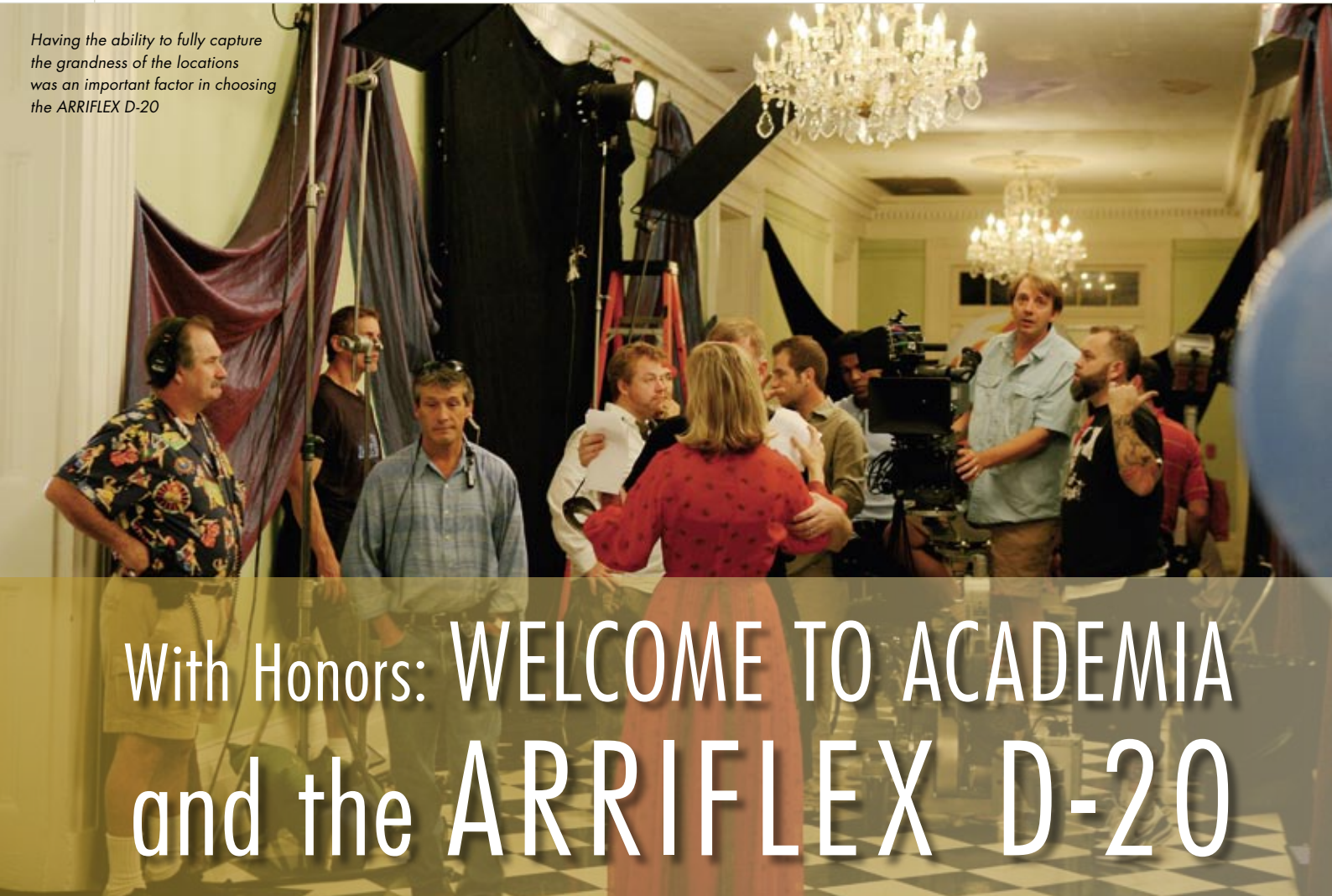


Having the ability to fully capture the grandness of the locations was an important factor in choosing the ARRIFLEX D-20



With Honors: WELCOME TO ACADEMIA and the ARRIFLEX D-20



Producer Laura Cartwright and Unit Production Manager David Stuart

WELCOME TO ACADEMIA isn't your typical college movie with keg parties, young coeds and campy hijinks that ensue. Instead, the recently wrapped independent film shows another side of university life seldom portrayed on screen – that of the professors and their struggle for power up the tenure ladder. Directed by Kirk Davis from the script he penned with Elzbieta Szoka, *WELCOME TO ACADEMIA* is a dark comedy starring James LeGros, Callie Thorne and Jess Weixler.



David Dunlap and the camera



A walk and talk scene using the Steadicam



To bring these unique characters to the screen, the filmmakers opted to shoot on the ARRIFLEX D-20 HD camera from ARRI CSC in New York. Explains Laura Cartwright, who served as the film's producer, "The director and the Director of Photography David Dunlap were both very interested in finding a camera that was as close to film as possible in terms of the depth of field and clarity. Kirk wanted to lead the viewer's eye across the screen and have them focus on what he wanted. We were looking at two cameras: the Genesis and the D-20. We ultimately settled on the D-20 for many reasons, one of which was that it is more compact than the Genesis. We had a lot of Steadicam work on this show and that was a big factor."

Besides employing the D-20 on Steadicam, the camera was moved frequently through other methods to lend energy to scenes. Unit Production Manager David Stuart adds, "We used jib arms and cranes, which sometimes had weight limits. Having a camera that could handle all the things that the director and DP wanted, [and] wasn't going to break the back of our Steadicam operator made the D-20 the right choice."

As one of the first features to use the ARRIFLEX D-20, the producers wanted the filmmaking process to be as transparent as possible. "It was important for Kirk that the performances were always where the attention was. We didn't want technology to rule the production. We really wanted the story and the performances to come out. That's the amazing thing about using such a cutting edge camera – you can go either way," says Stuart.

WELCOME TO ACADEMIA is set at Victorian College, a fictional Ivy League school. To convince viewers of the setting, Davis wanted old buildings and beautiful architecture for many scenes. Stuart explains the production

design deserved to be visually captured in all its glory. "One of the reasons that we chose this camera was because it had the single chip the size of a 35 mm frame," he says. "That was important so the grandeur of the spaces would come across. Kirk wanted the school itself to be a character in the movie. The D-20 captures a lot of information so the lighting schemes and the production design could really come out."

It may sound strange to shoot a film set at an Ivy League university in New Orleans, but the classical design of much of the Crescent City and its historical buildings worked perfectly as locations. Says Cartwright, "We were looking mostly in the Northeast and the East Coast for an Ivy League-looking type school, but when we started looking at the resources available, meaning: crew, equipment, housing, and tax incentives, New Orleans became a no-brainer. We were a bit hesitant because it was hurricane season, but the benefits of shooting here far outweighed the risks. We used several New Orleans historic locations; lovely, grand, old spaces that are going to come across really well with this camera."

For a Halloween costume ball sequence, Davis and Dunlap devised an intricate camera set-up that required careful choreography with the lead actors and 50 extras as Camera Operator Christopher Paul maneuvered his way up the huge winding staircase. "That was the whole point of choosing to shoot with the D-20, because it had the capabilities we were looking for to make ACADEMIA exciting visually. This shot required Steadicam and made a different and interesting way to view a party instead of being static, filming a group standing around at a party," Cartwright notes.

As an independent film that didn't have a huge budget, the production offered a new, original story that couldn't afford to be

bogged down in complicated and often, confusing hi-tech details. "The D-20 is different than other HD cameras I've used, because it has an incredible software interface," says Stuart. "Filmmaking is already such a complex process and it can quickly spiral out of control. Working with Alex Vollstaedt (Senior Engineer Digital Imaging) and Charlie Tammaro (Camera Department Manager) at ARRI CSC NY was great, because they knew this camera and the workflow backwards and forwards. We didn't have to go through a lot of jargon and we got whatever we wanted. That was the great thing about this camera, it could handle everything."

Cartwright and Stuart previously worked with the director on SCREEN DOOR JESUS, an indie feature shot in 2002. On WELCOME TO ACADEMIA, it was an opportunity to reunite for another rewarding collaboration. "We've all matured quite a bit in skills and our taste since we last worked together," explains Cartwright. "Plus, we already had a working rapport, so all of those things that can make the beginning part of a film a little bit difficult were easier for us this time around. This has been a really pleasurable experience for us all to come together and do this film."

WELCOME TO ACADEMIA is currently in postproduction and prepping for a theatrical release.

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