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Making the Student Film

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SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

"Making the Student Film"

written by

Rance Collins

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Making the Student Film
By Rance Collins

Every filmmaker creates their own unique path to producing motion pictures. Some start out at the bottom of the chain, getting cups of water for the director while learning the craft. Steven Spielberg started as a boy by filming a nine-minute feature with a 8mm camera that earned him a merit badge in Boy Scouts (Steven). I started learning the craft at the early age of eleven, and have since completed seven films, a dozen episodes of a sitcom, and countless news stories, wedding ceremonies, senior videos, and recruiting films. When I enrolled at Ouachita four years ago I knew I wanted to continue to pursue this craft. Three of those completed films were made while I was a student at Ouachita. I also worked as the director of photography on an additional film, and directed an incomplete movie project for a motion picture production course. Through the making of each of these projects I've learned something unique about filmmaking, and specifically, student filmmaking. So when it came time for me to choose a topic for my honor's thesis, there was really only one logical choice. Through my experiences I have learned much about the "dos" and "don'ts" of making a movie. I've had successes that have led to splashy, Hollywood-style premieres. And, in the case of the incomplete student film I directed, I've had disappointments. In short, it has been a learning process with a plethora of ups and downs. Every filmmaker will fail. Alfred Hitchcock didn't make his money back on some of his later films like *Topaz*, and *The Deer Hunter* director Michael Ciminio almost ruined his career with the expensive *Heaven's Gate* (Internet Movie), which became one of the most notorious flops in film history. With the aide of my own experiences, this paper will present a guide to avoiding many of the basic problems that plague aspiring student filmmakers. First, there are

items and knowledge a filmmaker will need in pre-production, such as how to write an efficient script that will take into account your limitations. Second, what to do to most effectively utilize the production time when filming. Third, how to survive the editing process, and finally, how to properly market a film.

Getting Started

There are several basic items the student filmmaker needs before beginning a project. There is first a certain amount of knowledge necessary to be properly prepared to produce a film. Having a passion for the craft is key for creating cinematic art. When I was ten years old I saw the classic film *Gone with the Wind* and found my passion for movies. Subsequently, I bought a "behind the scenes" photograph book about the film and began wishing I was there with the directors, cinematographers, script supervisors, and grips. A filmmaker has to have that internal need to be involved in every aspect of a production. If being involved in film production is not an ultimately enjoyable overall experience, then there is probably a better career choice on the horizon.

The first physical item needed is a camera. It does not need to be a top-of-the-line camcorder. Recently, an excellent student film consisted entirely of stop-motion photography. Why did the student choose to use stop-motion? The student did not have access to a high-quality motion camera, and the film ended up being more effective and more artistic because of the unique filming technique. As a result, the central love story came off as a heartbreaking series of "moments" in time. The quick, frozen frames stuck in the mind of the viewer and stayed in their consciousness long after the credits had rolled. Even a small Flip video camera or an old home video recorder can suffice when

attempting to capture screen magic. Low-quality can end up being a stylistic choice. Mainstream cinema features like the low-budget *The Blair Witch Project* made a fortune off of shooting with lower-quality cameras (Internet Movie). It is important to know as a filmmaker that the tools do not matter. How the tools are utilized is the key. The first camera I used was an old JVC camcorder that was quite inconvenient and bulky when compared to the equipment sold today. The camcorder was outdated by several years when I started using it, but I didn't care. I found ways to use lighting and camera angels to my advantage so to increase the quality of the frames. And while I did not make anything that came close to qualifying as "art," I was certainly excited about what I was making. Even today, working with a high definition-quality camera, there are some shots I framed from the old JVC that are still impressive, even by comparison. In Herbert Zettl's "Video Basics," he concedes that "you will not see much difference in how the pictures look" when comparing a smaller camcorder to a larger one (Zettl 59-60).

The most tedious part about movie-making to master is audio recording. Ironically, it is also the most important part. One of the first lessons Dr. David Ozmun taught in my Advanced Television Production class was the importance of audio-recording. If the audience can't understand what the performer is saying, then they won't care about what they're seeing. It is very easy to forget about audio. A filmmaker can get lost in setting-up that great shot or thinking up the most creative way to splice together a set of images, causing the spoken word to slip the mind. But without it, there is nothing. Voice-overs and dubbing can sometimes look very obvious or even cheesy, but they are preferable to muffled audio. If there is absolutely no way to produce a film with solid audio, then a filmmaker should look into making a silent film. Silent film was

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an art in itself, and working to communicate messages without dialogue can be a learning experience. That is just how important audio is. Zettl points out that even professional films suffer from bad audio, and most low-budget films are hit the hardest in the audio department. "Most amateur video is characterized not just by the madly moving camera and the fast zooms but also by the bad audio (115)." As far as microphones go, the student filmmaker should look and see what type of microphone will work with their camcorder. If they can't buy an external microphone, they should see to it that all dialogue is spoken close to the camera's internal microphone. That way, there is at least a track of the lines to splice in later during editing.

Elements such as lighting are also essential to research before setting out to film a production. One basic tip for shooting outdoors, for instance, is to try and film on cloudy days. When the sun is behind the clouds, it is easier to avoid obtrusive shadows. For shooting indoors, inexpensive lighting equipment can be found at online retailers and auction sights, and often time's natural lighting will suffice if a filmmaker is especially in tune with their camera settings. Specific equipment, such as tripods, can typically be found for low prices at mass retailers, where almost all forms of tapes can also be found. A starter studio can be easily and inexpensively created from supplies carried by stores like Wal-Mart and Target. Movie-making has come to the point of being that close to an aspiring filmmaker's fingertips.

Writing the Story

There are several basic points of writing a story, whether feature-length or sixty seconds, that should be learned before ever shooting a second of video. Stories are all around. There is no need to conjure up a plot out of thin air if not particularly inspired.

By reading the paper, watching the news, and paying attention in history class a screenwriter can find a variety of stories. There are real-life stories begging to become movies everywhere. After all, film is a slice of life. Hitchcock's masterpiece *Psycho* was based on real-life serial killer Ed Gein, who shared many common qualities with Norman Bates. For instance, like Gein, Norman was mother-fixated, killed young girls, dressed up like a woman, and lived alone in his mother's former home (Bardsley). Reading is also a way to find a story. Inspiration can come from an article in a newspaper, as was the case with *Dog Day Afternoon* and *Chinatown*, or perhaps even out of well-known historical events like *Bonnie and Clyde* (19-20). A few years ago, I made a movie called *Room for Rent*, which was a about a young woman who rents a room from a disturbing older couple. She later discovers that she bares a striking resemblance to their deceased daughter. While the plot was my own original idea, it shared themes from other films such as *Rebecca*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, and *The Haunting*. That is not to say that a screenwriter should copy ideas from other screenplays instead of creating their own, but they can find other stories that inspire them. What theme do they find fascinating? What do they want to explore on screen? The answers to these questions create the first step to finding a story.

It is also important that there is a character in the screenplay. This seems simple, but artists so often become caught up in the art, that they lose sight of the character. People don't necessarily have to be the subject of a film. An animal can be the star, and it is also possible to tell a story using inanimate objects. Whatever the case, finding a character the audience can connect with is pertinent for a story to spark interest. This connection is vitally important to the success of a picture. "Character is the essential

foundation of your screenplay. It is the heart and soul and nervous system of your story (Field 26)." Character is how an audience connects. So, when a writer gives the audience that vital connection, an essential step in the scriptwriting process is completed.

"If you don't know what your story is about, who does? If you don't know what you're writing about, how do you expect someone else to know (19)?" This quote rings true on many levels. It is important as a screenwriter to create an outline and know the story and its characters as if they are second nature. The screenwriter should keep in mind the basics of plot structure in order to assist in the development of their story and characters. Feature-length films are typically divided into three acts. The first act covers expository information, introduces the characters, and ends with the crisis or turning point in the narrative. The second act further develops the story with a rising line of tension, culminating in a setback for the protagonist. The third act leads up to the climax, after which occurs the denouement and falling action (Armer). Most all stories follow this basic plot structure and without it could fall into areas of confusion and inconsistency. Take the plot of "When Harry Met Sally...," a critically acclaimed romantic comedy from 1989 written by Nora Ephron. In the first act, contrasting characters Harry and Sally have several random encounters that lead to the plot's turning point, which is the point in which Harry and Sally become friends. In the second act, the platonic nature of their relationship becomes a continuing source of tension, and ultimately leads to the "setback" for the two protagonists, that setback being the fact that they sleep together. In the third act, the decline of their friendship is depicted, leading to the climax of the story, where the two admit their love for each other. The brief falling action suggests that Harry and Sally live happily ever after (When Harry).

When writing, the screenwriter should be conscious of limitations. It is my personal belief that something should not be attempted that is out of the realm of possibility in a filmmaker's unique circumstances. It would be ineffective, for instance, for someone to try and make their own version of *Star Wars* if they didn't have a substantial budget. It is likely that such a project would end up being unintentionally funny. When I decided a few years ago that I wanted to make a movie musical, I knew that I wasn't going to have the budget or the resources to pull together any spectacular musical numbers like the ones found in a classic Rodgers and Hammerstein film adaptation. So, in turn the story became all about making a cheesy musical on a budget. The plot for the movie, aptly entitled *A Movie Musical*, concerned a film director (ironically portrayed by myself) who is forced by his producer to direct an Elvis-like matinee idol in a formulaic, low-budget movie musical. The movie ended up being a hit with my fellow students in large part because it essentially spoofed itself. It was a low-budget musical that was all about making a low-budget musical. The script was littered with dialogue that commented on the sparseness of the sets and not-so-subtle winks to the audience acknowledging the obvious special effects and overly convenient lead-ins to the musical numbers. The script was not only written with limitations in mind, it relished those limitations and found ways to utilize them to the film's advantage. While a spectacular *Lord of the Rings*-style movie may not be possible on a student film budget, a specific situation can still be recognized and used to make something unique and different. In the sequel to *A Movie Musical*, *Another Movie Musical*, I created a send-up of the film *Bye Bye Birdie*'s "Telephone Hour," which showcases a number of teenaged boys and girls singing on the telephone the latest high school gossip to their friends. The

Another Movie Musical version contained an important plot point being spread over the telephone to a number of characters, and utilized a variety of complex split-screens, which saw each individual performer positioned against a different-colored background. Thanks to the editing suite, Final Cut Pro, I was able to create this complicated look. As a result, it ended up being perhaps the most visually impressive scene in the film. It didn't take a large amount of money, though. It simply took six or seven different colors of bed sheets, four or five different kinds of telephones, and patient editing.

Keep in mind, too, the time period when writing the screenplay. While it is possible to do "period pictures," even when lacking the funds to do so, it is much less difficult to make a movie that is set against a modern background. When I directed the uncompleted film *To Kill Two Birds*, one of the toughest obstacles to overcome was its early-1950s setting. While the research and detail-work could at times be fun, it ended up being more hassle than it was worth. No period cars were obtained for the shoot, many modern devices had to be avoided when filming on location, and there were not nearly enough costumes to cover all the cast members. As a result, clothing had to be reused and repurposed, which was not exactly ideal. Another avoidable issue that was confronted during the filming was age makeup. A character in the story was supposed to be near-eighty years old, but we cast a young lady of about twenty. While she ended up giving a top-notch performance and the makeup was quite effective, it still took too much time during set-up to create the difficult look. Age makeup can be a recipe for going over-schedule. Greogry Goodell writes in his book "Independent Feature Film Production" that one should "allow adequate time for the [makup] artist to do a careful job. Your efforts will evidence themselves in the quality of the makeup and in the

attitude of your actors on the set" (Goodwell 233). With *To Kill Two Birds*, I violated all of these guidelines. I hurried the makeup artists along (due to the fact that there was not enough time for them to be careful) and, as a result, the actors in makeup were often in foul moods. Both the age makeup issue and the time period issue could have been avoided had the script simply been more tailored for the specific situation of the shoot. Had the fact that the schedule was not going to allow for time to create the proper age makeup been taken into account when writing the screenplay, then the older characters might have been eliminated or perhaps even limited to a certain number of scenes. Had the time period been shifted in the screenplay to the present day, then the number of locations, props, and costumes that could be used would have expanded, and allowed for a quicker, easier shooting schedule. The obstacles created for a story start with the writing. Limiting these obstacles can make for a simpler shoot later on in the process.

Perhaps the most basic writing tip is for a writer to write about something with which they are familiar. Whether it is about a topic they have researched and have a particular interest in, or if it is something very similar to their own experiences, knowledge pays off when writing a screenplay. "The more you know, the more you can communicate" (Zettl 21). A writer may find their life boring, but they do know what scares them, and what causes them to feel love, pain, and excitement (Gilks). That is a starting point. Hitchcock worked many of his obsessions into his films, to the point that there is an entire Wikipedia entry devoted solely to the "Themes and plot devices of Alfred Hitchcock," with a list including "birds," "staircases," "trains," "mothers," "blonde women," and "the wrong man" (Themes and plot). Writing about what they

know and exploring their obsessions are great ways for a filmmaker's screenplay to come out exciting and relevant to an audience.

Filming

The most physically exhausting part of any production is the filming process. There are unpredictable problems that can occur during shooting that student filmmakers have neither the experience nor the training to fix. The most important step actually occurs before the "record" button is ever pressed. Pre-production can make or break a movie. When planning for *Another Movie Musical*, I worked tirelessly on meshing together the schedules of about twenty different people. Shooting ran for a solid month during the middle of summer break. Every member of the cast was working with no compensation and fitting shooting in around busy schedules. There was one lead performer who could only work a total of six days over the course of two long weekends. But thanks to meticulous planning, every scene was shot and each line was committed to tape. Had I not been working with the actors on their schedules months beforehand, however, none of this would have come off.
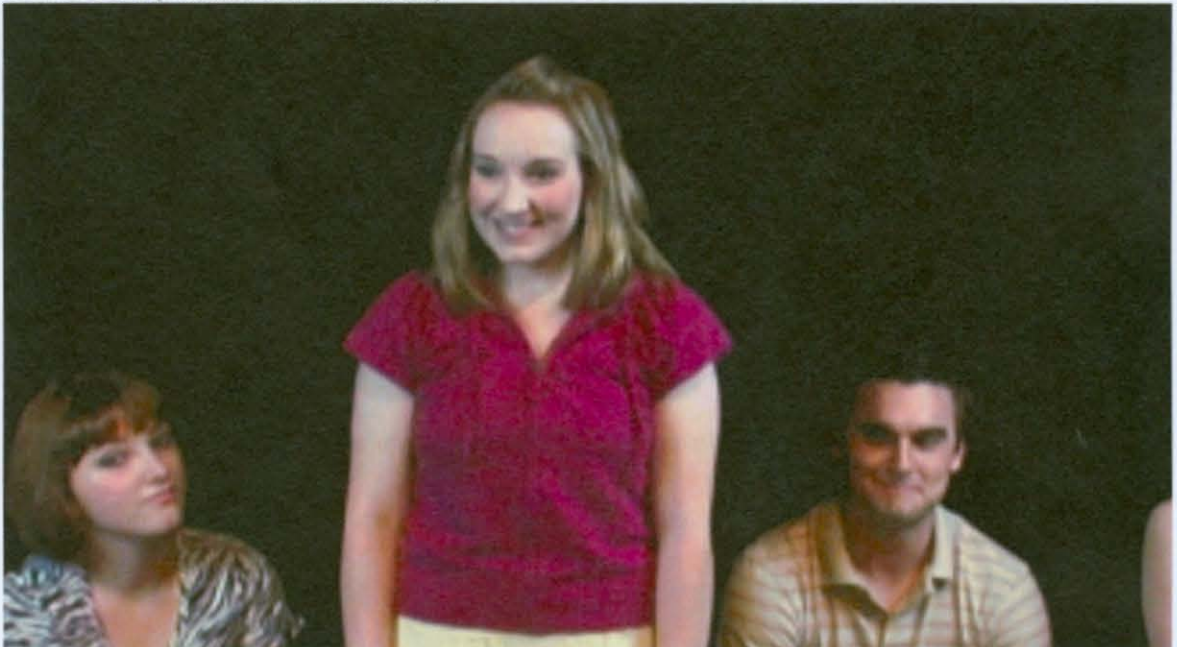
Schedules, though, often don't come through. Sometimes people suddenly have a family emergency or the flu. When making a student film, rarely is there any compensation obligating the cast and crew to stay on set, so there is nothing to hold over their heads to keep them working. A scene cannot be canceled because there will not be time to do it later. So what is to be done? This is where what I call the "Jerimiah" effect comes into play. When I was in high school, I had a rather unreliable friend playing a part in my third film *Murder at the Riverside Hotel*, an Agatha Christie-style murder mystery set at a secluded hotel with a register full of suspects. There were large group

scenes to shoot that required each cast members presence, but one actor, named Jerimiah, had a knack for not showing up. To solve this problem, I got a stand-in to wear his jacket and hat in several scenes, and then simply shot the character from the backside for those days of filming. A few days later when Jerimiah came to the set, we went back a shot a close-up of each of his lines and reactions in those scenes. In the final product, it is difficult to tell he wasn't really there. In the plot for *Another Movie Musical* there is also a murder mystery. There are two crucial scenes in the narrative where the entire cast of characters gathers at the scene of the crime. One actor was only available for three days of filming, none of which fell during the scheduled time for the shooting of these scenes. All of his lines and reactions were shot with a few members of the cast surrounding him weeks before filming the rest of the scene. He was positioned conveniently on the edge of the group of people. Then, when the rest of the scene was shot weeks later, the cameraman, J.L. West, framed all of the wide shots to where the character sitting right beside the missing actor was at the very edge of the frame. Thus, it ended up looking like he was there all along:

CAPTION 1 (Another Movie Musical)

CAPTION 2 (Another Movie Musical)

In **Caption 1**, actress Grace Whitaker is seen at the far right of the frame. In **Caption 2**, actor Greg Schwartz is pictured on the right side of the frame. **Caption 1** is taken from a shot filmed three weeks after the shot depicted in **Caption 2**. Greg Schwartz was not present when **Caption 1** was filmed.

This is something that happens in Hollywood pictures frequently. In *Ordinary People*, a best picture-winner directed by movie star Robert Redford, an emotional, climatic sequence where Donald Sutherland and Mary Tyler Moore's characters fight out their differences was shot on location. When he saw the rushes, Sutherland was

dissatisfied with his performance, so Redford recreated the location set on a sound stage and let Sutherland re-film the scene, without Moore, who was unavailable at the time (Internet Movie). The lesson in these examples is that a filmmaker only has to keep what's in the frame in mind. The audience cannot see any farther than the rectangle presented to them. They will not see what is just off to the right or left. The action contained within the rectangle is the sole visual focus of the filmmaker.

Actors aren't the only factor that can impair a production. Sometimes, a location can fall through, a piece of equipment can break, or the weather can suddenly turn sour. Nothing is ever going to be perfect, and much time must be spent adjusting to the cards that are dealt. Expecting things to go wrong is a fact of life for filmmakers. It sounds cryptic and pessimistic, but the student filmmaker has to be mentally prepared for anything and everything to go wrong in order to see any production to completion.

During *To Kill Two Birds*, something went wrong it seems on almost every day of shooting. Unfortunately, a rampant flu bug spread throughout the entire cast and crew, making various members of the ensemble unavailable over the course of an entire month. Because the film was made as part of a class, the set-up time for putting together the production took almost as long as the class period itself, and there was often no time to complete as many scenes as were scheduled. That autumn was also an oddly rainy season, leading to the postponing and cancellation of many planned sequences. In addition, members of the crew, including myself, butted heads with one another on a weekly basis, adding friction to an already tension-filled environment. The production fell irreparably behind schedule, and ultimately much of the written page did not make its way to the screen. While the course ended up being an excellent learning experience for

myself and the other students involved, it was learning that came with heartache and frustration. While the reasons as to why the film was unable to be completed are numerous, I put the blame on my own shoulders. As the student who had "been there before," I should have known to anticipate many of the problems that occurred. The crucial step that I skipped over in the production of *To Kill to Birds* was by far the most important one. I didn't expect things to go wrong. If a filmmaker does not prepare for the worst, if they do not have a back-up plan, then the chances of something going wrong goes up tenfold.

The student filmmaker should also keep locations in mind. When writing, they have hopefully managed to create a world that they can film easily within their area. Even so, they need to check with various sources to solidify days that they can use each set that complies with both their own and their cast and crew's schedules. Therefore, efficiency is pertinent when using each location. Indexing all of the scenes and arranging them based on their location is a simple method to use to most effectively create a shooting schedule. The filmmaker should film all scenes in one area one day, then another the next, and so on and so forth. Going in and finishing with a location as soon as possible will allow things to run more smoothly. It also cuts down on the possibility of changes to the location that could lead to continuity errors if there are significant gaps between days of filming. One mistake that the crew of *To Kill Two Birds* made was drawing out the shooting schedule too long in the key location of the family home, where the great majority of the film noir plot played out. Scenes were shot at the home over the course of three months, and when the final set of scenes were shot, it was December, and the home's real life owners had decorated for Christmas. In the background of some

exterior shots, one could plainly see the garland on the banisters and the wreath on the front door, which are then missing from the following scene in the script, since that scene was shot on the first day of filming at the location three months prior. If scheduling had been planned with efficiency in mind, this problem could have been avoided.

CAPTION 3 (To Kill Two Birds)

CAPTION 4 (To Kill Two Birds)

In **Caption 3** Christmas decorations are plainly seen on the front door toward the center of the frame. In **Caption 4**, taken from a scene shot three months prior, there is not even a hint of the garland that is draping either side of the door in **Caption 3**.

Another piece of advice has to do with creativity. I have issues with creativity because I am by nature a planner. All of my creative thoughts and ideas for a production come before photography begins. After the production officially starts up my creativity goes out the window, and the time-Nazi inside of me starts rearing his ugly head. While having a sometimes rude, time-efficient monster on hand can be helpful, creativity still has to have a place in the proceedings. One mistake that I have made too often is letting time catch up with me and, as a result, letting the more artistic elements of a scene fall to pieces. It is important that the student filmmaker find a healthy balance between these two qualities. While it is essential to stay on schedule, particularly when filming on a tight budget, it is also important to keep the aesthetic elements of a production squarely at the forefront of your mind. Do not rush through a scene and sacrifice quality, nor follow the example set by *Cleopatra*, a movie that almost bankrupt 20th Century Fox. *Cleopatra* was originally given a budget of two million dollars, but the budget ultimately ballooned to 44 million, which would be equivalent to over 300 million in today's dollars. The reason for going so massively over-budget? Filming began in 1960, but production stretched out for the next three years, with a release finally coming in 1963, due to various delays, illnesses of its star Elizabeth Taylor, the struggle between production heads for creative control, and the over-indulgence in the visual artistry by the different directors who made their mark on the product during its elephant-sized shooting schedule. The movie managed to be the highest grossing film of the year, but still did not make a profit. It also would have bankrupt 20th Century Fox, had *The Sound of Music* not come along in 1965 to save the studio (Cleopatra). While this is a big-budget example and may not seem applicable to the student film, a student filmmaker can still take away

a vital lesson from this near-disaster. Managing time well and balancing that time with the artistic elements is essential when putting together a film of any budget.

Finally, there is one important step that is often forgotten. Without this essential tool, a director can self-destruct. Sleep is a necessity for the student filmmaker. Without sleep, it is very hard for human beings to function. According to studies, humans need to average between 7.5 and 8.5 hours of sleep per night. Sleep deprivation can lead to lower quality work output, unclear thinking and judgment, and the memory loss of important information and details (The Bed). The filmmaker is not immune to these issues, no matter how powerful they may find themselves to be. A good day's work is never fully realized without a proper night's sleep.

One of my greatest influences was producer David O. Selznick, who was most famous for his production of *Gone with the Wind*. The man unfortunately died at the relatively young age of sixty-three. There were many reasons the man probably died that young, not least all his addiction to a drug commonly referred to as "speed" today (Rebecca). He used that drug to keep himself awake and alert through the filming of *Gone with the Wind* and three other pictures he was producing at the same time. While he eventually slowed down on his film career, the stress of the mammoth movie likely played a factor in his death (Making of a Legend). While, again, this is a rather large-scale parallel, the influence of this particular filmmaker has been great on my own experiences. As a result, it is my belief that I have inadvertently picked up some of the obsessive habits for which he was known. During the filming of *Another Movie Musical*, which as I stated earlier lasted about a month, I got an average of around four hours of sleep per night. Consequently, I was irritable and overly sarcastic during shooting, and

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there were several instances in which I said things I later regretted and that unintentionally offended people. Putting cast and crew through the horrors of being under-rested is seemingly simple to avoid, but often times difficult. The student filmmaker should be sure to include in their shooting schedule the allowance for plenty of sleep. It will help make the process a much more pleasant one.

Editing

Editing can be both the most relaxing and the most aggravating part of production. It is relaxing because it is the only area where the filmmaker has complete control. It is aggravating because it's tedious, time-consuming, and keeps a jittery person like myself tied up in front of a computer screen clicking a mouse and taking advantage of the short-cut keys for hours on end. In the case of *Another Movie Musical*, I had no less than twenty tapes to comb through when putting together the final product. That added up to roughly thirty hours of raw footage. Not surprisingly, editing was the longest phase of the process, taking about three months, from the end of shooting to exactly one week before the premiere. Editing is notorious for being a long process. Selznick put the final touches on *Gone with the Wind* four days before its Atlanta premiere (Making of a Legend). More recently, Baz Luhrmann worked until 48 hours before its first screening to finish *Australia* (Connolly). But as long and tedious a process as editing can be, there are several basic tips that can make the process a little more entertaining and go a little bit faster.

First, edit in steps. The first part of the process should be importing. Compile all of the source tapes together and then import them into the computer. Then, carefully label each clip. Organization saves time. I recommend editing in sequential order.

While skipping ahead to a big scene may be enticing, it helps with consistency and continuity to start at the beginning and work forward. That way, the narrative is built in the same order that the audience is going to see it. Add in the music and sound effects later. Worry only about the basic sound and video edits during the first edit. Having sound effects be a day's event by gathering a few friends together can make the "foley" process fun. A Foley artist is "a specialist in sound effects… named after Jack Foley, the man who established modern techniques for creating sounds that are recorded to fit the pictures on the screen" (Konigsberg 153). When music is added, small adjustments will probably need to be made to the video. It is important that music is timed correctly with the video, and when working with royalty free music (as independent filmmakers often have to do), chances are the student filmmaker will not have a composer timing music to their edits. Timing is key. When editing to music, it makes for a cleaner edit to time to the beat. Also, it is important to use appropriate music for the scene. Sometimes, the appropriate track can be something that seems at odds with the scene itself. Ken Dancyger points out in "The Technique of Film and Video Editing" Stanley Kubrick's disturbing *A Clockwork Orange*, which sets a startling, graphic rape scene to the cheery classic "Singin' in the Rain." "The music creates so much dissonance with the visual that the visual seems much more horrific" (Dancyger 339). In other words, when choosing a musical cue, the filmmaker must first think about the feeling they want to get across in the scene. Then, they choose the cue that most magnifies this feeling.

Finally, it is important to watch the movie. The student filmmaker should take notes as they watch the film, then go back and make small adjustments. Then, they should watch the movie with someone else, or several other people, and monitor their

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reactions. They should ask their thoughts afterwards and then, if necessary, make further adjustments. It is important to get other people's opinions when putting together a final cut of a film. Even today, production companies send out their pictures to test audiences long before the final film reaches its release date.

Going back to *Gone with the Wind*, Selznick went to a small California town and surprised an audience with a special preview of his mammoth motion picture, which was then in a rough form that ran nearly five hours long. The glowing reviews of the test audience told the producer that the movie was working, and, with a little cutting, could be everything he imagined it could be (Making of a Legend). When an editor is cooped up with a movie for so long, often little issues that might be very easy for a normal viewer to catch can escape their eye. It is important for the student filmmaker to keep in mind that even though they are the supreme power in their independent production, the motion picture process should be a collaborative one. They can learn from both their co-workers, and through the minds of their audience. The audience is, after all, the people who will ultimately watch the movie. Director Spike Lee once said. "I really think directors can learn from these screenings… sitting in the audience; and you can tell whether the audience is with the picture… You can feel it" (Goodell 328).

A fancy editing suite is not necessary to edit a good movie, either. While I have been lucky enough to use professional editing systems when putting together projects, I have also found that decent films can be put together with standard editing programs. While they may not have all of the features that the Final Cut Pro or Avid editing suites do, they can still clip together audio and video. Where there's a will, there's a way, a wise man once said. The student filmmaker should not let technical limitations keep

them from clipping together a great film. When Steven Spielberg made his films as a child, the idea of a home editing suite was a novelty. As with camera equipment, it isn't the tools, it's how the tools are used. An article at moviemaker.com recently discussed how much younger filmmakers are starting in today's society. Rhode Island International Film Festival director commented, "These kids are learning a foreign language, like French... it's second nature to them... They're learning sooner, and they're speaking without an accent. It's very exciting" (Rossen). Whether a college student or a grandparent, it's never too late to pick up a second language.

Marketing

Now after a student filmmaker has completed their work, they often want to find a venue in which to show it off. A big, splashy, Hollywood-style premiere can be a great reward for months of hard work. This leads to the marketing phase, a phase that I particularly enjoy. When I decided to premiere both *A Movie Musical* and *Another Movie Musical* on the Ouachita campus, I was determined to make sure as many students as possible were in attendance. I ambitiously secured Ouachita's large Jones Performing Arts Center as the venue for the events, and then set about creating an ad campaigns that would rival a major film studio. With the latter of the two films, I kept the production of the sequel prominently in the world of the Facebook mini-feed, by encouraging cast members to take pictures during the production and upload those pictures on the networking website. Right after the film's completion, before even a minute of footage was edited, I put a teaser trailer up for viewing on YouTube. A Facebook photo album of screen captures was continually updated as editing progressed, and an additional "theatrical" trailer found its way online less than a month before the premiere. The
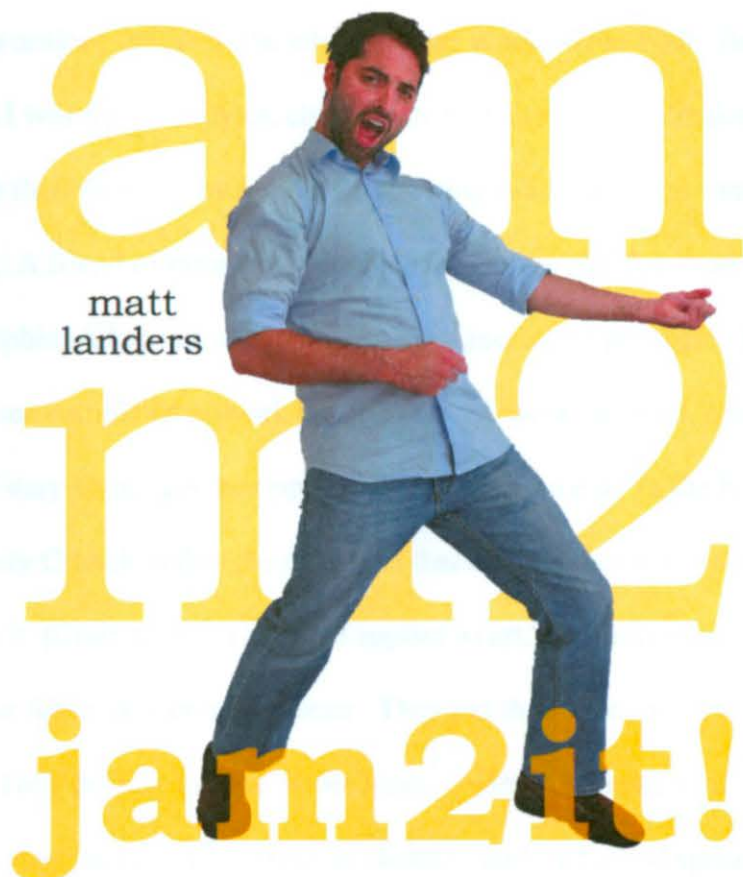
principal cast participated in a photo shoot for advertising materials, and starting three weeks before the opening day, posters designed by art minor and fellow cast member Adam Wheat were spread across campus. Each poster featured a mug shot of a different character, as seen in the following example:

another movie musical
premieres october 24, 2009 • 7:30 p.m. • jones performing arts center

An additional variation of the character posters, this time with full-body shots of each cast member, were added across campus about a week and a half later, as seen on the following page:

What do you do with a movie premiere
that's to die for?

am
m2

matt
landers

jam2it!

another movie musical
saturday, october 24, 2009 • 7:30 p.m. • jones performing arts center

By the time the day of the premiere arrived, it was very hard for a student at

Ouachita not to know about the event. As a result, between 400 and 450 people attended

the inaugural showing. In the lobby I also made available DVD copies of the film,

thereby increasing the chances for others to see the movie. The moral is if a filmmaker

wants people to see their movie, they can make it happen. With the Internet as accessible

as it is today, it's very easy to get a movie out there. Uploading a completed project on

YouTube and posting the link on a Facebook or Twitter account is just one effective way

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for the student filmmaker to get their work out there. They can also post links on message boards or other forms of networking websites. There are literally hundreds of outlets to get a film noticed thanks to the advent of the World Wide Web. And if on a college campus, as I was for my movies, chances are that a student filmmaker can get a healthy turn out for their film just by securing a showing at a location on campus or even in the general area. A friend of mine premiered his movie at a popular local café in downtown Arkadelphia, Arkansas, and enjoyed a very successful premiere. I believe that allowing others to see completed artwork is necessary. A work, after all, cannot have an affect on anyone if they do not get the opportunity to experience it. In the book *Culture Making*, author Andy Crouch makes the argument that culture does not become culture until someone sees it (Crouch 38). The same applies to art. It is important to make sure that the art a student filmmaker creates is seen. They put their time, money, and effort into their project. They deserve to have an audience. After the premiere of *A Movie Musical*, I went on stage to say a few words in closing. Before I could speak, there were more than 400 people on their feet, giving my production a standing ovation. That is the greatest feeling in the world. A student filmmaker deserves to experience that feeling.

One of my greatest disappointments is the failure to complete *To Kill Two Birds*, but I want to emphasize that just because I've experienced this failure, doesn't mean I'm giving up. Movies are in my blood. I can say without a doubt that I'm supposed to tell stories and be involved in the medium of film in whatever way possible. There is nothing that can stand between the movies and me. The musical theatre standard "Maybe This Time" has the lyrics "it's gonna happen- happen sometime. Maybe this time I'll win"

(Ebb), and it is my theory that the student filmmaker should live by these words. They have to fight, and fight really hard to make anything happen, but once they make it happen, it's worth it. They come out a winner. By following the advice presented in this paper, the student filmmaker has an increased opportunity for success. By carefully writing an appropriate screenplay, meticulously planning a schedule that takes into account the cast and crew's individual situations, expecting things to go wrong during the process, patiently editing, and marketing the completed film to the desired audience, the student filmmaker can leave a project satisfied with their hard work.

I close by emphasizing again the importance of a passion in the soul of a filmmaker. The great director Ingmar Bergman once said, "Film as dream, film as music. No art passes our conscience in the way film does, and goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of our souls" (Famous Quotes). When a film goes deep into our feelings, there is no greater artistic experience. My goal is to bring that experience to audiences. Whether I am aiming to make them laugh, cry, or love, I have an inherent need to bring feelings to people. This is the passion of a student filmmaker. And it is with this passion that movie magic is made.

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