

First Impressions from NAB Post +

Schoonmaker Talks Craft; Avid, Iridas, 3DMirage and Reality Make Splash

By Bryant Frazer

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Reflecting the fact that "post" in New York often means "editorial," the first NAB Post + show booked three ace editors as keynote speakers.

On Wednesday, Thelma Schoonmaker delivered an unbearably brief rundown of her years working with Martin Scorsese, mainly covering scenes from *Raging Bull* and *GoodFellas*. It was like listening to the commentaries on old Criterion laserdiscs back in film school, only much, much better. She talked about (her late husband) Michael Powell's influence on Scorsese and Scorsese's way with music, and also dropped in some tidbits I hadn't heard before, such as the fact that he cited the shower scene from *Psycho* as an influence on the famously brutal Sugar Ray Robinson v. Jake LaMotta match-up in *Raging Bull*. Best quip? When people ask her if she minds working on such violent movies, she says, she responds by saying, "It's not violent when I get it. I have to make it *look* that way."

Out on the show floor, the mood was fairly upbeat, if decidedly low-key. And there was some cool gear on display. The 3DMirage (www.3dmirage.com) exhibit, where you could get a load of 3D imagery displayed on a no-glasses-required screen mounted in the booth attracted crowds. It feels kind of like watching a moving version of one of those lenticular 3D postcards that used to be popular - you wouldn't want to watch a Hitchcock movie on it, or probably even *Chicken Little*, but if you want to turn shoppers or visitors to your corporate HQ into TV-eyed zombies, it's one heck of an attention-grabber. A free seminar on 3D animation is being held by 3DMirage's 3D Training Institute and Fashion Institute of Technology in Manhattan in January. Check the 3DTI Web site for more information.

The idea behind Reality, from the Montreal, Canada-based Lanterna Magica (www.lanternamagica.com) seems promising. This is video-logging software with a twist — it's keyed especially to the needs of reality TV programming, especially those shows that have multiple cameras trained on contestants, 24/7. Basically, you save wear and tear on your editors and producers by having dedicated videologgers doing the grunt work — entering critical data relating to scenes in real time, as they leave the cameras. (They can even rate each clip on a scale of one to five.) Within minutes, the clips and associated metadata are made available in low-res proxy versions to any authorized user via Web browser. Previously, you'd go over all of this footage on your Avid stations in your editorial suites. CEO Pierre Rinfret said there are shows being produced in Canada — one of them, *Star Académie*, has 39 cameras capturing footage for a single, daily program — that claim to have saved as much as 30 percent on production costs when they switched to Reality. You don't buy the system; you lease it. Check out their Web site for more.

Solid demos of SpeedGrade DI and SpeedGrade OnSet from Iridas (www.iridas.com) again impressed, one of those brave companies thinking hard about ways to preserve color decisions from the shoot (where a DP tweaks still images visually and saves his work as a ".look" file) all the way into the DI suite (where the XML-style ".look" file can be loaded in order to make changes to the actual footage). Iridas prides its system on being "non-destructive," meaning that color decisions are maintained throughout the process as metadata, rather than being applied to the frames as they are made — this preserves quality and conserves disk space by not requiring multiple versions to be saved. The changes are only applied to the footage when the final frames are rendered, at the very end of the workflow. It's a slick-looking package.

Finally, Avid (www.avid.com) gave a closer look at Symphony Nitris, which it debuted at NAB in April and plans to ship in December. This time around, Avid was able to demonstrate advanced motion-tracking and stabilization features, which seem rock solid, as well as the new 16-bit SpectraMatte keyer, including a cool new visualization tool. At first glance, it looks just like a burst of static in front of a rainbow of colors. In reality, it shows you exactly which colors are being keyed out in your shot. As you work on your key, Avid's SpectraGraph gives you visual feedback on exactly how your adjustments are affecting the quality of your scene. Once you figure out what you're looking at, it becomes a highly intuitive way to think about keying.

Talk soon turned to the new Avid DNxHD codec, which the whole company has gotten behind as a highly efficient, high-quality way to work with compressed HD video. Responding to questions about whether it's solely high-end users who are still demanding to work with uncompressed video, given the apparent quality of DNxHD, the demo artists said some customers are frustrated by the poor quality of low-bandwidth digital cable signals, and take that into account. Some of them say, "No, I don't need uncompressed — do you know how bad this will look by the time it gets to my cable box?" And others will say, "Of course I need uncompressed — do you know how bad this will look by the time it gets to my cable box?" Which proves that "broadcast quality," for the producer as well as the end user, remains a moving target.