Editor Profile: Jason Ballantine

Nominated for an FCCA & AFI Award in 2005 for Best Editing on Wolf Creek, we catch up with Jason Ballantine, one of Australia's hardest working editors, to discuss his history with Avid and latest work on Rogue.

Rogue, the second feature film by writer-director Greg McLean of *Wolf Creek* fame, tells the story of a group of tourists stranded on a tidal island with one very large, nasty crocodile. Starring Radha Mitchell (*Pitch Black, Finding Neverland*) and Michael Vartan (*Alias*), the film reunites McLean with editor Jason Ballantine, whose stellar career has led him to Hollywood, following the success of their previous collaboration. *Wolf Creek* grossed approximately $6 million at the Australian box office and approximately $25 million in the US, making it the most successful Australian film of 2005.

Rogue is funded by Hollywood executive producers Bob and Harvey Weinstein through their company Dimension Films. Filming on location in crocodile-infested waters was a challenge for the 80-plus crew. Bringing it all together in the editing suite, Jason and his two assistant editors worked on two Avid Film Composers set up on Unity at 14:1 with 4TB of storage, and the film was shot on Sony HDCAM F900 cameras.

Can you talk about how you worked on *Rogue* and the differences between how you worked on *Wolf Creek*?

There were many aspects that differed from low budget *Wolf Creek* to modest budget *Rogue*, from the Editor's point of view.

Time was the biggest benefit from the higher budget. I had the time to edit an animatic for the Director during pre-production. We had time to discuss the previsualisation with Sydney based VFX company Fuel.

The shoot was much longer but the edit period was too. Large VFX components always lengthen the post production schedule. Discovering your film will not happen overnight.

The one thing that doesn't change through budget levels is the wonderful sense of responsibility that fuels the fire to piece together the absolute best moments in making the film.

What path of events led you to become an editor?

I did a Bachelor of Arts - Visual Arts with the University of South Australia straight out of High School in the late 80s. Although my initial interest lay with drawing and photography, the course introduced me to film and video. I entered the South Australia Young Film Makers Contest and won categories over consecutive years. One of the prizes was work experience with Network 8 (at the time, Adelaide's leading television post production facility). The week's work experience became a job offer.

Tell us about the first time you sat down with an Avid.

It was in 1992; from memory a version 3. There were a couple 500MB cartridges to flip in the optical media drives. I was thrilled to watch AVR1! The non-linear principal was the real winner after battling with the inaccuracy of Umatic tape editing.

Unlike today, back in the early 90s Avid knowledge was a little light on the ground in Australia. I sat and read the manual and with many hours of trial and error, became very comfortable with operating the system. I operated for local TVC Editors and Directors, and soon gained an understanding of editing techniques, principals and language. It was a great way to start a career.

What was your first big break?

My first long form project as an Assistant Editor was on a television miniseries for Editor Denise Haratzis in 1993. This introduced me to a real sense of crew camaraderie as opposed to TVCs - having that eleventh hour visit from the agency wanting to justify their existence.

But for me, my real film industry break came the following year when Kennedy Miller asked me to assist Editor Marcus D'Arcy on their new film *Babe* in Sydney. This was a version 5 Film Composer with a massive (for the time) 72GB of storage for the AVR3 pictures.

Tell us about your other involvement with Avid.

In April 1995 I conceived and ran my own Assistant Editor's course for those wanting to learn how to use Avid on a film project, using Frameworks' (now Tracks) facility on weekends. Over the years I taught over 60 students. It was very popular and really only stopped due to my other commitments.

In May 1996, I obtained my Certified Instructor accreditation and presented an Editing Instructional Video for Assistant Editors for the Australian Film and Television Radio School (AFTRS). That same year, I was an assistant editor on the feature film *Dark City.* I used MediaShare for the first time, and it was really exciting to be able to share media rather than only have local storage. We were connected to two Film Composers with three 63GB towers, using AVR6 res.

In August 1997, as 1st Assistant Editor/VFX Editor on *Babe - Pig in the City* we used MediaShare

again, with three Film Composers, and for the time, a whopping seven 63GB towers, in AVR6 res. That year I also reviewed the PAL version 7 Film Composer manual.

What motivates you to keep exploring your craft?

My motivation comes from simply wanting to be successful. I love the creative and technical aspects to editing. I love the journey of discovery in watching rushes, trialling cuts and finding that story. So it's passion that motivates me.

The greatest thing about using a system that you're comfortable with is the operation never gets in the way of the creativity. Avid has such a brilliant history and a product that is number one in the work place. There is a real sense of security in that knowledge. The product is continually developing to accommodate the new ways of our industry.

You're currently in LA, living 'the dream' and cutting Hollywood studio films. How are you feeling about the future?

I feel great about the past, present and the future. This current opportunity at ScreenGems is a wonderful chance to impress and get on a studio list. It is a new branch for future connections. As much as I love Australia and our local industry, LA is the centre of the universe when it comes to film making. It's not hard to get excited being here!

Rogue is unleashed on cinemas on November 8. Visit **www.jasonballantine.com** for more information.

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