

Expecting Mary a star-studded independent film in 2-perf

The cast for *Expecting Mary* reads like a meeting of the Hollywood Hall of Fame. It includes Elliott Gould, Linda Gray, Lainie Kazan, Cloris Leachman, Della Reese, Cybill Shepherd and Gene Simmons. The independent feature was veteran screenwriter Dan Gordon's first turn at the helm.

"Dan wrote a compelling story with interesting characters," says Michael Goi, ASC. "It was a joy working with him and that wonderful cast." Goi is president of the American Society of Cinematographers. He has a diverse range of some 50 narrative film credits for television and the cinema.

The central character of *Expecting Mary* is a 16-year-old girl, played by Olesya Rulin, from a wealthy family. The teenager runs away from home after getting pregnant because her family wants her to have an abortion. She makes a connection with an eccentric group of older people who live in a rundown trailer park in New Mexico. One of them is a former showgirl who encourages everyone to support the girl during this difficult time in her life.

"I suggested that the Techniscope format was an affordable way for us to produce *Expecting Mary* in 35mm format in widescreen (2.4:1) aspect ratio," Goi says. Technicolor introduced the 2-perf 35mm Techniscope format in 1964. It was embraced by Sergio Leone, who used it to produce his fabled spaghetti Westerns, during the mid-1960s.

Henner Hofmann, ASC, AMC sparked a renaissance of Techniscope in late 2006 when he asked Panavision to modify a couple of contemporary motion picture cameras with two-perforation movements for the production of *Gallowwalker*, an independent feature. Hofmann wanted to

emulate the aesthetics of Leone's films in widescreen 35mm format, with a modest budget. Seventeen films, including *Expecting Mary*, have subsequently been produced in Techniscope format as this issue goes to press.

After reading the script and his initial conversations with Gordon, Goi created a DVD to explain his concept for lighting and other visual grammar in different scenes. He selected shots from his own extensive collection of movies augmented with narrations explaining why he wanted to create that look for different scenes.

"We agreed that the trailer park should look and feel like a fantasy world," Goi says. "I used white Suprafrost Filters on the camera lenses. Those filters aren't in common use anymore, but they helped us render looks and colors that tell the audience on a subliminal level that *Expecting Mary* is a fantasy rather than a reality-based story."

The Panavision camera package included two Panaflex IIs and a lightweight Panaflex that Goi used for Steadicam shots. There were Primo 11:1 (24 to 275mm) and 4:1 (17.5 to 75mm) zooms and 14.5, 17.5, 21, 27, 40, 85 and 100mm prime lenses. Goi had KODAK VISION3 500T 5219 and VISION2 250D 5205 films on his palette.

Expecting Mary was produced at practical locations and on a few sets in Los Angeles in 18 days. Goi says they were able to produce the film on that ambitious schedule without compromising

production values because Gordon usually got the performances he wanted in just one or two takes.

"Film gave us the latitude needed to shoot quickly and manipulate light for the looks we wanted," Goi says. "Many of our actors are in their 70s and 80s. We wanted them to feel comfortable knowing that they would look attractive and as warm as possible."

The Techniscope format also enabled them to shoot twice as long, going 20 minutes without stopping to load a new film magazine.

Many scenes take place in a trailer. Goi notes the widescreen aspect ratio allowed him to compose characters in their settings with deep focus. The zoom lenses also allowed him to subtly draw attention to characters by sharpening focus on them.

He took an artistic approach to filming scenes with the young actress.

"We started with no diffusion on her and kept the look a little on the moody side," Goi says. "As she begins feeling connected with the community, we began creating a glow around her. By the time, her baby is born she is glowing like an angel."

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1 (L-R) Cybill Shepherd, Michael Goi, ASC and 1st AD Otto Penzato on the set of *Expecting Mary*. (Photo by Maile Klein)