Student Feature!
Diploma in Film Making Graduate

Allan George
SAE Class of 2007
Top Film Student for 2007
Western Heights High School, 2006

What course did you study at SAE and why did you choose that course?

Allan: I studied the Diploma in Film Making at SAE Auckland in 2006. I chose it because it is an internationally recognized institute, it was definitely the place for me to go.

What was your favorite part of the course and why?

Allan: It would have to be the hands on aspect of the course. Being able to handle a camera from early on really excited me. Having an experienced DOP as one of the lecturers really helped fuel my passion for camerawork and made me want to become a Cinematographer.

What have you been doing since leaving SAE?

Allan: It was a huge challenge trying to find work in the Film/TV Industry here in New Zealand. I started out by applying for a workshop at "Weta Workshop" in Wellington which opened up at the time. I was then told I was one of the 30 accepted to attend the course. I flew down to Wellington a couple of weeks later and I found myself learning about Prosthetics from Gino Acevedo and Conceptual Design from Greg Broadmore who both worked on all of the Lord of the Rings films as well as King Kong. Learning from people who worked with Peter Jackson was incredibly inspiring!

I flew back to Auckland and after a month of searching for work I was offered an internship at Maori Television as an Audio Post Production Engineer. I took the opportunity and I was in the position for 3 months while they launched their second channel. It was an amazing experience where I learnt a lot. Shortly after that I applied for an entry level position at Sky Television as an Assistant Media Operator; I was responsible for ingesting commercials, promotional material and had to record incoming material from overseas. As I was working full time at Sky Television I continued to learn as much as I could about Cinematography. I bought books, and every weekend I would shoot something with my friends. I DOP’d my first music video for Miscreant, then went on to shoot music videos for many other bands such as 4DG ft Nesian Mystik, Opshop, LT Funk, Pieter T, RAC & PJ, Deviolo, Symphony of Screams, Dead Fools Fiesta as well as others. I found myself working up to 18 hours a day; full time at Sky TV and then going to shoots straight after work. I remember working graveyard shifts from midnight to 7am, one particular shift was on the Commonwealth Games closing ceremony, that finished at 8am and I jumped straight into the car and off to a short film shoot at the Alberton in Mt Albert. I was on set by 8:30am preparing a Sony-PMW EX3 with a Prime Lenses for the first set up. That shoot wrapped at about 8pm, got a few hours sleep and off to work at midnight again. That was my life.

After working in the industry for over 3 years I decided to start my own production company with Ben Fowler (Editor) and Isaiah Vaega (Gaffer) “Sideways Productions” (www.sideways-productions.co.nz). We now produce corporate videos, music
videos, promotional videos and short films.

After starting Sideways Productions, I was still working at Sky Television. One day I saw a job available to work on New Zealand’s leading daily sports show “The Crowd Goes Wild”. I applied and within a month I found myself working on the show as a Camera Operator/Editor. I edit up to 4-5 minutes a day (for that nights program) on Final Cut Pro and I shoot regularly on the Sony PMW EX3. I have worked on many amazing stories with the show including the Rugby World Cup Final where we were sideline for the last few minutes of the game, I have met Tony Hawk and I have been sent around the country to places like Queenstown and Kerikeri to shoot stories, and after a year with the show I found myself in Bali, Indonesia shooting stories for the show!

My varied background has provided me with a lot of experience. I learnt how to light makeup and prosthetics due to my Weta Workshop course. I understand Luma/Chroma Levels due to my time as a Media Operator. I appreciate sound and know how to get the best location audio due to my time at Maori Television. My eye for composition has grown due to my time as a Camera Operator at The Crowd Goes Wild. Overall my journey as a Cinematographer has only just started but so far it has been a crazy ride!

What have been some of the highlights from your experiences in the film industry so far?

Allan: Sunday’s Best Clothes Music Video - Opshop

My company Sideways Productions was offered the job of producing a music video for Opshop. This was a huge job for us, we were new on the block and we wanted to do justice to the song. The idea was pitched by the Director and it was a crazy one. It involved four frames within the frame all moving simultaneously, but that wasn’t the trickiest part. It was all to be done in one shot, four times. With each band member in one of the frames at all times. This meant that we had to create a 360 degree set. It was a huge undertaking for me as a DOP. We rigged all of the lights into the roof with string and used lights from the local supermarket to light the band. The amount of light from a supermarket 60w tungsten bulb was perfect for what we needed. It took under two hours to shoot the video; the band said it was the fastest shoot they have ever done. The music video was shot on the Sunday and it was delivered a few days later. A shoot I will never forget!

How do you think your time at SAE helped prepare you for these experiences?

Allan: Honestly I think its impossible for any course to prepare anyone 100% for the industry, simply because it’s such a varied industry we work in. But what prepared me for the industry was the fact I had to learn to handle the overall intensity of the SAE Film Making Diploma because it was non-stop.

I walked through the SAE doors as soon as they opened and I left when the supervisors left. The intensity made me work hard. The fact I had to put in the hard work and hours made me a hard-worker. That aspect made me survive the industry and it is what gets me by each day, seriously! When everything starts going wrong on a shoot, you need to pull yourself together and find another way to achieve what it is you need to.

If you get onto a set for anything, the first thing you need to do is work hard and impress your department head. Moving fast lifting the dolly and moving the crane, you can’t be scared of getting your hands dirty.

What are you doing now and what are your plans for the future?

Allan: Well now I am working full time on The Crowd Goes Wild, running Sideways Productions we are in pre production on a music video for a reggae band, which is definitely pushing our boundaries. I can’t say too much at this stage about the idea but check back soon!

My ultimate goal is to become a Cinematographer on feature films. I will continue to work on Short Films, Music Videos and other productions until I get my chance on a feature film.

What advice would you give to SAE students and new Alumni members just starting up in the industry?

Allan: If you get any work whether it is free or not, you need to jump on the opportunity. Ultimately just work hard, seriously as I said earlier it’s what gets me through each day on set.

Once I got onto my first large production I was told these three rules to follow by the DOP:

1. Be “fast and efficient” on set, you do that, you get work.
2. When starting out “keep your thoughts to yourself” Don’t go telling your DOP or Director your thoughts on the shot or frame.
3. “Persevere”. It is incredibly difficult to find work in this industry. But after a while, after enough free shoots and perseverance the work will eventually come and find you.

To keep up to date with what Allan is up to, have a look at his work or to get in touch with him, check out -
www.sidewaysproductions.co.nz
www.facebook.com/SidewaysProductions

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Just because you record with two microphones doesn't necessarily mean that you are recording in stereo. To get a good stereo recording you need to consider what exactly you are recording and why it needs to be in stereo.

The usual candidates for stereo recording include acoustic guitars, drum overheads, pianos, organs, choirs, orchestras (or sections of orchestras) and the space around a sound source. All of these originate from multiple voices and those voices can be spread out, sometimes over quite a large area. If you are recording single voices such as lead vocal, electric guitar, bass, individual drums, etc then there is probably no need to record in stereo.

Traditional wisdom says that you need to use a matched pair of microphones. This is a pair of mics of the same make and model that have been electronically matched by the manufacturer so that they respond in exactly the same way. If you haven't got a matched pair then the same make and model will suffice but you may get less accurate results.

As soon as you decide to use two mics to record one sound source you are going to encounter phase issues. This is because the microphones will potentially be at different distances from the sound source but will be picking up the same frequency at approximately the same amplitude. This will cause some of the signals to add together in a constructive way and others in a destructive way, which may cause your signal to vary widely in level and clarity once summed to mono.

While there are a lot of different ways that you can configure two microphones there are some tried and true methods that will give you a good place to start. These techniques have been designed to reduce phase interference but not to eliminate it. At the end of the day we do not want to eliminate these differences in the signals because it is actually the difference between the signals that creates stereo.

One of the most basic techniques is the AB technique (also known as the spaced pair – see Fig. 1), which simply involves placing the microphones at ninety degrees to the sound source and putting some space between them. The polar (or pick up) pattern of the mics can be either omni directional (even response to a signal from all around the mic – see Fig 2) or cardioid (a heart shape response pattern with better pick up from the front of the mic – see Fig 3). This technique will...
give a good separation between the left and right channels as well as a realistic representation of where the sound originated from in the panoramic spectrum or of its movement within it. In fact, AB is the technique of choice if you want to exaggerate the width of a sound source.

There are a couple of drawbacks with this technique. The distance between the mics and the distance between the sound source and the mics can cause problems. If the mics are too far apart then there may appear to be a “hole in the middle”. If the mics are too close together then the chance of destructive phasing between the tracks is greatly increased.

To reduce the chance of this occurring the ‘3 to 1’ rule (see Fig. 4) can be applied. It states that the distance between the mics should be at least three times the distance between the mics and the sound source. So, if you place your mics 1 metre from the sound source then the mics should be at least 3 metres apart.

Finally, when recording in stereo it is important to consider what will happen when the signals get summed to mono. You may think that mono is a bit ‘old hat’ in this day of surround sound but it is more common than you might suspect. Imagine a mono-equipped TV audience listening to your carefully crafted mix during the music awards and your stereo miced guitars simply disappear. They’ll be wondering why you got the Tui.

AB is more prone to phase issues than many other stereo techniques. Before you finally commit to the recording it is a good idea to sum the tracks to mono to make sure that the track will maintain its integrity.

In part 2 (Term 4 Newsletter) we’ll look at some other stereo techniques.

Fig. 4

Mal Smith is a lecturer for the SAE Audio Engineering Diploma and Bachelor of Recording Arts. In his spare time he also plays in a band called The Blue Jaffas.

This article is also published in the June/ July 2012 edition of New Zealand Musician Magazine.

NZ Musician Magazine is published six times a year, available by direct subscription and free through selected outlets.

SAE Student Spotlight

In this new feature, we interview one of SAE’s current students and find what they’re up to and how they’re going. This term’s student spotlight is on Nikki MacIntosh! She’s 18, originally from Whakatane and she moved up to Auckland to study Audio Engineering here at SAE.

What high school did you attend and what year did you finish?
I went to Trident High School in Whakatane and left after I finished up my 7th form year in 2011.

What course are you studying at SAE and where are you up to?
At the moment I’m studying the Diploma in Audio Engineering which I started in January, so I’m half way through now. It’s going really well and I’m enjoying it a lot.

Why did you choose to study at SAE?
I’ve always been interested in the technical side of music, even though I haven’t had too much to do with it before. Last year I helped out the sound guy at a few events and absolutely loved it! I chose SAE because of the quality of the studios and the fact that you can choose to carry on after the diploma year to complete the degree.

What has been your favourite part or subject so far and why?
It’s hard to pick, but I think recording in the Classic Studio has been my favourite part so far. The band I was working with was great and made the process so easy. I’ve also been really enjoying the lectures focusing on the theoretical part of audio engineering. Learning about sound theory, acoustics and live sound has been awesome.

What do you want to do when you finish studying at SAE?
At the moment I’m still undecided as there’s so many things to choose from! I’m leaning more towards theatre sound or TV, but I love all of it. I guess we’ll just have to wait and see!

Thanks so much Nikki - good luck with the rest of the year, we’re sure you’ll produce some amazing results! Thanks!