

Brandon Cox uses VISION3 to shoot **The Midnight Man**

When Brandon Cox read the script for *The Midnight Man*, he saw that the independent feature would require dealing with a few challenging factors: shooting nights, rain, and a tight schedule. But he found the script suspenseful, engaging and decided he would define a visual language for an old-fashioned horror film, yet in a modern way.

The story, which unfolds over one long night, was scripted by the writing team of Marcus Dunstan and Patrick Melton (*Saw V*, *Saw IV* and *Feast*). The film marks Dunstan's directorial debut. In *The Midnight Man*, the protagonist is talked into stealing something precious from the house where he works doing odd jobs. He enters the house, only to find that it's been booby-trapped by a clever killer who is holding the family hostage. Surprises wait around every corner.

In terms of camera movement, Cox and Dunstan split the film into three sections. The first section features smooth dolly moves; the second segues into a mix of Steadicam and handheld shots; and in the third,

the camera slows down and eventually becomes still. The main location was a large, old house in Shreveport, Louisiana. The film features some chases inside the house, often including staircases. The need for freedom of movement factored into the decision to shoot in the Super 16mm film format.

"Production considered using HD video, but Marcus (Dunstan) and I knew that a large camera would create more problems at the practical locations," explains Cox. "For shooting this film in practical locations, I wouldn't trade Super 16 for the world. It worked brilliantly." The camera was an ARRI SR 3 matched with Panavision Primo lenses designed for the 35mm format.

LaserPacific in Hollywood handled front-end lab work and transferred the images to HDCAM SR. For a dreamy, otherworldly scene, Cox used KODAK EKTACHROME 100D 7285 color reversal film and

cross-processed it at the lab. Cox also used KODAK VISION2 250D 7205 film for a couple of exterior scenes, but most of *The Midnight Man* was photographed on KODAK VISION3 500T 7219 stock.

"I knew I was going to be shooting in low light levels, and I wanted contrast, detail and latitude," says Cox. "I had read about the new VISION3 7219 film stock; that it was like the VISION2 7218, plus more. I took a chance and used 7219 without testing. It completely exceeded my high expectations. It has tighter grain, beautiful contrast, and fantastic latitude. It has great detail in the highlights and looks beautiful in the blacks. It's an amazing stock, no doubt about it."

The filmmakers composed in a widescreen 2.40:1 aspect ratio. The wide image will be extracted from the Super 16 frame during digital intermediate timing. "We made extensive use of the wide frame in our storytelling," Cox remarks. "We really wanted to tell a lot with focus. In one shot, the main character is in the foreground behind a shelf. We dolly from right to left and on the other side of the frame the villain is revealed deep in the background by a lightning strike. That's a very cool way to tell a story. I really enjoy creating shots like that."

