

Learning on film remains the gold standard

Internationally renowned cinematographer and York University alumnus Paul Sarossy, CSC, BSC, recently returned to his alma mater to share his insights and experiences. The master class led by Sarossy launched the Department of Film's 2008-2009 Norman Jewison Series, named in honor of the acclaimed Canadian film director and producer. The series was established in 2007 for the purpose of bringing distinguished Canadian and international filmmakers to York University to meet with students, and to present and discuss their work.

The week-long program began with a public screening of Sarossy's 2005 feature project *Where the Truth Lies*, directed by Atom Egoyan. Sarossy introduced the film and talked about his role during an interactive discussion with the audience. Egoyan and Sarossy have collaborated on several films, beginning with *Speaking Parts* in 1988. He has earned Genie and CSC Awards, among many other accolades.

Bag of tricks

Sarossy found his experience to be an educational maturation. "It's great to re-evaluate the things that you do, and sharing one's knowledge with students forces you to confront many things that you take for granted," he reflects. "As a cinematographer, you sometimes fall into the trap of relying on your 'bag of tricks.' Rarely are you asked to explain your approach."

The participants were fourth-year production students chosen by the university. Sarossy started by screening sequences from his various films, and discussing his method of lighting and his reasons for camera angles. After the seminar, the group went into the school's studio for some hands-on work. They spent one

day shooting a scene based on a script, using actors, a simple interior set and the school's lighting equipment. Panavision donated a camera and Kodak provided their newest 35mm stock, KODAK VISION3 500T 5219 film.

Students were able to see the basic construction of a scene through this process, from read-through, blocking, revisions and rehearsals to the rudiments of cinematography, such as lighting the scene and planning camera movement. Sarossy played the role of director/director of photography with a team of professional camera assistants, grips and a gaffer. "My goal was to leave the students with at least one useful bit of constructive information that they could build upon in their student projects, which they'll shoot this year," he says.

The following day offered students the chance to take over

while Sarossy observed and provided guidance. Initially, it was suggested that the students gain experience on a digital camera, but Sarossy maintains that 35mm film is still the premier medium for origination, and the best starting point for the students.

Telling the story

"Students today are on the brink of enormous technical changes, and the challenge for them is to focus on what cinematography truly is," Sarossy says. "For me, it is mainly about lighting, and telling the story with light. That is central to filmmaking. We must encourage creative flexibility to keep our art alive and healthy."

"As in the real world, the students discovered how little time is available to do your job," he adds. "A cinematographer's role on set varies greatly from film to film based on the relationship with the

director. The cinematographer's job is to adjust to the needs of each director. That's a very exciting aspect of the job." The class culminated with the transfer of the film they shot to high definition video at Deluxe in Toronto.

"As schools invest in HD and other digital media, I'm amazed at how quickly students accept the hype and dismiss what has worked for over a century," Sarossy concludes. "When the group at York went through the process of screening rushes the day after shooting, you could see their eyes open wide at the magic of those images unfolding before them. They felt what it was like to be the sole author of their visual creations, versus a collaborator with all who are in eyeshot of an on-set monitor on a digital shoot. I think the students glimpsed the enormous pleasure the cinematographer sees as their work comes to life as intended. Only film allows this."



1 (L-R) Cinematography student Sarah Blevins confers with Paul Sarossy, CSC, BSC during a master class at York University. Photo by Ali Kazimi