

Just Like the Son:

A road movie with a sense of grandeur

Hurricane Streets, Morgan J. Freeman's debut feature, won the Audience, Best Director and Cinematography Awards at the 1997 Sundance Festival. Freeman, not to be confused with the Oscar-winning actor, was the director. His latest venture is an independent feature called *Just Like the Son*.

The lead character is a petty thief who takes an orphan under his wing. Things get complicated when the thief kidnaps the boy and begins a cross-country trek towards Texas. Freeman teamed up with cinematographer Yaron Orbach, a native of Israel, who studied filmmaking at the School of Visual Arts in New York.

The filmmakers considered whether to shoot in the Super 16 film format or in high-definition digital video. They opted for Super 16 film in part due to cost savings in post-production. Orbach envisioned a road movie with a sense of grandeur that communicated the wide-open spaces through which the characters travel. He suggested framing the images in a widescreen 2.4:1 aspect ratio.

Freeman and producer Jamin O'Brien requested to see some tests before approving the proposed aspect ratio. "The script called for a simple, organic visual language based on natural, available light," the cinematographer says. "We wanted to focus attention on the characters and not the cinematography. I knew that we'd be on the road, capturing all these environments, and HD would not work for such a filmic story with so many day exteriors."

"The question became how to give the film widescreen scope while shooting in the Super 16 format," he says. "I shot tests with a couple of stocks, and did DIs of about a minute's worth of film at PostWorks in New York. They did a bit of color correction and made an anamorphic print on 35mm film. When we saw the print, we knew there wouldn't be a problem making the film that way. There was virtually no loss in the quality."



Above: Cinematographer, Yaron Orbach, taking an exposure reading at night
Below: Mark Webber and Antonio Ortiz enjoy a private moment



Orbach ordered a ground glass with the widescreen aspect ratio. He exposed the full frame, however, which allowed reframing later if necessary or desired.

After testing a range of films, he chose KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 film, "because of its grain structure and consistency. I used that stock for the entire film—day, night, interiors and exteriors. That was partially for simplicity and also because the slightly grainy look gave the film an extra little bit of character."

He covered the action with an ARRI SR3 camera mounted with T2 Zeiss 35 mm lenses. "It was important to use the pristine glass," he says. "The speed and resolution helped us."

Hostess trays and hood mounts were used for car shots. Sometimes the picture car was towed with a horse trailer carrying lights. For some shots Orbach aimed a 6K or 4K HMI with diffusion through the windshield. Other times he shot with available light.

Post-production, including the digital intermediate, was done at Goldcrest Post in New York City. The colorist was John J. Dowdell III.

"We made some subtle alterations," says Orbach. "The New York material is cooler and the colors are not as rich. As the two characters warm to each other, the film warms up and the colors become more lush."

"I recently saw the finished film at the Tribeca Film Festival," says Orbach. "There's something slightly meditative about it. It's very simple and natural, not too flashy. I got somewhat lost in the calmness of it, which seems rare nowadays. I'm very pleased that our minimalist approach worked out so well." ■