



# The French Revolution will be televised...

**Above:** Actor George Ivascu portrays Robespierre, seen here after an apparent suicide attempt in a scene from *The French Revolution*, photographed by DP Peter Schnall.

**Opposite page top:** A re-enactment of the execution of Marie Antoinette on a MediaPro backlot outside of Bucharest, Romania.

**Opposite page bottom:** (Front, left) DP Alex Sterian lenses a ponderous shot of King Louis XVI outside the national palace in Bucharest.

**All photos:** Sandya Viswanathan

Partisan Pictures has a solid track record as a producer of television content for The History Channel. Two previous success stories were **The Quest for King Arthur** and **Russia: Land of the Tsars**, which is still the highest rated show ever on the channel. Their latest production **The French Revolution** introduces viewers to the key figures of the Revolution.

"The idea is to bring history to life through the use of feature-like, cinematic stylized recreations," says Peter Schnall, Partisan's executive producer.

Schnall and director/producer Doug Shultz say Super 16mm film helps provide that cinematic quality without breaking the bank. "When it comes to this kind of controlled shooting, where we know exactly what we need to get, the costs of shooting on HD and shooting on Super 16mm are pretty much even, all things considered," says Schnall.

The Super 16mm format produces images in a wide, 15x9 aspect ratio. "From the beginning, we wanted to make this program look and feel like you're watching a feature film rather than a documentary," says Shultz. "We wanted to shoot as much material as possible and create scenes that really sweep you up and make you feel like you're watching a movie."

Many of the re-creation scenes, especially interiors, were photographed in Romania, partly on sets built for another film set in medieval times. Some exterior scenes were done at recognizable locations in France, as well as a few wintry sequences done at a French Huguenot village in upstate New York. Two looks represent the basic dynamic of the Revolution. Scenes involving royalty and

aristocrats were designed to be very rich, with lush, eye-popping color. Often these were shot with an antique filter that enhanced primary colors. Scenes with peasants are drained of color, with a more gritty, grainy look.

"We shot a lot of the peasant scenes on tungsten film but in daylight to give it kind of a bluish cast," says Shultz. "We processed that film with a bleach bypass, which blows out a lot of the whites, and makes the reds and purples very rich and gives it a highly textured grainy quality that suited the material."

The director of photography on the European material was Alex Sterian, who usually used an ARRI camera. Schnall handled photography in New York, using his Aaton XTR camera. The filmmakers used Kodak Vision 200T 7274 film for exteriors and Kodak Vision 500T 7279 film for interiors. "If you want it to look like a movie, you shoot it like a movie," says Shultz. "People respond, even if they're not really cognizant of what the footage is shot on. If you ask the average person what the difference is, they wouldn't know. But when they see it, the images ease them into feeling as if they're watching a drama."

"There's a richness and texture and detail that only film captures," says Schnall. "The whites don't get blown out. You can almost feel the texture of the textiles. We often used slow motion to exaggerate details. Slow motion in video is not the same. In one scene we wanted to bring a famous painting to life. The only way to bring the richness and beauty of that painting back to life was by shooting it on film."

The Partisan folks also note that the logistical aspects of shooting film on far-flung locations went smoothly. "Using film for us was very easy, because there are Kodak locations everywhere," says Shultz. "In Romania, we were able to buy the film there and process it there. They were familiar with the bleach bypass process and were very helpful as we were testing various looks."

The History Channel agrees that quality filmed content is one key to their success. "We are always looking for quality in everything we do," says Beth Dietrich Segarra, executive producer of **The French Revolution** for The History Channel. "In terms of visuals, right now film has no equal. It brings a richness and texture that is well suited for epic, historical documentaries, which need to portray a different perspective and a sense of time and place. I trust Peter's eye and I know he's going to deliver that kind of quality."

The History Channel is promoting **The French Revolution** with a trailer showing in theaters. More information is available at [www.partisanpictures.com](http://www.partisanpictures.com) and [www.historychannel.com](http://www.historychannel.com). ■

