

Super 8

GETS A TICKET TO HOLLYWOOD ON

American Idol



You probably had no idea that when you were watching *American Idol* at any point over the last 14 seasons, that you were witnessing the nostalgia of Super 8. It would take a trained eye indeed to notice that all those winter evenings spent in front of the tube with your family, ready for the next Carrie Underwood or Kelly Clarkson, were actually a throwback to many family's home videos.

Cinematographer Owen Smith, who's been with the show since 2006, has been capturing Super 8 footage that is interspersed throughout the road show portion of the series.

"My dad shot Super 8," the St. Augustine, Florida, native reminisces. "His dad had shot Super 8 too. More than photography, it is a history of people. When my dad was using it, it was to document the life around him. Everybody had one of those cameras, so a lot of people can identify with it as sitting around watching home movies."

Smith had been doing a lot of travel documentary work earlier in his career, and got to work on shows like *Survivor* and *The Deadliest Catch*. When he started on *American Idol*, an already huge, well-oiled machine, he asked himself what he could do to make his contribution unique.

"I'd just joined the Union and was getting into bigger productions," he explains, "and I realized that my strength could come from something that I've always done - Super 8."

Smith was on a schedule that had him and his team up at 4 a.m. shooting thousands of screaming people in lines in a different city every few days. During his off time, he'd take a bike or go walking with his Canon 814 and shoot B-roll of the cities. He'd end up using 24 to 36 rolls of Super 8, which would equal about an hour's worth of footage.

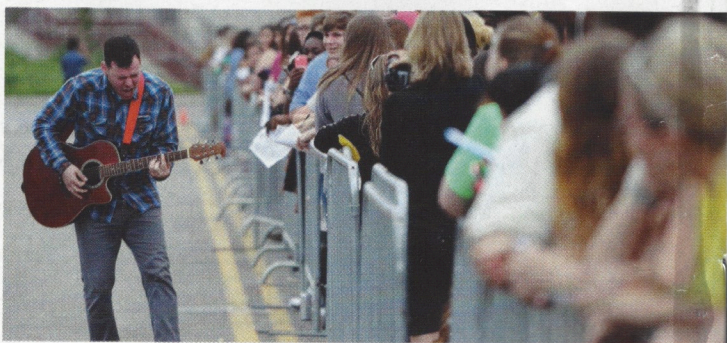
It was never a fight for Smith to shoot the footage, but he would have to usher it through the post-production phase, making sure each editor who already had a million tasks to complete was aware that Super 8 footage was available. Smith says once the producers — namely Charles Boyd, Patrick Lynn and Megan Michaels — began to see the value it added, they asked for more Super 8 shots.

Smith has shot a variety of Super 8 negative and reversal film stocks since his first season with the FOX show. He frames it for 16:9, and Pro8mm in Burbank scans the film in 1920x1080 with 3:1 color correction on a Millennium 2 HD scanner. The film output is a ProRes HQ codec, downloaded to a hard drive for editing of the digital files.

"Owen wanted to create a unique look for the *American Idol* sequences, and he chose Super 8 because it combines a classic film look with a modern application for stunning results," offers Rhonda Vigeant, VP of Marketing at Pro8mm. "We provide a one-stop solution with KODAK Super 8mm film, lab processing and HD scanning with just a two-day turn around."

Smith always felt his Super 8 footage would mimic a dad following his kid as they audition and make the trip across country to compete in the iconic *American Idol*. He never put it on a jib or a Technocrane, but lately, he has been using it in a more stylized way.

"Now," he says, "we talk about how we're going to compose the frame and how it fits into the bigger show. I relate to this medium through travel and a nostalgic emotion of family, friends and adventure. I'll always use it."



Photos: Top: Cinematographer Owen Smith. Bottom: Thousands line up for a chance to become the next *American Idol* at Mariucci Arena in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Photo by Adam Bettcher. (FOX. Copyright 2014 FOX BROADCASTING Getty Images for FOX Broadcasting)

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