

**Below:** Dr. Wilbur (Jessica Lange) helps a young woman (Tammy Blanchard) confront her personalities in *Sybil*.

*How do you depict a main character who suffers from a multiple personality disorder? Do you light or frame them differently, or skew the angle of coverage?*

That was just one question Joe Sargent and Donald M. Morgan, ASC had to answer while preparing to film a remake of *Sybil*, a classic 1976 television movie.

*Sybil* is based on a book by Flora Rheta Schreiber about a young woman who had 16 personalities. The original telefilm earned four Emmy Awards and two additional nominations. Morgan decided not to watch it during pre-production.

"I didn't want to have any preconceived ideas," the cinematographer explains. "I wanted to go into this project with a fresh outlook and have Joe feed me ideas. We spoke about filming flashback scenes in a different style but we agreed it would be better to just have the audience watch her go through transitions."

*Sybil* marks the 10th telefilm collaboration between Sargent and Morgan, dating back to *Amber Waves* in 1980. Six of their previous co-ventures have earned Emmy awards and nominations for either the director or the cinematographer or both.

"*Sybil* is a fascinating examination of a multiple personality patient with a superb script by John Pielmeier," Sargent says. "It is a little worrisome when you're making a sequel of a classic film. We added a different dimension by combining the obstacles that both women, the therapist and patient, had to overcome. The story took place during the late 1940s and early '50s. Her therapist was a woman in what was then a male profession. Her colleagues in the

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psychiatric department were in disbelief of her diagnosis of this particular case and were always putting her down."

*Sybil* was produced for television by Warner Bros. in conjunction with The Wolper Organization and executive producer Norman Stephens. It was shot primarily at practical locations in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. After premiering on the CBS television network, it has cable distribution.

Morgan only had two weeks of pre-production planning in Halifax. He spent that time conferring with Sargent and production designer Doug McCullough on scouting locations. They also collaborated on the choice of colors, including painting most of the walls at houses where *Sybil* lived beginning with her childhood and other interior locations. Morgan describes the basic color palette as warm earth tones.

Producer Michael Mahoney brought in a local crew to shoot limited hair and make-ups tests with Jessica Lange, who was cast in the role of Dr. Cornelia Wilbur. *Sybil* was portrayed by Tammy Blanchard. Morgan was so pleased that he used the same crew to shoot the entire movie.

"*Sybil* comes across as a sympathetic character," Morgan relates. "Her mother, played by JoBeth Williams, was definitely a cause of her problems. I never tried to make the mother look unpleasant,

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ugly or mean. It was all in the acting. She had a particular scream. We used wide-angle lenses so you could see Sybil reacting in the background."

*Sybil* was produced in Super 16 film format. Morgan says that was a concession to the budget, but he assured Sargent that it would be transparent to the audience based on his experience shooting the HBO telefilm *Walkout* in Super 16 mm.

One location was an older building that housed the set for the doctor's office. There was a lake outside the window. It was a challenge to balance the light from interior to exterior, as it would change throughout the day. Next door they had a set for a hospital room in an abandoned building. In one sequence, the doctor took Sybil home for a weekend to try to find out more about her. Morgan says it was a beautiful house that had a porch with a glass wall and a lake in the background. It was also a challenge to balance the light.

Morgan mainly covered the action with two ARRI SR 3 cameras, usually with Cooke prime lenses. One camera was generally on a tight shot of a character and the other on a master. When Morgan didn't feel the light was right, Sargent generally took his advice and shot separate takes for masters and close-ups with a single camera.

Morgan's palette included KODAK VISION2 500T 7218 and 200T 7217 films for interiors, depending on the environment and mood, and KODAK VISION2 250D 7205 film for daylight exterior scenes. Morgan cites the latitude of the VISION2 stocks. There are dark, interior scenes with the sun glimmering on the surface of a lake seen through a window. Deluxe Labs in Toronto handled the front-end lab work.

"One thing that I love about working with Joe is that he knows what he wants," Morgan says. "He doesn't do shot lists. Joe watched rehearsals and started guiding the actors around the set while we looked for ways to reinforce the performances. We used a lot of close-ups from chin to forehead, but we also did some interesting framing with 8mm, 6mm and other wide-angle lenses. We had a Steadicam and used a crane once or twice, but the cameras were mainly on dollies or handheld."

He put the final touches on the look in collaboration with colorist Kevin O'Connor at Global Entertainment Partners in Los Angeles. O'Connor and Morgan have worked on many films, commercials and promos over the last 23 years. ■