

Shadowing

The dynamic and visually-stunning \$25 million action-packed fantasy *Bunraku* interweaves Samurai with Western, past with present, and reality with traditional Japanese puppet theatre – also known as bunraku. It is a world where guns are banned and the sword reigns. Josh Hartnett plays the lead role of The Drifter and is joined by Demi Moore, Woody Harrelson and Ron Perlman.

Scripted and directed by Guy Moshe (*Holly*), the creation of the visuals demanded a unique approach. “*Bunraku* uses colour with gels and visual effects to create an expressionistic and radical visual universe in which the choreographed action-fantasy story unfolds,” says Spanish-born director of photography Juan Ruiz-Anchía, ASC (*Glengarry Glen Ross*, *At Close Range*). “*Bunraku* combines a magical multi-layered use of camera movements, colours and lighting with post-visual effects. Changes in colouration and sky effects completed in post also occur throughout the film. On the technical side, it was a demanding creative ambition.”

Fine detail in the shadows

“Building the *Bunraku* world on stage would have been cost prohibitive, so the only way to create it was in post-production,” he continues. “The use of visual effects in post also helped to fill the transitions during narrative scenes and familiarise the audience to the different areas in which the story takes place. The camera roams between the spaces freely and flies from one scene to the next, all the while switching perspectives and reorienting the geography. In that respect, the camera work enhances the magic trickery of the story telling.”

The decision to go with film was partly based on cost and partly on the availability of equipment close to Romania where the film was shot. Anchía was familiar with HD and considered that going digital on such a complex production as *Bunraku* would have impacted upon the speed of the shoot. “Importantly, it was Guy’s opinion that HD would have been of insufficient quality to support the project,” he says.

After tests at KODAK Cinelabs Romania, Anchía selected KODAK VISION2 500T Color Negative Film 5260 for its handling of fine detail in the shadows. Principal photography began in April 2008. “Then, much later, when we were in the US shooting post-production footage, Kodak introduced the KODAK VISION3 family of stocks. So we decided to try KODAK VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 5219 on selected post-production green-screen shots – with great results. The very

fine grain was much superior and enhanced the sharpness of the visual effects even further.”

Bunraku was shot entirely on stages at the MediaPro Studios in Buftea, Romania. Romanians made up the bulk of the crew. In excess of 30 sets were built for the film and most was shot with giant green-screens. It was Anchía’s first experience of shooting a movie entirely on stages. “Lighting giant green-screens and handling simultaneous shoots on different stages with different units was a real learning curve,” he says. “We had two complete units working concurrently and another unit of riggers preparing sets ahead of time. Large numbers of crew members, technical elements, cameras, lights and cranes were everywhere. We even had climbers to install the large green-screens and lights. I’ve learn that’s the way they do it in Romania!”

“On the technical side, we had to plan many shots in 3-D Previs and figure out special rigs, such as the card game sequence and set pieces, for example the walls in the office and the bar. Elaborate lighting schemes required us to light so many different areas of the set as the camera travelled through them. The lighting in the film was a unique attempt to create striking graphical aesthetics with light rather than colour, paint and/or digital treatment. The camera work is almost representative of a seamless character: the story teller, the puppeteer and finally our hands as the film makers. In camera transitions cut through 90-percent of the movie. Shooting the transitions and sides of transitions presented me with great challenges, not to mention the full in camera tricks such as those in the bar sequence.”

Colour timing

There were a number of different stages for the colour timing during post-production before *Bunraku* reached the final digital internegative stage. “The many green-screen sequences meant that we colour-timed the scenes shot in camera first, leaving the green-screens alone. It then enabled the VFX house, Origami Digital in Los Angeles, to have a colour base which they could match later on when they were creating the composites. That was an important step because we had used strong colours during the filming and the visual effects house had to have good references,” says Anchía.

“The second stage of colour timing occurred much later because the visual effects took some time to be completed. When the visual effects replaced the green-screens, we created skies, perspectives, extensions of sets, light sources

Bunraku

that were not in the filming, camera movements, textiles... everything was based on the concepts we had developed in the pre-production stages to create a narrative filled with colour, light and movement. I was quite amazed at the unique quality of the final photography when we incorporated the right colours, the images shot in camera and the visual effects."

Theatrical

"*Bunraku* leans towards classical artwork, varying from Lionel Fenninger paintings to Robert Wilson's avant-garde theatrical staging. But in mixing these influences with lighting schemes and in camera light changes that echo the theatrical and the circus, we have actually ended up with the cinematic equivalent of graphics rather than a cinematic interpretation of graphics," explains Anchiá. "I find that the combination of a near-film noir shadow painting and the use of two or three colours in each scene has created the kind of colourful experience that one does not find so often in these 21st century days of D.I. in which the DP usually leaves the risk-taking to the post-production stages. I also think that abandoning the logic of light directionality was a brave and successful idea that can easily lend itself to the theatrical."

"We received great assistance from director Cornelia Popa and her staff at KODAK Cinelabs Romania in terms of pre-production tests and the development of the negatives and dailies" says Anchiá. The DP also worked with colourist Joe Finley at Modern VideoFilm in Burbank to create the digital internegative. Beverly Wood at Deluxe Labs in Los Angeles controlled the prints.

The Picturesque/Ram Bergman production will be distributed by IM Global.

Key Data at a glance

Director	Guy Moshe
Cinematographer	Juan Ruiz Anchiá, ASC
VFX	Origami Digital, Los Angeles
Film stock	KODAK VISION2 500T 5260 KODAK VISION3 500T 5219
Image transfer	KODAK Cinelabs Romania
Colorist	Joe Finley