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### Tapeless TIFFs: HD Movie Workflow

by Michael Goldman

Filmmakers from Boston's Moody Street Pictures who recently oversaw production of a new independent movie, *The Legend of Lucy Keyes*, starring Julie Delpy and Justin Theroux, admit to a few moments of consternation when they decided to adopt a relatively untested HD post workflow for the project.

The first part of their decision—to commit to the DVCPRO HD format via Panasonic's AJ-HDC27F Varicam for image acquisition—wasn't too worrisome. They had previously used the Varicam with great success on a short film called *Winter People*, and were pleased with the results.

"We have now embraced Varicam here at Moody Street, and at our sister company, (rental house) Boston Camera, which now owns eight (Varicams)," explains *Lucy Keyes* writer/director/producer/editor John Stimpson. "The format has a rich texture in the FILM REC mode that we liked in *Winter People*, and we thought it would be right for this film. Plus, it gave us the choice of using slower frame rates to create nice, creamy slo-mos for this movie, and our DP (Gary Henoch) has been shooting with them for a couple of years. It just made sense to go in that direction."

That choice, however, left filmmakers with more trepidation over what the post workflow would be, says Dave Bigelow, Moody Street's postproduction supervisor on the movie. At Bigelow's urging, Stimpson eventually agreed to edit the movie uncompressed at 720p HD in Final Cut Pro HD (version 4.5). And from there, to remain tapeless all the way through to the eventual color-correction session at Technicolor, New York, slated to happen later this summer after a looming distribution deal is finalized.

It's a workflow that Bigelow explained during a recent presentation at NAB. He says the workflow has "the potential to make tapeless postproduction efficient and affordable for independent filmmakers, without having to downconvert anything, knowing that your final, 24 frames-per-second media will correlate exactly to the final master of the film."

Filmmakers digitized the imagery from the original DVCPRO HD tapes to a LaCie 500GB D2 Extreme hard drive. Stimpson then was able to begin editing immediately on his 17in. Apple Powerbook, while viewing the evolving cut on 23in. Apple Cinema Display monitors.

Stimpson says, as the editor on the project, what eventually sold him on this workflow was the ability to work in full-resolution HD, avoiding a typical standard def offline, while doing the whole thing on his laptop. "It was nice staying at 24 frames all the way through, but full-resolution HD right off the bat is what really convinced me."

At press time, according to Bigelow, filmmakers were still a few weeks away from locking the cut and producing a high-quality HD master. After that, the plan was, after finalizing distribution, to bring the data to Technicolor and commence with a DI process. But the looming plan to



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output the film as TIFF image still sequences (about 38,000, all broken down into individual 20-minute reels, Bigelow approximated at press time) was, perhaps, the most unorthodox part of the entire plan.

Bigelow says the reason for this approach was to avoid the need to offline and the need for an HD conform, while keeping the media at the highest possible resolution in an affordable way.

"When I talked to Technicolor and told them we were not doing an HD conform because we already had the HD media, we discussed the most effective way to send them over the media," says Bigelow. "They said we could output a tape in any of a few, certain formats and bring that to them, where it would be re-digitized and so forth. But I said, why go to tape? Can't we just give them the raw media? And they said TIFF sequences would give them the best quality in the data's native compression. So, when we're ready, they will take folders of TIFF images of the original Varicam images, with no color correction added by us, and they will bring that raw data into their color-correction system, which works at 10-bit, uncompressed HD resolution, and they will be able to maximize quality that way before shooting the final result out to film. They will up-rez everything to 2k, color-correct in 2k space, and then output to film on an Arri Laser recorder."

Bigelow adds that this approach is also being applied to the film's 15 visual effects shots, being created at Brickyard Visual Effects, Boston. Brickyard is also receiving imagery as TIFF files, combining those plates with the effects material, and returning them to Moody Street via an FTP site.

"It's all tapeless, all virtual, all remote after the original image capture," says Bigelow. "I think this kind of workflow has great potential."

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