

OAKLAND, CA, September 18, 2013 **/24-7PressRelease/** -- PBS recently made a [documentary](#) about digital cinema entitled, "Side by Side: The Science, Art and Impact of Digital Cinema." The documentary features Keanu Reeves as narrator and on-camera interlocutor. As a major player in the transition to digital cinema, [Russell Ferstandig](#) is excited that the spotlight is finally starting to shine on this innovative area of cinema.

The PBS documentary is extremely detailed in how it traces the evolution from photochemical filmmaking to digital filmmaking. The hour-long documentary includes a variety of major film directors, including James Cameron, David Fincher, George Lucas and Martin Scorsese. Russell Ferstandig also notes that the documentary highlights the differing opinions of cinematographers regarding the pros and cons of digital filmmaking.

Digital filmmaking has emerged as a new technology that challenges the standard of photochemical filmmaking, the dominant method of filmmaking since the late 19th century. After one hundred years, the use of photochemical films has reached a historic tipping point, as digital technologies have recently evolved to the point that they just might become the new standard for cinema. The question arises: is it the end of film? Will film become the exception?

Digital filmmaking first began with the technological advances in the 1970s, but it was not until later on that commercial movies were shot with digital cameras. Denmark's Dogma 95 filmmakers, such as Thomas Vinterberg, Lars von Trier and others, found photochemical film to be too restrictive. Film only allows shooting in 10-minute increments. With digital, however, you can shoot as long as a scene calls for. This offers increased flexibility and mobility when filming. However, the images on digital cameras are often static and grainy because of the limited number of pixels the cameras are able to capture. With new technology, the number of pixels per frame has risen, increasing the image's clarity, definition and detail. Recently, the Red Epic camera has given filmmakers the ability to create 5,000-pixel images. Moreover, besides easier access to filmmaking technologies, another dynamic aspect of digital cinema is the expansive possibilities of potential visual effects, which are much more limited when using photochemical film.

While digital technology is the new aesthetic of cinema, Russel Ferstandig is well aware that others are not convinced that photochemical filmmaking is dead yet. There is something about the texture and the grain structure of film that many filmmakers still desire and do not want to throw out altogether. This has prompted debates about what is gained and what is lost with the new digital technology. Russel Ferstandig finds it very interesting that "Side by Side" highlights the disagreements that have emerged among filmmakers over this question.

Russell Ferstandig On The Impact of Digital Cinema

Written by Australian Business

According to Ferstandig, the project manager and chief architect of the world's first true end to end digital cinema distribution and exhibition project, Miramax's "Bounce." in November, 2000, the side by side projection of a full screen shot of Ben Affleck's face, half film and half digital, was probably the single most impressive demonstration to the press and others who attended the press conference at the AMC Empire 25 Theatre on 42nd St. in NYC. Ferstandig summarizes, "What was most obvious in this demonstration was the marked improvement in physical stability of the on screen image with digital exhibition compared to film since there is no physical movement of the source through a film-gate. With time, as soon as several days, one also sees marked degradation of the quality of the image with film compared to digital images due to the impact of heat in the film gate on the film emulsion plus scratches from dust and dirt. For me one of the single most important moments at the exhibition was standing next to Ben Affleck during the side by side digital/film exhibition and hearing him comment, "I cannot believe the difference. I want my onscreen image to be digitally projected whenever possible"."

At ShoWest 1999, the major movie exhibition industry meeting in Las Vegas, Russel Ferstandig, literally dragged Robert Rodriguez and his children in pajamas to a late night custom showing of the best digital projection technology from JVC that he had set up for Rodriguez. Although Rodriguez was very familiar with shooting in digital, he had never seen digital exhibition on a large screen. Ferstandig recounts, "Robert turned to me after about 5 seconds and said, "I am convinced and will demand that my movies be exhibited in digital whenever possible". Several months later, through Ferstandig's and Miramax's guidance, Rodriguez's film "Spy Kids 2" was exhibited digitally, as the first digital presentation in Disney California Adventure's new Aladdin Theater.

While people like Cameron, Lucas and Robert Rodriguez are strong supporters of digital filmmaking, others like cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond and film editor Anne Coates defend the fine details of the imagery created in traditional photochemical filmmaking. The documentary goes back and forth between the two sides of the debate and concludes with the observation that digital filmmaking is here to stay. Russel Ferstandig wholeheartedly agrees with this conclusion.

ABOUT:

[Russel Ferstandig](#) worked for 6 years with Miramax, where he urged the company to transition to digital cinema. This ultimately led to the shift from photochemical films to digital, and put Miramax on the digital cinema chart.