

Blackout

or the electrician's apprentice

Right: (L to R) Zoë White, Bet Rourich-Sanchez and DP Sanne Kurz
Inset: a scene from *Blackout*

Director of Photography Sanne Kurz from Munich was exhausted. She and her three companions—Uwe Pfizenmaier from Berlin, Zoë White from Sydney and Bet Rourich-Sanchez from Barcelona—had just completed the last shot of their short film **Blackout**.

They had worked 18 hours each day for three successive days. No one had more than two hours sleep each night. Now they faced a three-hour car journey to New York to catch flights home.

Sanne drew the short straw; she would drive first. The others gratefully slumped into the car and fell asleep.

But not for long. Extreme fatigue plays mischievous tricks on the mind.

"Soon after setting off I thought I saw animals jumping on our car" Sanne said. "While I was trying to get rid of them the others woke and quickly decided someone else should take over the driving! Luckily we're all still alive."

Blackout is a 16mm comedy about a Master Electrician, mending electrical fuses in a New York power plant, helped by his apprentice. The apprentice, briefly left unsupervised, takes the opportunity to smoke a cigarette while holding a live wire in each hand... New York City would soon plunge into total darkness!

Sanne had previously worked with Zoë and Bet during the celebrated

Budapest Cinematography Masterclass of 2003. All three women had become firm friends while rooming together during those two never-to-be-forgotten weeks, when Vilmos Zsigmond ASC and Laslo Kovacs ASC guided them in filmmaking. The room-mates promised to work together again on a future project.

And **Blackout** was it.

For **Blackout**, Uwe Pfizenmaier, who is studying filmmaking in New York, joined the threesome. Uwe would direct. Sanne had met him at the Camerimage Festival in Lodz.



All four experienced filmmakers are able to fill any role. For **Blackout**, Zoë White was Gaffer and Bet Rourich-Sanchez completed the team as Camera Assistant.

They all made big sacrifices to fulfil their dream. "We were all passionate about working together again and everyone paid for her own trip. It was a big expense for us, because we're all students or emerging DPs."

"But, as we say in Germany: Wo ein Wille ist, ist auch ein Weg." (Where there is a will, there is a way.)

Sanne borrowed an ARRI SR and a

set of Zeiss High Speed primes from Munich Film School. The crew travelled light, had little spare cash, so used the minimum of lighting.

"We just had three 2ks, a couple of 1ks and a bunch of smaller lights" said Sanne. "With such modest lighting, our film stock chose itself. Kodak VISION2 500T 7218 film. We first saw



its capabilities in Budapest. We had to have its versatility to cope with our many challenging low-key, low light and available light shots in **Blackout**."

"The film stock helped us cope with everything photographic, but we had other major problems. The heavy shooting schedule; 120 shots in three days. One location had not enough circuits to cover even our lowly lighting needs. Zoë was replacing fuses all day; there were no neighbours to steal power from! We knew we only had the Art Director for two hours, but he promised to prepare everything in pre-production. He didn't keep his promise."

"But there were many high points too. Especially our crew. I love international collaborations, bringing people together to serve a strong story or help a drama. **Blackout** was a great experience and we've already planned our next project. Uwe will be Director of Photography on our next film early in 2005. We're on!" ■