JOURNAL ENTRY 3 - DAY FOR NIGHT

Whenever I have needed to shoot a video at night, I have always setup, waited for dusk, shot as quick as possible and packed up. This has always meant cold crew, grains shots and plenty of unusable footage. However, directors have been getting around this for long time by shooting nighttime shots during the day, day for night! Below I will detail some of the techniques and tips I have uncovered during my research and discuss how I can use them in future productions.

SETTING THE SCENE

Before you even get the camera out, it is important to choose the correct location and plan out how you intend the scene to look. These are a few tips I have picked up.

No sky in the shot

Seeing the daytime sky in the shot is a big giveaway as it will be much brighter than any objects on the ground, even after darkening. Shooting from a slightly higher angle can compensate for this.[1]

If the sky is needed in the shot, for example, in a landscape, there are a couple of things that can help you out. Using a 'Matte Box' can help reduce the light spilling onto the lens from above and the sides.[2] Using a 'Graduated ND filter' will darken the sky to a more reasonable level, however it is necessary to use a tripod to keep the edge of the gradient on the horizon.

The Sun

Around noon, the sun is at its highest and brightest. This can cause problems when shooting day for night. Most guides recommend shooting in the afternoon, after around 3pm for best results. The guides also say to keep the sun behind the talent. The reasoning behind this is that with sunlight spilling onto the talent's face, the talent would be very brightly lit compared to the background, this does not happen at night. Keeping the sun behind the talent gives a good backlight and keeps the subject in the shadows.

Mis-en scene & Practicals

One guide reminded me, nobody is awake at 2am! It is important to keep the set clear, people walking around in the background will ruin the verisimilitude. Also, keeping the audio quiet and introducing some ambient 'night' noises will add to the illusion that it is

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[1] Reff, M. (2010) Day for night. Available at: http://www.videomaker.com/article/14796-day-for-night (Accessed: 29 October 2015).

[2] Anderson, S. (2001) Hollywood's dark secret: Shooting day for night. Available at: http://www.videomaker.com/article/8150-hollywoods-dark-secret-shooting-day-for-night (Accessed: 29 October 2015).

night time. Using practicals such as torches, phone LED's, lighters and candles will also lead the viewer to believe that it is night time.

TECHNICAL SETUP

White balance

To simulate nighttime, filmmakers often play on our misunderstanding that moonlight is blue. According to Noam Kroll from premiumbeat.com, "Most people believe that blue light represents moonlight, and, while sunlight is considered to have blue tint due to its cool color temperature (5600 - 6300 degrees Kelvin compared to a tungsten desk lamp at 3200 degrees Kelvin or a fire which might be 1800 degrees Kelvin), moonlight is much bluer."[3] This means that by shooting with a blue white balance can help you simulate night time without having to force the colour too much in post production. This can be achieved in a few different ways.

1. Yellow Card
White balancing with a piece of yellow card rather than white can throw the white balance into the blue territory, however it is down to choice to pick the right colour yellow.

2. Colour Temperature Orange
Taking a white balance as you usually would but through a CTO gel will accurately throw your white balance into the blue.

3. Manual Temperature
Manually setting the white balance to a Tungsten temperature around 3,200K

Darkening the shot

All guides I have looked at recommend underexposing by 1-3 stops, but most recommend 2. However, closing down the iris limits the amount of light getting onto the sensor, and at nighttime, you would have it open and want as much as possible. Having the iris open also makes the depth of field shallower, hiding any goofs that may be in the background. An alternative to this is using ND filters to limit the amount of light hitting the lens. ND4 seems to be the most recommended but guides range form ND1 to ND6. The Sony NX3's only go up to ND3.

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[3]Kroll, N. (2014) 5 reasons your day for night footage Doesn't look right. Available at: http://www.premiumbeat.com/blog/5-reasons-day-for-night-footage-doesnt-look-right/ (Accessed: 29 October 2015).

Compressing Highlights

One guide recommends crushing the highlights in a scene to lower the dynamic range, which is quite small at night. A camera operator could use picture profiles to set a custom 'day for night' profile with highlights caused and other enhancements.

DO IT IN POST

There are several guides like the one titled, "How to create day for night in after effects in 5 minutes"[4]. You could do the entire process in post production, however it requires rotoscoping, sky replacement, colour correction, special effects and more.

CONCLUSION

I have leant a lot from this and I will certainly be trying this out in the future. I will need to take a look at   how I can apply it to my particular setup and If I need to purchase extra equipment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Anderson, S. (2001) Hollywood's dark secret: Shooting day for night. Available at: http://www.videomaker.com/article/8150-hollywoods-dark-secret-shooting-day-for-night (Accessed: 29 October 2015).
2. How to create day for night in after effects in 5 minutes (2015) Available at: http://filmmakeriq.com/2012/11/how-to-create-day-for-night-in-after-effects-in-5-minutes/ (Accessed: 30 October 2015).
3. Kroll, N. (2014) 5 reasons your day for night footage Doesn't look right. Available at: http://www.premiumbeat.com/blog/5-reasons-day-for-night-footage-doesnt-look-right/ (Accessed: 29 October 2015).
4. Reff, M. (2010) Day for night. Available at: http://www.videomaker.com/article/14796-day-for-night (Accessed: 29 October 2015).

IMAGES

Image used from http://www.videomaker.com/article/14796-day-for-night
Link: http://www.videomaker.com/sites/videomaker.com/files/styles/magazine_article_secondary/public/articles/14796/b_23.jpg?itok=5OVhq0Fw

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[4] How to create day for night in after effects in 5 minutes (2015) Available at: http://filmmakeriq.com/2012/11/how-to-create-day-for-night-in-after-effects-in-5-minutes/ (Accessed: 30 October 2015).