

Creating the Majestic World of Stop Motion with Director of Photography Joe Passarelli

Owen Shapiro 00:04

Welcome to Kino society. With Owen Shapiro. On today's podcast, we have Joe Passarelli, cinematographer, and director of photography. Joe's most recent film Anomalisa, premiered in 2015. Yeah, tele read Film Festival and won the Grand Jury Prize at seven, the second Venice International Film Festival, which is a big accomplishment. So, Joe, you're pretty well known because you work in this stop motion movie called anomalisa. But I want to know who you were before all of this, how do you start your journey in the film industry? What drew you to cinematography?

Joe Passarelli 00:48

I started out. When I got into wanting to be a filmmaker, I found out right away, they wanted to be a cinematographer. So I kind of looked into the best kind of training or schools that I could find. And I came across Columbia College, Chicago, and I'm actually from Chicago. So I did my undergrad studies there. And then after that, I went to the American Film Institute for my graduate school. And I kind of brought me out to Los Angeles, and I've been out here, I live in LA now. And again, that was kind of what got me started and kind of post to my endeavors, probably people I met while I was at ASI. It's kind of how I got into stop motion, as well. The director of my thesis film, I was the DP, director, Duke Johnson, he got into stop motion after we got out of afib. And he brought me on a few projects and then he and Charlie Kaufman set up to make the stop motion. Film anomalisa he actually brought me on to that. So it's kind of a journey, but I still kind of in that time through you know, kind of graduating from EFI until shooting more full time now I work as 728 lighting technician on TV shows live action TV shows mainly and different lighting departments and live action films and shot quite a few low budget live action films as well. And then ever since anomalisa, I've still done live action but I get a lot of visual effects work and stop motion work. To Can I recently worked on a stop motion segment of the show Cosmos possible worlds that just premiered. late September of this year, we did the Vavilov episode so if you guys get a chance, check that out. It's really cool all the flashbacks are have all done stop motion animation kind of in the vein of anomalisa kind of a realistic but you know, dreamy type of a quality to it.

Owen Shapiro 03:14

So have you done the animation outside of solution.

Joe Passarelli 03:19

kind of part of the like within the stop motion world or when I'm working on stop motion projects, a lot of the elements that get added into it are kind of photographed and an old school animation way. We basically have a camera shoot it down at a few planes of glass and they put two D like flat images on those planes of glass and animated animation I've shot and kind of advised a little bit on slick live action elements that I've shot working with visual effects departments and stuff like that. So he's going to work in the stop motion world it's very fast shooting is very post heavy. So it's kind of fun, you get to you

know, work with a lot of different people to kind of all add to that image should keep everyone on the same page as well being the kind of the first one in line to start the

Owen Shapiro 04:18

process. Routine as a director of photography. What does your typical day look like when shooting a movie?

Joe Passarelli 04:25

Well, that basically depends on on the film, like right before Coronavirus, I was shooting a low budget live action film six day weeks so basically like, you know, like a couple months of shooting my whole life is kind of surrounding that movie. So you know, get up get to work and kind of talk with you know, first thing always gonna find the director, Director go over, you know, plan Any questions? has about, you know, how we're going to cover stuff. And then from there we can to speak with like the ad, go over, you know, their plan for the day, make sure everyone's plans work. And then from there, I just basically peel off and start working directly with the gaffer, and the camera department and grip department to get everything set up.

Owen Shapiro 05:25

So how is this routine different when you're shooting for a series,

Joe Passarelli 05:29

you know, it really doesn't differ as much. So as I think unlike a series, or something, that's something of more of a longer term project. I think that the, like the gaffer, and the camera operators, would be, you know, right away in that first conversation with the ad and the, you know, after I kind of touch base with the director, you know, it's kind of a more of a communal setting, because everybody's been there for months. So we all kind of talk about the day as kind of a bigger group, I would say, we kind of be, you know, the difference on a longer series versus a movie where it's a little more intimate than here, you know, really kind of focused on a very specific vision of, you know, the director versus, you know, series, there's a lot of becomes more of a minute, you know, machine where, you know, everybody's got to make sure they, you know, accomplish their goal for the day.

Owen Shapiro 06:28

Yes. So I know that an animation is a bit different in terms of how much vision to creator has over the animators. So how is that how much creative vision do the animators have over the directors?

Joe Passarelli 06:44

I wouldn't necessarily say it's, it's more of like how the animators because I feel like the animators, just as a, you know, spectator of their work so often, you know, each one of them brings their own very specific way of animating, you know, and it's just the, you know, feeling that they have, or whatever. So, I think, you know, I think when a director is, you know, kind of working with the animators, I think they, the best I've seen is when they kind of like almost cast the roles, you know, so it'd be a certain character, and they would want a specific animator always to animate that character, because they, you know, that animators can have feelings come out in that character over time. Remember, a lot of that

was done on anomalisa. And I think that kind of shows there were certain animators that did very specific characters, and you know, they can have that emotion after a long time of doing that character.

Owen Shapiro 07:51

I think that's a cool thing that you could do in stop motion. As someone who seen a good majority of what Caitlyn worked on, I've done Elisa definitely felt a little bit different from his other works. It's like in terms of terms of the writing as well it just felt a bit not that it's bad it's a great movie, but it just it felt feel very different. What do you say do you have a special technique to shoot that makes your work different from the rest

Joe Passarelli 08:18

say I tried to as best I can kind of have captured the emotion that like the directors going for it became it make it in such a way that it looks like real life, you know, this kind of really nice moments in life that are out there and you know, capturing that on film and having the opportunity sometimes just create it from scratch and like a you know, an effects world or a miniature world or stop motion world is really fun. And I think I think that's it like I really enjoy that challenge of creating like very visually real yet unique Glee real you know, those those moments that you see when the sun setting or something and then trying to create that, on its own is what the what, I don't know if I puts me above any anybody else, but that's what I enjoy the most. The biggest challenge that I like to take on movies is

Owen Shapiro 09:21

definitely film that serves its purpose and kudos. So can you tell us a bit more about the process of shooting this film?

09:27

Yeah,

Joe Passarelli 09:27

I mean, when we shot anomalisa, it started out relatively low budgets, as far as stop motion films go. So it was crowdfunded. And after time, you know, we, as a production realized we needed to get more money than the crowdfunding was providing. So it was kind of a crossroads at the project. Just keep going down the path of making the best quality piece we can, possibly running out of money or, you know, just figure out a way to make it work. And we chose To make the best quality thing we could, and it was a good move, because, you know, we ended up with a good chunk of the movie being shot. And we had, you know, the producer setup tours of investors to come through and hop on board. And, you know, luckily, there was a few that did, and, you know, we kind of pushed forward in that same vein of trying to, you know, make the best quality, we can, in a very, you know, kind of like a down home setting, everything was built on site, you know, just like everything was built in the other room from where we were shooting where all the stages were. So people are making some molds and stuff or carving stuff out of wood printing faces. Last minute, you know, painting faces, if they were off color, stuff like that. I think that the uniqueness and shedding chosen anomalisa

Owen Shapiro 11:00

differences, a counter between shooting animated films versus shooting with real life people,

Joe Passarelli 11:04

animated films, ever, there's a lot more pre planning that goes into it in such a way that you know, me, as the Director of Photography, it really has a lot to do with what the visual effects department is doing, the animation department is doing. So I have to, you know, be a little more mechanical in the way that I approached things at first, you know, in a vision going, but then I have to make sure run it by a lot of different people versus live action, you know, with a lot of pre planning, there are very spontaneous moments that tend to happen, you know, Haitian scout something with the seven D and then you know, you show up with all the actors and everything, you know, you're, there's a good chance, you're going to find something a little better than you did before where in animation, that's, that's got to be pre planned, which also has advantages, because you have a lot of time to think about it, you know, my email is being passed around about ideas and colors and color schemes and with different color lights needing to be put where so there is a lot of room and stop motion to get it exactly how you want it.

Owen Shapiro 12:23

So do you have a preference for either of these,

Joe Passarelli 12:26

you know, I, I kind of like splitting my time between both right now, because of the different qualities because of the spontaneous nature of live action, I don't think I could physically be capable of shooting live action 12 months out of the year, and stop motion is a much more relaxed pace. And, you know, I guess in a lot of stuff is pre planned. So when you show up, you know, you kind of, you know, it's significantly more less stressful than live action, because even as far as the lighting and everything, like I have a pretty good idea coming into the stop motion things where I have to put stuff just because space is small, you know, and a lot of stuff I've already kind of worked with the production designer to build into the sense. So, but, you know, the live action, the, you know, that pace is quite thrilling. And, you know, it's always fun to have the adrenaline pumping for a couple months and, you know, make a really cool film,

Owen Shapiro 13:24

do you have any advice for people like me who want to pick it big in the film industry of cinematography origin,

Joe Passarelli 13:31

best advice is just to just to get out there and keep you know, keep working at it as much as you can, you know, try to take on as many different aspects of the, you know, the visual image as you can, you know, I put a lot of lighting work and through that was able to learn a lot about like LEDs and stuff like that and that has really helped me and stop motions have been able to kind of manufacture small little lights just with some basic like you know, and it knowledge you know, and then trying to use it in a creative way. So, you know, I think being resourceful also, you know, is a good thing you know, if you know someone wants to hire you on just shoot something small. I mean, you never know that could end up like you know, winning film festivals and you know, furthering your career more than you can imagine. So it's always good just to make the best of every situation you know, shot stuff that has gone really poorly with a lot of money on the end and stuff where there was no money that I personally think

looks great, you know, and so does director so it's always you know, whatever you kind of make of the situation is, has taken me a while to learn but once I learned that it's made it a little more fun.

Owen Shapiro 14:54

However, during the films that have inspired you in the past, like is there anything that makes Do you want to become a photographer?

Joe Passarelli 15:02

Yeah, you know, it's not to the generic or have a predictable answer. But I'm a huge fan of the Godfather Part One and two. And once I, you know, went to film school early on at Columbia College and found out what a cinematographer guys, I was like, Oh my god, this is, you know, the cinematographer really made this movie, even better than, you know, it could have been, I was, I don't know, every few years, kind of watch that for a little inspiration, light stuff in a way that, you know, kind of goes with the feeling and mood of the movie more So then, than a lot of other stuff that I've seen.

Owen Shapiro 15:45

So now you've built an amazing career and cinematography industry, what's next for you,

Joe Passarelli 15:50

I'm just gonna keep trying to, you know, kind of better gig try to try to get better with each job, you know, and try to learn from the past job. So, you know, now there's a lot of technology coming out. So I try to try to utilize that in such a way that maybe we'll make my job easier, and go faster, you know, something like that. And, you know, being on set, even if it's laid back, stop motion, production is still gotta, you know, still gotta move quickly, always as a cinematographer. So any little bit of stuff like that helps, I think, you know, in the, in the near future, you know, really getting into more, you know, high quality LED, stuff like that. A lot of great, bigger companies to carry and crowdsource sores are making really amazing products that have made the job of the cinematographer easier. Now, with the skypanel, you can have some really awesome looking fire lights and top lights and stuff that before would take, you know, a handful of grips and, you know, true well trained grips and electricians with flags. And you know what, not trying to do that now with, you know, a really good programmer, you know, that's gonna look great now, and it's very easy to do.

Owen Shapiro 17:22

So do you have any upcoming projects? Do you have anything that you're currently working on?

Joe Passarelli 17:28

Yeah, right now I'm actually shooting a pilot for the network, p YGZ. Which is the gonna be the after sci fi and after dark, more of in the vein of Adult Swim. We're shooting a stop motion pilot for that. About a group of aliens at a bar in space. So hopefully that gets picked up. It's a fun project to be working out. Yeah.

Owen Shapiro 18:01

So finally working by listeners find and connect with you.

Joe Passarelli 18:05

You can always go to my website, Joe pastorelli.com. And, you know, my email on there, you can always feel free to you know, ask me anything. I'm always good at responding

Owen Shapiro 18:15

to stuff. That's all for today. Don't forget, you can subscribe to Kino society on iTunes and Spotify. Thank you so much for your attention.

Joe Passarelli 18:24

Thank you.