York to shoot for around five weeks. "As a Londoner who wishes they were really a New Yorker, it was a dream come true to live and shoot in Manhattan," Benedict smiles, "we were staying in Wall Street so I could walk 3 and a half minutes to work where we had three cameras, a supertechno crane and 200 extras, right in the middle of downtown New York. It was brilliant!"

"I've always wanted to do period New York, especially sort of seventies/eighties, so this was a dream come true brief," says Toby, who is well known for his timeless looks. Lucy provided key images as

reference that “felt of-the-time” and encapsulated the gritty reality of New York. “It was about finding a balance of something that felt of the time but that didn’t necessarily feel like it was captured at the time” Toby adds, “and obviously that’s a very subjective thing to everyone involved” - whether that comes from memories of visits, living through it in the era, or experiencing it through cinema. Grain was an important consideration when it came to locating it in the past. “For me, if something is in ‘80s New York, the grain sells that,” says Toby, “I’ve only been exposed to ‘80s New York through cinema with something acquired through film.” “Everything is an impression,” adds Benedict, “I wanted the lighting and the camera work of a modern TV show but the feel of something out of time, not specifically mimicking what those ‘80s cameras would do.”

Having spent time before shooting finding the look for the dailies, when it got to finishing, there wasn’t a huge deviation from the show LUT, which meant the pair were left to push the look a little further in the DI with little resistance. “It was an easy journey once we’d done episode one” says Toby. “We were left to it, and it was nice to feel that trust.” Benedict says, pointing to a tone document in front of him, “We’re not far from the references on these pages which is a really good feeling. Most of these images were shot on film, but you don’t need film anymore

REFERENCE SHOT BY FRANK HORVAT

"We're not far from the references on these pages," Benedict says, pointing to a tone document in front of him.

because you've got Toby Tomkins!" Benedict smiles. The series was actually shot on a pair of ARRI Alexa 35s, which "gave us the best possible starting point for a film emulation" adds Toby, "shout out to Arri!"

Benedict has done screen tests for his previous few jobs, and now swears by them. "You get to meet everybody, you get to do a perfect lighting setup which you'll never get to do on a TV schedule, you get to shoot all your key cast on a set. They look good. You get to take footage back to Toby Tomkins, who makes it look amazing. And then you show everybody this amazing footage. And suddenly everyone's confident and excited instead of shitting their pants scared, which is what they normally are at that stage, including me!" From a grading perspective too, it means Toby can experiment with the look on actual footage, which makes it easier for execs and crew to envision and get on board with, "which gets us closer to the look, sooner" Toby confirms. "You can create something bold and strong because you know it'll work."

"Look dev is probably my favorite part," says Toby. "You're kind of feeling it out, and when you find it, you know it's right. It's different for every job because it depends on the material, depends on the cast, depends on the production design, the lighting, the costume, the makeup. The perfect look for one thing will never be the perfect look for something else. They might look similar from afar, but when you look at them closely, they're all slightly different... like snowflakes!"

STORYTELLING

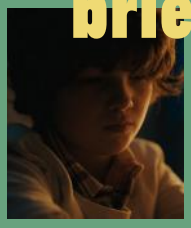
The story plays out across multiple locations in New York: Domestic environments, Upper West Side townhouses, subway-based homeless villages, police stations, and clubs all serve as a backdrop to a story that centres class, racism, homelessness and collective anxieties. "It's quite rare to play with the extreme ends of society like this. It's a big, big world," says Benedict.

When it comes to using color for storytelling, Benedict says "I try my best to make choices based on character and arcs, but more than anything else I think it has to be believable for that space." Robert Anderson, the father of Benedict Cumberbatch's character, is a multimillionaire property developer who lives in a giant apartment with great high ceilings. "I did a little bit of research and energy saving light bulbs had just been invented. So, we put in our version of energy saving light bulbs with a horrible daylight green spike. If you were rich (and had no taste!), you'd have this latest technology" says Benedict.

Eric is without a doubt the most mainstream show Benedict and Toby have worked on thus far, and Benedict has been working on it since Autumn 2022. "I'm quite excited to see what people think about it," says Benedict, "because I wouldn't describe it as a look for everyone." Being somewhat new to the world of drama, the pair feel they have added something slightly more unusual or "indie" to the series when it comes to the cinematography. "I was expecting us to sort of water it down a bit more than we had to, look wise, grade wise, but we didn't," explains Toby.

In its first week of release, figures show *Eric* was watched for approximately 1.1 billion minutes, topped the streaming charts, and reached #1 on Netflix worldwide, according to Variety. Undoubtedly this is down to the topnotch writing, acting, direction, production design, and every department bringing their A-game – but certainly, as far as the cinematography goes, there is much to be said for the careful custodianship of the vision, the high level of craft and attention to detail, and the nurturing of the creative relationship Toby, Benedict, and Lucy have built over time. It's one not to miss.

"I've always wanted to do period New York, especially sort of seventies/ eighties, so this was a dream come true brief."



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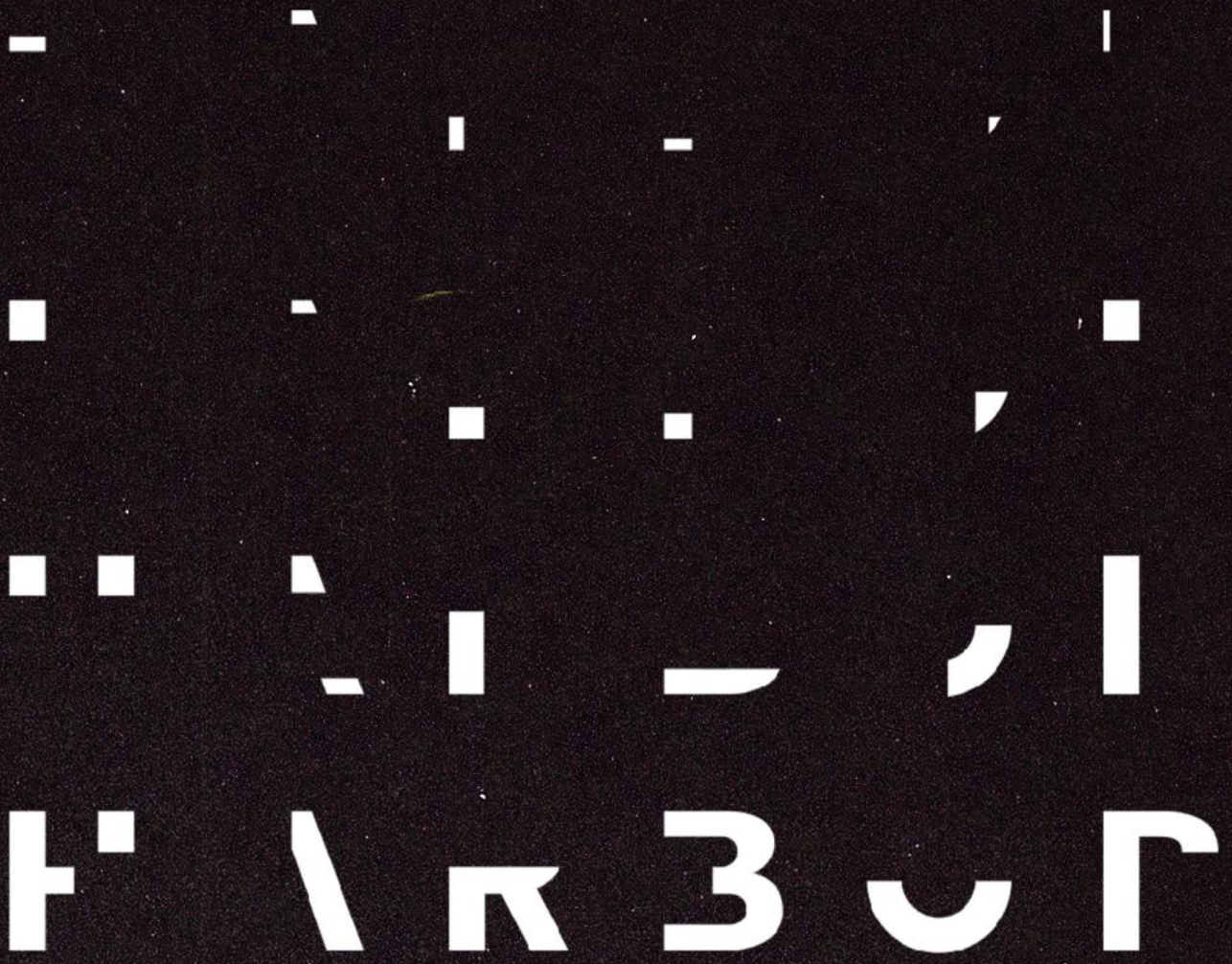

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De-Aging IN *HERE*

Images courtesy of Sony Pictures

Forrest Gump Director Robert Zemeckis has once again teamed up with Tom Hanks and Robin Wright for his latest movie, *Here* – based on the graphic novel by Richard McGuire.

The movie uses an AI-assisted aging and de-aging process to convey the lifetime of a married couple, played by Hanks and Wright. The film, which was shot from one camera position and angle that jumped back and forth in time, brought unique challenges to the production and post team – Don Burgess, ASC, cinematographer; Kevin Baillie, VFX; and Harbor Colorist Maxine Gervais.

A TEAM REUNITED

Here not only reunited actor Tom Hanks with actress Robin Wright, it also brought back together the team working behind the scenes – Gervais' first collaboration with Burgess was in 2010, on *The Book of Eli*, and Gervais, Baillie and Zemeckis's team also worked together on *Welcome to Marwen* (2018) and *The Witches* (2020).

"Don is a very professional man who has been doing this for a long time," says Gervais. "I remember at the beginning of the movie there were rumors that it would be 'easy' for us all, as it was 'one point of view' with the camera not moving. That made us giggle, as we knew there would be

“It took many hours of trial and error to find the perfect spot from where to tell the story.”

no such thing as ‘easy’.

“Don and Kevin are so efficient at executing Zemeckis’s visions – they are a well-oiled machine,” adds Gervais. “They are very creative in finding new ways to do things that haven’t been done before. Kevin is one of a kind, always pushing boundaries and ahead of his time for sure – he and Don work in harmony.”

EARLY DISCUSSIONS AND TESTING

Cinematographer Don Burgess, ASC began concept discussions and camera and lens test shoots in June 2022, along with Director Robert Zemeckis, VFX Supervisor Kevin Baillie and Colorist Maxine Gervais.

“Bob Zemeckis expressed the idea of locking off the camera and shooting from one position on the planet,” said Burgess. “Most of the movie was in the hero house and some before the house was built or would fade in as characters would enter the house. The set was still in design, but we had a good idea of size and where the window and front door would be.”

“It took many hours of trial and error to find the perfect spot from where to tell the story,” adds Burgess. “We had to talk through and test every scene before we started shooting. The lighting was designed for every hour of the day and every day of the year. The weather was also talked about with Bob – will there be cloud, sun, rain, sleet or snow? Once again, all worked out before we started shooting.”

Following thorough testing, Burgess picked the Panavision 35mm P70 series and the RED Raptor Camera.

With VFX so heavily involved in the movie, Kevin Baillie was also part of these very early discussions.

“I was invited into discussions before Bob had even finished writing the script with Eric Roth,” recalls Baillie. “Different directors deal with visual effects in different ways, and Bob happens to be one that considers visual effects a key component of the process. This is not only fortunate and fun, but it also allows us to plan how best to shoot the movie.

“Often, people think of visual effects as merely a process that happens in post-production, whereas really good visual effects are considered as a tool to aid in the course of production,” adds Baillie. “Especially when you’re doing something new or extensive like we were for this film. We had approximately 43 scripted minutes of de-aging that went as far as to require a full digital face replacement of our

four lead actors. And this ended up expanding to 53 minutes in the final film."

"We knew we weren't going to be able to accomplish this through traditional face replacement techniques with CGI, because it was going to be too expensive and time consuming. And it would also be difficult to maintain consistent quality, so we knew we would have to rely heavily on machine learning and AI-based techniques. We spent time doing the necessary diligence to figure out what techniques would work and what vendors we could partner with – something that we absolutely had to do before the shoot."

LED WALL

The team shot the interior of the house on two sound stages in Pinewood, and the window exterior was an LED wall portraying over 80 different eras, weathers and times of day in the neighborhood.

"The LED wall required a lot of prep work," comments Baillie. "We used Unreal Engine to create the world outside and, because we had a real-time environment out the window, Don was able to adjust the lighting to match the time of day or weather to accommodate what he wanted to see in the story. He could then adjust his practical lights to match what was happening outside."

"Most of the shots had the LED wall showing exterior background out the window," comments Burgess. "The wall performed best at a cool color temperature, so we set up the camera at 1600 ASA, 4300K and exposed at T5.6. The LUT was set up on set with Maxine and our DIT, Chris Bolton."

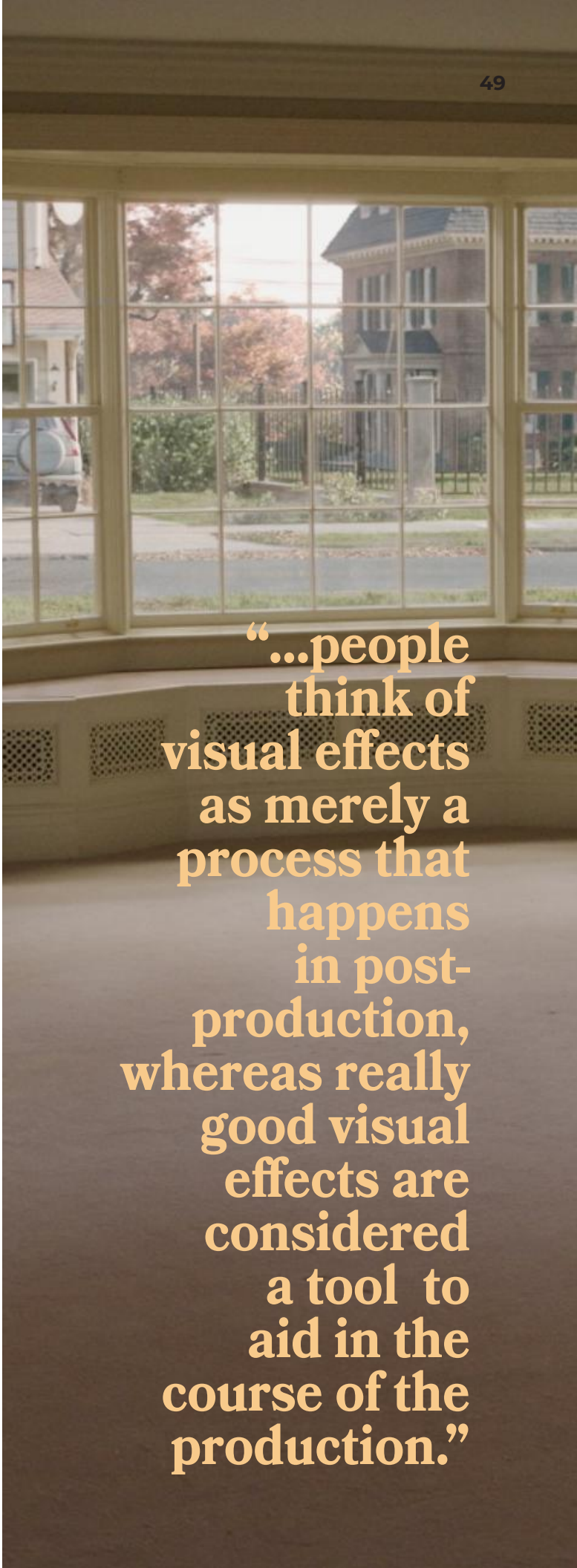
GRAPHIC PANELS

The story was adopted from Richard McGuire's graphic novel, which made heavy use of panels (a picture-in-picture effect, where parts of the image are showing different scenes at different times of day or time).

Zemeckis used this same graphic novel/comic book iconography for the film, which brought specific challenges for the team.

"The transitions between scenes were primarily done through graphic panels, in the style of the original graphic novel," says Baillie. "So, we could have multiple scenes playing on screen at any one time and juxtapose two moments that were spiritually or thematically 'connected' – which is something that you can't really do in a traditional movie.

"The process of creating and designing those panels involved bringing in my longtime friend Dav Rauch, who was one of the original designers of the Iron Man Heads-Up



"...people think of visual effects as merely a process that happens in post-production, whereas really good visual effects are considered a tool to aid in the course of the production."

Display, in the first *Iron Man* film – so he's a graphic design genius. When I invited him to help us work on these transitions and 'design some boxes,' he jumped at the chance to work with Bob and to use a simple looking design language to do something very creatively nuanced."

The team set up a system in conjunction with editorial – Rauch would sit on a machine in the editing room with After Effects and collaborate with Zemeckis and the editor Jesse Goldsmith to create these graphic panel transitions. Those approved transitions would then get fed into Avid, where they would recreate them (so they could maintain editorial flexibility without having to do cumbersome graphic design work within Avid).

"Once those were signed off, we assembled an in-house team led by Woei Lee to do the graphic panel transitions as a visual effects task," says Baillie. "And some of the panels required layering in front of or behind other live-action elements in shots, so by using an in-house compositing team in Nuke, we were able to do some very cool subtle effects with the transitions.

"You don't see it on the screen, but the graphic panel team also provided detailed, labelled masks for every single transition in the film, which allowed Maxine and her color team to be able to consistently treat the color of not just the shot, but the shot as it transitions through an outgoing panel and into the next shot.

"There were mattes for every border of every panel and, since some of these transitions have over 20 different scenes that go into a single transition, it was quite the logistical challenge to both create in the Nuke workflow as well as to manage in the DI."

A COMPLEX COLOR TIMELINE

Gervais was given mattes to isolate all the panels for color grading, but there were sometimes multiple panels showing the same scene (which needed to be graded the same way) that would fade in and out at different times or be cross-dissolved with other scenes (that needed different grades).

"Not only did we have to find a way to deconstruct and rebuild the shot into their panels using mattes, but there were also mattes within mattes," explains Gervais. "This meant that if I wanted to color a panel to match its full screen before transitions, and the full screen used mattes for windows or different elements, these same mattes needed to carry these color tweaks within the panel themselves – and then carry on and blend/dissolve seamlessly into the transition."

FilmLight's Peter Postma dedicated a few days at the beginning of the process to help Gervais work out the most efficient way to build the timeline in Baselight – allowing her to focus on the grading without constantly having to copy grades around between the panels every time a change was made.

"Let's just say the workflow was very complex and needed a lot of organizing and labelling," says Gervais. "I had never had such complex timelines before, but thanks to our talented team we were able to make it happen."

"Grading *Here* presented unique challenges which forced us to rethink the way the tools in Baselight could be used to deliver the best grading experience," says Peter Postma of FilmLight. "It was great working with Maxine and her team to push the boundaries of what our tools could do to meet those creative challenges."

As VFX was so integral in the movie, Baillie was also involved in the color process.

"I sat with Don and Maxine to create initial color passes of all these scenes," he says. "Which was a challenge because every scene is connected – so if one scene isn't done, the next scene and the scene before also can't be finished. That meant that the color timeline

remained open until very late in the process, with us making informed choices along the way with unfinished visual effects. Once we had the full movie in place, we went through it many times trying our best to spot everything that needed to be addressed – counterintuitively, the static camera actually made everything much more difficult."

"We had nowhere to hide in this film, so the final color and the nuance really ended up being a team effort – driven by Don Burgess with the hands-on done by Maxine, and with me making sure the visual effects were doing what they were supposed to."

Gervais also utilized several features in Baselight to support her creative and technical goals.

"I used everything that was at my disposal in order to make this work," comments Gervais. "Baselight, thankfully, has very powerful compositing tools like grid wrap, painting tools, texture tools and blending tools – the list goes on. These tools were not only necessary for making this happen, but also a great help for VFX where we could contribute via VFX work in the DI."

FINAL THOUGHTS

"I can only humbly say that I am very grateful for such an opportunity," says Gervais. "Although Don has a long history with Panavision, I'm lucky to have had these few projects together where color wasn't just an artistic goal, but often a technical challenge."

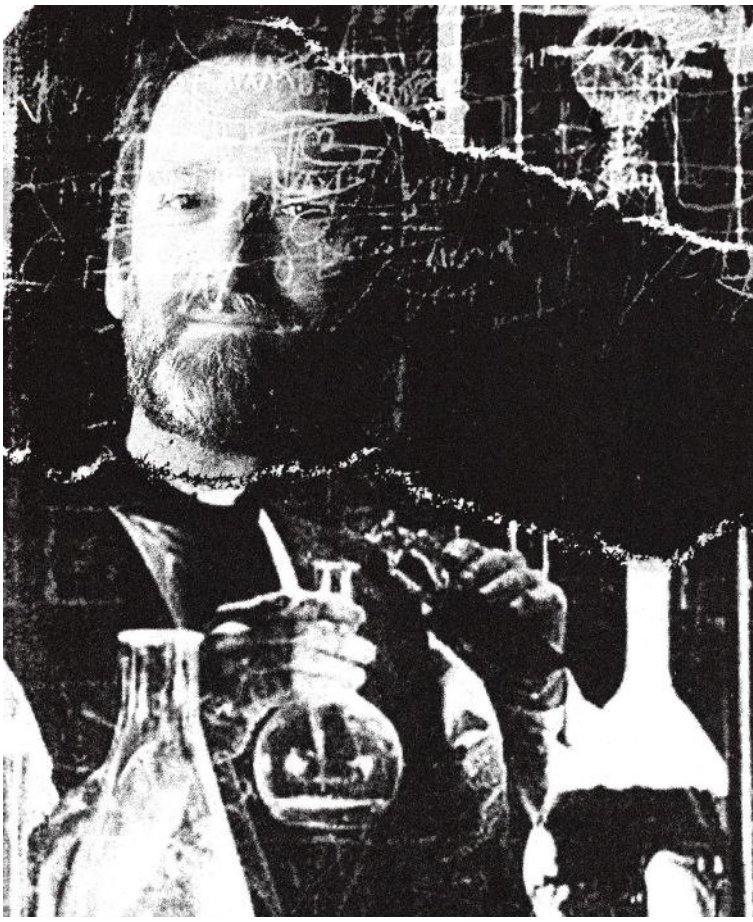
"Bob created a very unique way of telling the story, which became visually challenging for me, and it was great to collaborate with Maxine to bring it to the big screen," comments Burgess.

"It was a huge pleasure working with Don and Maxine," adds Baillie. "When Bob came to review the work that we prepared for him, he was extremely satisfied and had almost no notes – which is always the best compliment that you can ask for."

ASK MATT

Follow along each issue as our Head of Color Science Matt Tomlinson answers your questions about anything and everything image science and technology.

Q *What is a 'linear image'?*



A There is a lot of confusion about what linear means. First things first, if you have a jpg or tiff and you double click on it and it looks "normal" on your computer, it's not a linear image; it's a gamma-based image. Secondly, it's not enough to simply linearize an image. You need to understand the colorspace, what I often refer to as the "color map." Linear is not a colorspace. Log is not a colorspace. Those are tone maps which refer to brightness and contrast. If you are compositing an sRGB plate with an AWG LogCv3 plate, and you linearize both, they are colorspace mismatched. Therefore, if those two plates are composited, color grading that shot will be problematic.

SUBMIT QUESTIONS TO
MATTHEW@HARBORPICTURECOMPANY.COM

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EDITORIAL TEAM

ELLIE POWERS	**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**
MADI SABO	**EDITOR**
GABRIELA ELDER	**DIRECTOR OF MARKETING**
ALLI ALBION	**CONTRIBUTOR**
MATT TOMLINSON	**CONTRIBUTOR**
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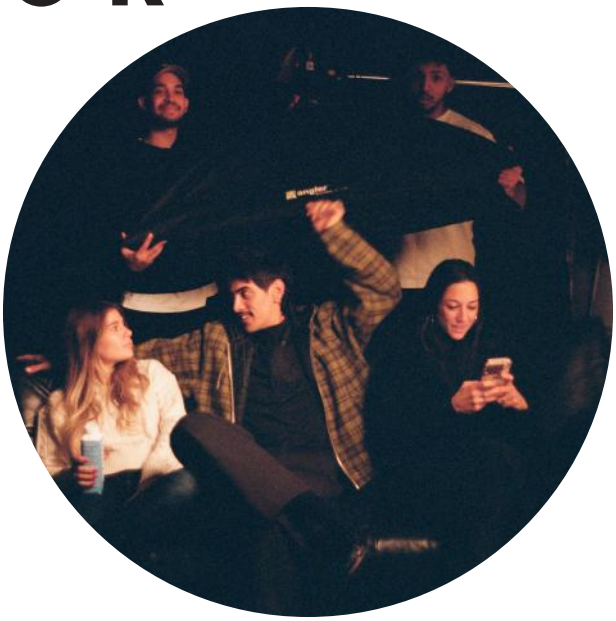

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NIGHTBITCH

DAILIES, COLOR, SOUND & ADR BY HARBOR

BABYGIRL

DAILIES, OFFLINE EDITORIAL, COLOR, SOUND & ADR BY HARBOR

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CRAZY, NOT INSANE, BOOM! BOOM!: THE WORLD VS. BORIS BECKER, IN RESTLESS DREAMS: THE MUSIC OF PAUL SIMON

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