

FUJIFILM NEWS FEATURE

BLACK AND WHITE IN COLOUR

I was invited by Brian Tufano BSC, who heads the cinematography course at the NFTS, to teach a studio lighting masterclass to the first year students.

As an NFTS alumnus, I was very honoured to be given the opportunity to return and offer some small insights. I've always felt that one of the best ways to understand lighting is to see things in black and white.

When I was a student we were made to shoot our first films in black and white and I'm convinced that being forced to use lighting to achieve separation and, consequently, depth in the frame has formed the basis of the way I tend to do things today.

My intention then was for the students to light their sets so that the results worked in monochrome. These days, however, it is nearly impossible to source black and white 16mm film stock and if you are lucky enough to stumble across a few rolls there are very few people left in the world who will process it.

The only practical alternative was to shoot in colour and ask the lab, Soho Film Labs, to do a black and white transfer. In all honesty, I did not have terribly high hopes of a successful outcome because these types of transfer usually end up being a little flat and lifeless. Nevertheless it would be a good enough guide for the students and teachers to perform a proper analysis of the results.

Out of interest I asked the lab to do a colour transfer of all the material afterwards as I wanted to impress upon the students that if their black and white rushes looked good they would most probably be very happy with the colour.

I was not particularly concerned which film stock the students used as long as it was a medium speed 160-200 ASA stock. They needed to learn to light studio sets to a decent stop on slower films before



graduating to 500 ASA as faster stocks can make you a little lazy. As it happened Brian Tufano had a fridge full of ETERNA Vivid 160T, so that is what was used.

Each student had a specific brief: Sunny Day, Overcast Day, Moonlight, Candlelight, Torchlight, Dusk (Magic Hour), Practicals. Their job was to light a domestic interior set to reflect these scenarios convincingly in black and white.

I was immediately impressed by the skill and sensitivity with which each student went about their business and I could tell that they were thinking clearly about using not only lighting but framing and silhouettes to create a feeling of depth and

separation - the key ingredients to successful black and white.

A greyscale was put on the head of every roll and the lab was instructed only to print a good monochrome greyscale with a rich black, clean white and decent tonal separation between the shades of grey.

The rushes were projected from a digibeta on the big screen at the NFTS. I was utterly amazed by the results. Needless to say each student's lighting was excellent but the quality of the black and white was extraordinary.

I have shot a great deal of 'real' black and white in my time but this was something else. The tonal range was what you would expect from

modern colour emulsions but to my eye the depth of detail in the blacks, which still retained their inkiness, was a revelation.

The richness of the midtones was very seductive and the highlights were clean, bright and sparkly. There was hardly any grain at all and if I had been viewing the rushes blind I would have sworn they had been originated on 35mm.

All in all, this was some of the best black and white I had ever seen and I would wholeheartedly advocate using this method to any cinematographer interested in shooting monochrome.

One caveat, and this would require further testing to resolve, is the issue of how to achieve similar results on exteriors using colour stock as when one were to use black and white filters, i.e. red, green and yellow, on monochrome stock to darken skies and alter flesh tones etc... Maybe that will be the subject of next year's masterclass!

Apart from all the students' great talent the great heroes of this exercise was the Vivid 160T in conjunction with Soho Film Labs. My theory after the fact is that the extra dose of contrast inherent to the new Vivid stocks has enabled them to convert very readily to a traditionalist's impression of what black and white ought to look like.

By the way, the colour looked fantastic, too!

Tim Palmer, whose past credits include *Life On Mars*, *Ashes To Ashes* and *Mistresses* - which he shot entirely on Fujifilm - is currently working on *Florizel St* (about the origins of *Coronation St*), a new series of *Hustle* and the comedy-drama *Vexed*. He also recently shot a musical feature film *Così*, aka *Sizzle*, co-starring Richard E Grant, Sarah Brightman and Miá Maestro.

Photo: DP Tim Palmer

TIM PALMER

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY



DP **TIM PALMER** REPORTS ON A FASCINATING MODULE HE CONDUCTED EARLIER THIS YEAR WITH STUDENTS AT THE NATIONAL FILM & TELEVISION SCHOOL

RECREATING MONOCHROME

EXPOSURE ASKED FOUR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT THE NFTS TO COMMENT ON PALMER'S CLASS...

MATTHIAS PILZ: "I liked the contrast and the look of it when we transferred to black-and-white; the resolution of it appeared very strong and clear. I think the fact that black-and-white film isn't developed any more means that with colour to black-and-white, you have many more possibilities.

"In the grading you can use effects like red or yellow filters which in the past you'd have done on the shoot and now do in the post. I shot some stuff on black-and-white reversal film a couple of years ago and it was quite interesting, but also quite restricting. Doing it on the Vivid offered a lot of opportunities."

DAVID WOODMAN: "My background is in stills lab work – black-and-white and colour. Tim was quite keen to make us think about lighting contrasts and a good way to show it is with black-and-white because it has that limited tonal range compared to colour.

"With the Vivid, it worked out quite well because it seemed to have a more compressed tonal range as a black-and-white when compared with some of the other film stocks.

"We were given various scenarios where we had to recreate a time of day in a studio setting; some did night time, others dusk. Mine was bright but overcast Day. The set we used was quite challenging, with a lot of white walls.

"The challenge was to try to create that contrast and cut back on reflective surfaces to see what the light's doing.

"Black-and-white is just a different aesthetic. Look at contemporary films like *Control* and *The Man Who Wasn't There*. Doubtless they were actually shot in colour. If you watch them, it makes sense they were eventually screened in black-and-white.

"It also allows you to be a little more abstract with your ideas and it's also quite refreshing for the audience. When lighting, you can afford the paler areas to burn out just a little bit, especially with the Vivid because it's already got the contrast built into the film; it just naturally transfers quite well.

CHLOE THOMPSON: "Before I came to the NFTS I was a camera assistant and also did loading for couple of years on features, dramas and promos. It's been my dream to be a DP since I was 11.

"I was very impressed with this experiment as I usually really like colour and feel it can tell stories on its own. We were basically looking at how we could create depth and our tutor thought it'd be much easier if we achieved that with black-and-white. "The results were amazing. I preferred them to the colour to be quite honest. The skin tones were really beautiful, blacks really rich,

and whites had detail in them. Overall, the tonal range was terrific.

Of course, the latitude in the Vivid is incredible. For the Set lighting, we did candlelight, daylight and overcast day and torchlight. I did candlelight. For Location, it was about balancing daylight and tungsten light. I used HMLs for that. "The Vivid worked particularly well for the set as it's quite contrasty. If I wanted a black-and-white image I don't think I'd now go for black-and-white film; also it doesn't seem much point given that the colour stocks now give you such incredible b&w."

ANDY ALDERSLADE: "It wasn't intended as an exercise in black-and-white as such rather about shooting in colour but then doing a transfer to b&w to teach depth in the frame. So, when black-and-white came up it was an incredibly pleasant surprise. Beautiful contrast and an almost grainless, very snappy image came up on screen."

Special thanks to Stuart Harris, a visiting cinematography tutor at the NFTS, and to director Jack Gold who let us interrupt his Silent Movie masterclass to speak to the students.



Photos top inset: NFTS students on campus; B&W images shot by NFTS students: Matthias Pilz, Chloe Thompson, Kasper Nielsen and Ben Hecking