



## Why and how That Evening Sun touches people's hearts

*That Evening Sun* won the Audience Award and Special Jury Award for Best Ensemble Cast at the 2009 SXSW Film Festival in Austin, Texas. One critic wrote, "... it featured the best acting, the best cinematography and best written characters ... Rodney Taylor's (ASC) brilliant cinematography is to be applauded. ..." Another critic observed, "(Writer/director) Scott Teems' film stands as one of 2009's most distinguished low-budget American narratives. Hal Holbrook's performance is worthy of awards ... Rodney Taylor's rich, anamorphic 35mm cinematography and Michael Penn's beautiful score take things to an even deeper level."

*That Evening Sun* was produced with a very modest budget in 21 days at practical locations in a rural area on the outskirts of Knoxville, Tennessee. Holbrook plays Abner Meecham, an elderly man who leaves a nursing home and goes back to his family farm. When he arrives, Abner discovers that his son has leased his house to Lonzo Choat, who is his long-time nemesis. Ray McKinnon was cast in that role. The two adversaries become unfriendly neighbors when Abner moves into a small tenant house on the farm.

Taylor and Teems were introduced by a mutual friend. "Scott asked me to read his script, which was based on a short story written by William Gay; I loved the story and believed that it would make a great film," Taylor recalls. "I was seeing images in widescreen format in my mind as I read the words."

### Sense of place

Taylor suggested producing *That Evening Sun* in anamorphic format coupled with traditional optical post-production at a film lab. "This is a very dark, character-driven story," he explains. "I felt this was the best way to get an organic look that reflected the emotions that the characters are feeling." Teems embraced that vision during their first discussion.

The main house was a practical location outside Knoxville. They built the house that Abner settles in next to it. The green landscapes and blue sky help to create a visceral sense of place. A few scenes were filmed at practical locations in town.

The camera package provided by Panavision in Dallas included two Moviecam Compact bodies with a range of anamorphic prime lenses

made by Joe Dunton. "I used those lenses on *Swimmers* and other films," Taylor explains. "They have an older glass that renders a somewhat softer image without using diffusion. They flare beautifully, and I think they were the right look for this film. It's also a dark story, and Scott wanted rich black tones especially in night scenes in the house where Abner lives. The anamorphic format gives you more range on the negative."

Taylor had KODAK VISION2 500T 5218 and 250D 5205 color negative films on his palette. He used 5218 for night and darker interior scenes and 5205 in daylight.

"We covered most scenes with a single camera, usually from a subjective point of view," he says. "The camera was frequently static, augmented by shots with very deliberate, slow movement on a dolly to bring the audience closer into selected scenes."

Artful composition is also weaved into the visual grammar. There is a scene where Abner's son, played by Walton Goggins, is on one edge of the frame having a phone conversation with his father, on the

other edge. They have their backs to each other and the frame visually punctuates the emotional separation they feel.

### Body language

There are night scenes outside the house where the light from a yellow sodium yard lamp adds a painterly touch to the drama. In many scenes, body language augments the dialogue. There are also scenes where a character's eyes are veiled in shadows to conceal their feelings. Other times, their eyes speak as loudly as words.

Technicolor in Los Angeles did the front-end lab work. After editing was completed, Taylor timed the film with Harry Muller at Deluxe Laboratories in Hollywood.

"They showed a trailer in 1.85:1 format with a digital projector before *That Evening Sun* was screened at the SXSW festival," Taylor reports. "Scott and I both noticed the excited response of the audience when the curtains opened and they realized they were going to see a film in widescreen format."

1 (L-R) Writer-director Scott Teems and cinematographer Rodney Taylor, ASC on the set of *That Evening Sun*.  
Photo by Cooper Dunn

