

About a girl



where time has stopped" - he added Tiffen Antique Suede 1 and 2 filters to create a change of skin tone and an old fashioned atmosphere.

Lacking funds for conventional balloon lighting in a simulated moonlight scene, Šurkala improvised with a standard white helium advertising balloon. "We placed two 6kW ARRI Suns on the ground and

"I was able to shoot in natural light from sunrise until twilight without using a conversion filter."

used the balloon as a bounce reflector. It was difficult to work with it, but the final effect is really nice," he says.

Šurkala used Eastman Ektachrome 7240, which he cross-processed, for a dream sequence in which Zuzana leaves Bratislava for Paris. "We recorded the

Left: (L to R) DP Alex Šurkala, AČK with viewfinder, actress Zuzana Šulajová and Focus Puller Peter Necas

Below: Alex Šurkala, AČK (left) and Grip Jozef Pepekosut

"Alex Šurkala, AČK, brings an impressionistic quality of reality to a story. He 'paints' with light and exploits every possibility with film material," remarks Patrik Pašš, Producer of **O dve slabiky pozadu (Two Syllables Behind)**, the Czech feature that won the 2004 IFF Golden Pheasant Viewers' Award in Bratislava.

Dreamlike

Set in present day Bratislava and Paris, **O dve slabiky pozadu** is a mosaic of real and dreamlike situations in the life of a student called Zuzana. She appears to have everything: a part-time job as a dubbing actress, financial security and independence, yet she wanders restlessly from one place to another and from one person to the next. It takes Zuzana's eccentric but beloved grandmother to bring order to her confused and chaotic life.

Although accustomed to working with sizeable budgets, Šurkala was unfazed by the stringent economies on **O dve slabiky pozadu**, his second feature based on Director Katarína Šulajová's award-winning VSMU Bratislava graduation script. "When we began work two-and-a-half years ago, we planned to shoot on DV because we couldn't afford film" remarks the DP, who admits he's not a fan of digital technology. "But after the initial tests, Patrik obtained some funding

and we were able to shoot the dream sequence on Kodak Super 16mm stock. We waited for a year before doing the primary shoot because we wanted Zuzana to have a different look for the rest of the film and by then we had enough money for 35mm."

A former Camera Operator for Vilmos Zsigmond, ASC, and Miroslav Ondříček, ASC, Šurkala used Zeiss 25mm, 35mm, 50mm, 85mm and 100mm lenses on an Aaton XTR 16mm and a 35mm Moviecam SuperAmerika to create a visual intimacy with Zuzana, switching to a Vantage 14mm lens for the intercuts of her grandmother talking directly to the camera. "I used energy and punch to tell Zuzana's story and, because the whole concept of the movie relates to space, I tried to be up close to her as much as possible."

"I chose Kodak Vision 250D 5246 as my workhorse stock and pushed it up one stop to get daylight film with the sensitivity of 500 ASA. We didn't have much lighting equipment, so I was able to shoot in natural light from sunrise until twilight without using a conversion filter, with really good results. It was especially helpful in Paris, where I was filming handheld with an extremely small crew and in very difficult lighting conditions," he comments. Šurkala used Kodak Vision 500T 5279 for night exteriors and interiors, adding an LC1 filter to maximise shadow details and suppress colours. In the grandmother's flat - "a peaceful place



dialogue separately in the studio, then shot the scene at 50 fps. I've used this technique on a few music videos in which the singers are in sync, but the scene is in slow motion. It was quite tricky for the actors who had to double the speed of their dialogue, but it has come out really well."

"Lack of funding makes it difficult for DPs in the Czech and Slovak Republics to make features, but with a little imagination and hard work, you can shoot a beautiful movie with just one lens and one camera. And if you shoot on Eastman Kodak film, you go home happy!" states Šurkala. ■