

The Scuole Civiche Milano [Civil Schools of Milan] produce their first feature-length film

Four stories contributed by four established writers working in Milan are the jumping-off point for a collaborative film produced recently by the Scuola di Cinema Televisione e Nuovi Media [School of Cinema, Television, and New Media] and its senior students.

The writers (in strict alphabetical order) are Silvia Ballestra, Gianni Biondillo, Laura Bosio, and Andrea Pinketts. They worked with the students to find a cinematographic key to the interpretation of their stories, while leaving ample room for adaptation.

The idea was to make available coordinators who would help interpret reality through the stories, each in their own way. The students devoted themselves energetically and passionately to the work, which also served as a bridge between their educational training and their professional careers. In this endeavour they were supported by members of the teaching staff in the areas of direction (Monica Castiglioni, Marina Spada, Flavio Vida, and Laura Zagordi), cinematography (Luciano Baresi, Andrea Treccani, Piergiuseppe Vezzoli, and Ercole Visconti), and editing (Diego Cassani). All of these established professionals shared with the students their knowledge and skills, in order to create the best product possible.

The intense commitment by the school, its students, and its faculty may lead to the first feature-length film in the school's history. What's more, the decision to shoot the film in 16mm is a move toward a level of quality for both the image *per se* and the product – one that could make such projects a regular part of the school's curriculum.

We spoke with cinematography instructor Ercole Visconti, and also with Timon De Graaf and Paolo Milani, the film's cameramen and cinematographers.

How did the plan for this production by the School of Cinema first come about?

Visconti: "*E le stele stanno a sparare* ('*And the stars are coming out*') is one of the many productions that the school mounts on a regular basis. It's one segment of the tetralogy that makes up the feature-length film that second- and third-year students create. This segment, directed by Vanja Pavlovic, is an adaptation of the urban *noir* story of the same name by Andrea Pinketts. The course of the cinematographic narrative, which takes the form of discrete blocks or segments, made it possible for several different cinematographers to experiment during the shoot. For this reason, as well as for instructional purposes, students were able to work by turns as the film's cinematographers."

Did the directorial requirements demand any particular type of lighting?

Paolo: "The needs were dictated by the nature of the story and by its atmosphere, in which darkness and night are dominant. The contrasts are strong, to the point of violence, and they had to be rendered faithfully and effectively. Then, too, the many different locations described in the screenplay forced us to study a broad range of lighting styles, which my colleagues and I were able to put to the test."

What technical choices were made in support of the selected cinematographic atmosphere?

Timon: "This production was characterized visually by a nocturnal atmosphere and strong contrasts. At the same time, however, from the production point of view, it was determined by the budget (which, as this was an academic production, was necessarily limited). The other controlling factor was the need for a large number of locations with different lighting. So we chose the KODAK VISION2 500T 7218, which let us address all of these aspects. Technically speaking, this film stock



Above: Giraudo e Banfi in a scene from the film

produces excellent results, even with variable lighting. And with as many exteriors as we had – where we couldn't use all of the school's lighting gear – it gave us a fairly broad margin of error, which was a rather important factor for our students. Artistically, the film reads very well, with well-represented blacks and the good contrast performance that we wanted."

What technical difficulties did you encounter while you were shooting?

Paolo: "We had to be able to interpret effectively the rapid succession of scenes that took place at night, out of doors, or with transitions from interiors to exteriors. In the vast majority of these instances we were able to succeed specifically because of the type of film we chose. Where we couldn't use technical means, we had to do our best to take maximum advantage of all of the school's resources in order to overcome the environmental difficulties."

Would you care to tell us about a particularly complex shot?

Timon: "One thing that turned out to be very complex for us was shooting the slow sequence – in particular, matching the need for movement with the required cinematographic atmosphere. This was also the part that required the closest coordination of all of the tasks involving the camera. It was quite a challenge."

Paolo: "There was another scene that we started shooting after just a few days that was certainly very demanding. It's the scene where one of the leading characters is found dead. It had to be shot right at sunset, so the light was variable and the timing was extremely tricky." ■