

London based camera operator Giles Musitano, has spent the last five years specializing in the professional application of Super8 for the film and TV industry, and has written three books on Super8 filmmaking. *GF* tracked down the Super8 kid in Los Angeles, where he was working on the fourth edition of his best-selling Super8 Guide, and asked him why he believes that switching from Super8mm to Pro8mm can accelerate your film career.

Aside from the aesthetics, the two most obvious reasons why aspiring Spielbergs can benefit from shooting 8mm film are firstly, if you want to be taken seriously, then starting out on film will earn you much more respect and credibility within the established community of cinematographers you're trying to break into. Secondly, the equipment and support crew required for most 16mm shoots makes it very difficult to pass unnoticed in a public place, but the size of your average Super8 camera allows you to shoot without permits. And if you happen to be stopped by an over-conscientious security officer, you can usually get away with playing the "I'm only shooting home movies" card.

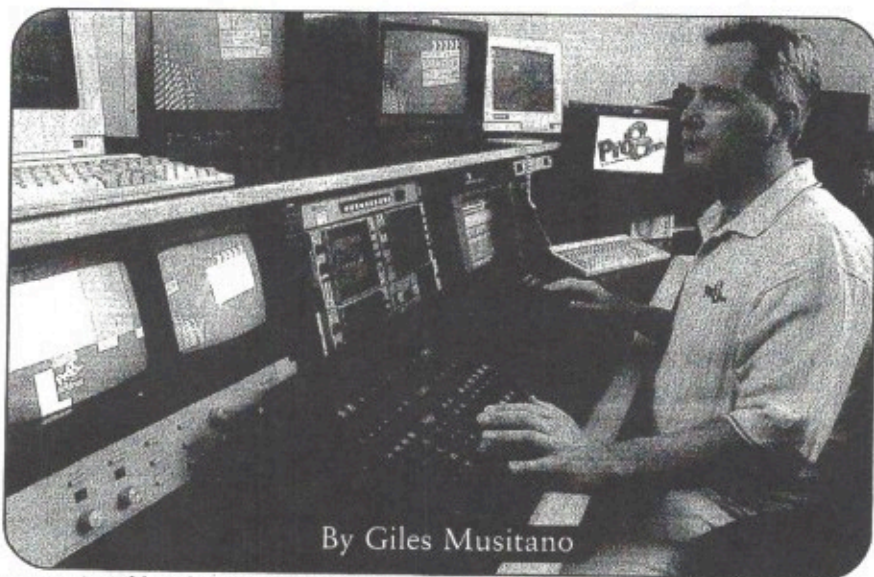
However, to be able to play on a level with the big guys, you've really got to be shooting on the same film as they are. Many cinematographers love nothing better than to sit around and chew on ideas of how to maximize on the speed rating of '79 film, while keeping the grain to an acceptable level to cut together with '45 stock. These guys speak in code - it's a different language - but you can learn it very quickly by going out and shooting with the same film they do. It doesn't matter if it's 8mm or 70mm film; if you know your way around the color negative emulsions used every day in the film and TV industry, then you're already way ahead of the next guy in line who has shot a whole feature length movie on reversal film.

For the last eight years, Super8 Sound in Burbank, California, has been offering a fantastic range of Pro8mm products and services to professional users, as well as supporting the large number of student and independent filmmakers. In their offices, they recondition

Super8 cameras and offer affordable starter packages, including camera, film, processing, and transfer to video. Super8 Sound also manufactures Pro8mm cartridges by slitting all of Kodak's 35mm color negative motion picture film stocks into 8mm widths, re-perforating the film with Super8 sprocket holes, and then loading it into brand new Kodak Super8 cartridges.

I've been lucky enough to have shot a fairly large number of Pro8mm cartridges, including 50ASA daylight film, which the clients sometimes couldn't distinguish from 35mm, and Vision 800ASA film properly exposed at a restaurant table lit by just two candles. It really is amazing stuff that opens up the Super8 palette and makes the format incredibly versatile. Indeed, many people (myself included), that use

SHOOTING



By Giles Musitano

Pro8mm negative film for the first time, are so completely blown away by the quality, that they rarely go back to shooting Kodachrome and Ektachrome.

Fortunately for users of Pro8mm film, company president and chief telecine colorist, Phil Vigeant, had the foresight to set up two state-of-the-art Rank Cintel film-to-tape transfer suites at their Burbank facility, both of which have been specially modified and engineered for all types of 8mm film. They also offer camera rental packages, custom loaded film emul-

sions, and same-day process and tape transfer, if required, to allow cinematographers to really push the 8mm format to its limits, with the reliability and high quality they require.

Vigeant explains, "When someone has us transfer color reversal Super8 footage (Kodachrome or Ektachrome) then we can expect to see a fairly small amount of well-exposed usable material relative to the amount of film shot. But when we're transferring color negative Pro8mm film, the percentage of usable material is always much higher. When the clients see how many more good quality shots they're getting from Pro8mm film, they quickly realize that there's just no point in making life difficult for themselves by shooting reversal film again."

And if it's good enough for ASC cinematographer John Toll to use in the film *Simpatico*, director Michael Bay to use in *Armageddon*, and the forthcoming *Pearl Harbor*, and Jim Jarmusch to use in *Year Of The Horse*, then Phil Vigeant and his Pro8mm team must be doing something right.

Vigeant continues, "Color negative film is much more forgiving than the traditional Super8 reversal stock, and offers a greater flexibility for the cinematographer because it can render detail

and correct exposure in much more extreme lighting conditions. We currently offer eight different Pro8mm color negative films for use in every conceivable situation, with the cartridges, processing, and telecine suites now delivering consistently clean and high quality results."

I stole a few minutes on the phone with one of the more attractive Hollywood 'big guys,' Barbara Martinez-Jitner, Visual Effects Supervisor and 2nd Unit Director for Warner Bros., to ask about her use of Pro8mm film in movies for theatrical release.

"In *Selena*, we used Pro8 in some of the performance sequences, which we then graded at the telecine with Andy Warhol style 'pop art' saturated colors to give it an alternative music video look. We also shot some other very different sequences on Pro8 to create a kind of heightened reality, but we didn't want to use Kodachrome or Ektachrome because we weren't trying to re-create nostalgic

major motion picture; but we wanted to take a few risks and maximize on the effect of the Pro8mm footage, and the audiences responded to it really well."

"At the time when we shot *Why Do Fools Fall In Love*, there was a run of films being released, like *Trainspotting*, that dealt with some kind of drug culture. In our film, the main character, Frankie Lymon, was a heroin addict, and we needed a way to show his point of view when he was actually on heroin. It didn't make sense for us to spend days creating a digital effect, because the film is set in the 1950s, so we felt that audiences would respond better to a visual effect that didn't seem so out of place for the period. Actually, in a movie theater, 8mm film is really more of a visual experience than a visual effect, because there's a language to the organic medium of Super8 that people respond to without even being aware of it."

Martinez-Jitner used the digital post-production route for both feature,

avoiding the traditional path of optical printing from the 8mm direct to 35mm film. "In the telecine suite you can play with color and grain very precisely to create a specific

look for an individual character, time, or place, so we always transfer the Pro8 to digital video,

and then bump it up to 2K resolution just so it's sharp enough for theatrical screening."

So now that you've heard it from one of the serious players in the movie industry, if you're about to shoot a project, or part of a project, on a pint-sized format, then whatever you do, don't waste your

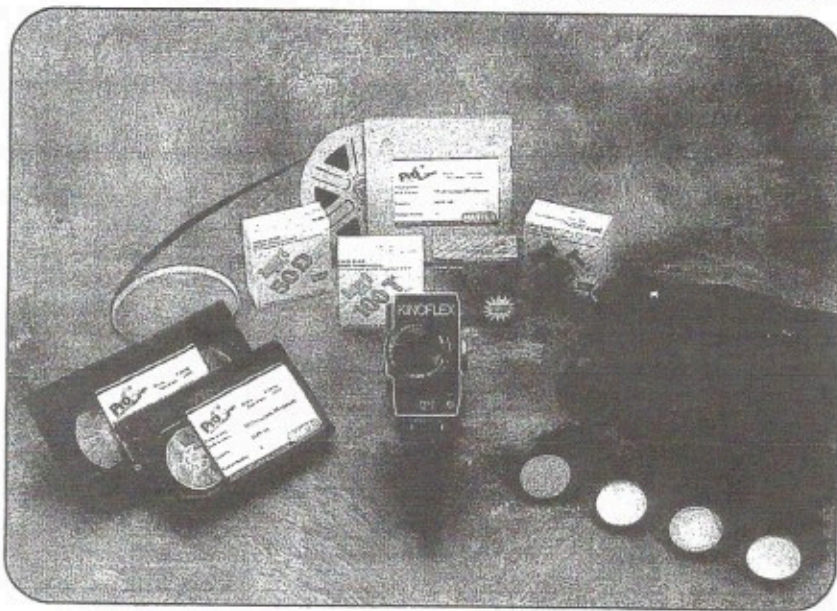
cash on a thousand dollar MiniDV camera. Most serious filmmakers who've flirted with MiniDV will have realized by now that it's pretty useless as an origination format, but really handy for zapping transferred film footage into your desktop editing program through a Firewire cable - and with nearly all movies these days being shot on color negative film, transferred to tape, and then edited on computer, it makes perfect sense to follow the example of the industry professionals. Pro8mm allows you to do all that from day one without compromising on quality, so you're much better off hunting down a decent quality Super8 camera, originating on film, and then editing from MiniDV.

Of course, there will always be experimental filmmakers and home movie fans shooting traditional reversal Super8 so they can project it on the living room wall or down at the local underground film club. And while that kind of filmmaking takes just as much energy and commitment, let's face it, those 8mm users very rarely break into the major movie industry. There's no doubt that practicing the real craft of cinematography by shooting Pro8mm film in your Super8 camera will give you a much better appreciation of what it takes to make it out there with the big guys. <<

For more information on Pro8mm film and the other products and services offered by Super8 Sound, visit www.Super8Sound.com or call them at 818-848-5522 (8am to 8pm Monday to Friday).

Giles Musitano's 250 page fourth edition of *The Super8 Guide*, published by Focal Press, includes photos and specifications of 500 Super8 cameras and 200 projectors, interviews with Super8 guru Lenny Lipton, Brooklyn based experimental filmmaker Eve Sussman, and with the genius inventor of the Super8 format, Evan Edwards.

The *Super8 Guide* will be available from all good book stores around Christmas 2000. For more information visit www.focalpress.com.



Super 8

home movie style images. What we needed was an edgy, hard look, to contrast with the 35mm. There was no need to use squeeze lenses or step effects, because the Pro8mm was good enough on its own to show a different point of view - an altered state. In some sequences, we desaturated all the chroma except the red, which you might think is a very bold thing to do in a