

Sinner

a redeeming feature



British director/producer Marc Benardout and director of photography David Kerr were main collaborators on many small to medium budget commercials and several shorts, including the award-winning black-and-white anamorphic film, *A Little Worm*. Then, seven years ago, Benardout moved to Los Angeles. But when he began focusing on the look for *Sinner*, his dark and visually intriguing debut feature about a priest's attempt to redeem his vocation and regain his integrity, there was only one DP on his mind.

The pair re-teamed in Los Angeles and it was as if time had stood still. They shared an understanding of the sensitivity of the subject matter and quickly gravitated towards the same influences and palette. "David is very collaborative and has an immense knowledge of film history," says Benardout. "He is inspired by many of the great names that are all too easily forgotten with the trendy new techniques and contemporary whiz kid filmmakers. He brought a sense of traditional composition and camera movement to the 'table'. His enthusiasm never waned, despite the low budget, a crew he hadn't worked with before and a tight schedule that saw us complete a daily average of eight pages on the seventeen day location shoot."

After their years of experience with television commercials in which they had utilised conventional 4K telecine techniques, Benardout and Kerr set out to use offline video editing, negative cutting and traditional timing at an optical lab. But when they began researching the most cost effective ways to achieve the level of quality and post flexibility to which they were accustomed in the commercial world, they discovered the inDI system offered affordable solutions to both aspects.

An addition to the digital intermediate (DI) services provided by LaserPacific in Hollywood, inDI is an amalgamation of LaserPacific's workflow innovation and Kodak's image science, which maximises image quality and creative options while minimising the independent filmmaker's budget. "inDI was recommended to us for its low cost and convenient deliverables procedure" notes Benardout, whose editing schedule for *Sinner* required expeditious handling. "With everything under the one roof at LaserPacific, inDI proved to be the most efficient route."

LaserPacific assigned DI colourist Mike Sowa to the film. "*Sinner* started on a system that wasn't right for the looks which David had in mind but, once we had the right system, the timing went very smoothly," Sowa recalls. "Some scenes required windowing and tracking but, apart from those, there weren't too many other challenges. Balancing a scene to make up for the loss of sunlight is just part of the timing system which allows filmmakers to be very specific about the colour correction. Using the tools that Discrete Lustre offers, we are able to address shots that would normally have to be sent out as a visual effect."

Kerr shot with a Panaflex Millennium camera on 3-perf Super 35 film format and achieved a 25% negative and front-end lab cost savings. He based his colour palette on the dominant colours that feature in the Catholic religion - green, gold, white and purple - and used red, a symbol of lust, for the prostitute, Lil (Georgina Cates). "Marc wanted to use black as a character to represent the blindness of the lead priest, Father Anthony (Nick Chinlund) and to allow the audience to enter a world of shifting forms and false perspectives. Emphasising darkness rather than the perceptible exposes the claustrophobic nature of the situation and the struggle between the characters; it envelops them and depicts their strengths" notes Kerr. Along with gaffer Richard Ralston, he was also faced with lighting night shoots for at least 75% of the film.



Director/producer
Marc Benardout

Director of Photography
David Kerr

Colourist
Mike Sowa

Digital Intermediate
Laser Pacific inDI system

"Knowing that we were going to use the inDI system didn't affect the way I shot *Sinner*" remarks Kerr who, like Benardout, was a newcomer to LaserPacific's post-production tools and workflows. "I always believe in achieving as much as possible in camera in terms of lighting, exposure and composition but, given the tight shoot and budgetary constraints, I was confident that the lighting could be fine-tuned in DI."

"The dailies were received on an HDSR master with a DVCAM and DVD clone and were a real pre-visualisation of what the audience would see. What also impressed me about the inDI system is that you get not only a conformed RGB 4:4:4 high definition master from a single scan of the negative, but also the rushes; the film does not need to be rescanned. The colour grading was achieved on a 33 foot-wide screen in a cinema-like environment using the Discreet Lustre software-based colour correction system, which is a perfect method. I enjoyed working with Mike; he is very experienced and knowledgeable and helped me to achieve the look I wanted," says Kerr.

"I was really impressed with LaserPacific's approach, the affordability and benefits of (Autodesk) Flame and Avid DS Nitris, as well as Chyron software for titling. It precluded the need for expensive optical work. inDI is a powerful, versatile and creative post-production tool that offers many options to independent feature filmmakers."

"The incredible aspect of shooting a feature is that you are suddenly bombarded with questions which, for the most part, need immediate answers," adds Benardout. "Everyone at LaserPacific, from the dailies grader David Perkins to post production executive Max Straight, were incredible in shepherding us through this innovative system. The finishing touch was when we were able to view and grade the film in a

theatre with Mike. It was simply breathtaking and so rewarding, after all the hard work that everyone had put into the film."

"There was a savings differential in the workflow of about \$20,000 which, on a low budget independent film like *Sinner*, made a crucial and positive impact on our overall budget" says Benardout, who was very satisfied with his experience with the inDI system. "A key element in choosing the inDI route was the considerable time saving on the final colour timing. Apart from avoiding the negative cutting system, it has given us the flexibility to make incremental changes between film festival presentations as the cut has evolved and as we have received more audience input. We were very satisfied with our experience and would most definitely consider using inDI again, particularly on a budget-constrained feature in which the acquisition method is 35mm, but the end format may be HD or DVD."

"We learnt the hard way that the editorial system is something which cannot be rushed. The more we collaborated with the post supervisors upfront, the less we had to handle in the edit bays. It also seems to me that many individuals are overly concerned with the fact that the medium of film is supposedly disappearing, but instead they should be embracing the versatile world of HD and the capabilities of digital technology in conjunction with film."

Sinner has scooped awards at the 41st Brooklyn Arts Council festival (best cinematography), the Buffalo Niagara Film Festival (best feature), the Boston International Film Festival (best director) and the Newport Beach Film Festival (screenwriting). It also features in the official selections at the Palm Beach, Vail and Garden State film festivals. "David Kerr's lighting prowess has ensured that *Sinner* continues to garner critical acclaim," concludes Benardout.

1 (L-R) Director
Marc Benardout and
cinematographer
David Kerr.

2 Actor Nick
Chinlund as Anthony
Romano.