



CINEMATOGRAPHERS BEHIND THE CAMERA

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with **Joel Honeywell**

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Joel Honeywell



With the world's biggest names on his reel, multi award-winning DoP Joel Honeywell charts his journey and reveals his surprising approach to cinematography.

From music promos for the likes of Stormzy, Jorja Smith and Maverick Saber to global brand commercials for Nike, Vogue and Adidas, London-based DoP Joel Honeywell has racked up an impressive list of names for his portfolio. Winning Best Cinematographer at both We The People's Film Festival and Athens Fashion Film Festival as well as Honorable Mention at Los Angeles Film Awards this year already, Joel is no stranger to creating work that resonates and connects with audiences worldwide.

Speaking to LBB's Sunna Coleman, as part of Cinelab London's series of Cinematographers Behind the Camera, Joel shares the chance encounter that led to his first job in the industry and how he uses emotion to lead his creative decisions.



“The level of attention to detail increases and the amount of mistakes gets smaller. I really like that.”

- Joel Honeywell

Tell us a bit about your journey into the industry.

I always had a creative spark, even as a kid. I was constantly doodling in a notepad and when I was four years old my grandma noticed that my drawings had a sense of shape and form and weren't just childlike nonsense! She was the first to encourage my parents to push me into learning art.

One summer break from my Fda Film Art studies I was at a local coffee shop when a man came running in holding lots of architectural drawings. He was in a huge rush and realised he'd forgotten his wallet, so I offered to pay for his coffee just as one of those kind gestures you do without thinking. He was very thankful and asked me about what I do and then offered me a job in the art department that he worked with for a TV production studio that very same day. I worked there for a couple of years and that's how I first got a taste for the industry.



STORMZY | BLINDED BY YOUR GRACE PT. 2

So how did you move from the art department to the camera department?

After I'd learned the ropes, I started to chat to the different camera crews a lot more as I was intrigued by what they did. One of them, Hopi Demattio, offered me a lot of advice and we bumped into each other on another job where he taught me more about what he did. After I left uni, I stayed in touch with Hopi and he called me to set one day to help out as a camera assistant. I continued to work with him from there and after four years as a clapper loader, I stepped up and began focus pulling, then a few years later, started shooting for myself.

I shot my very first video for a band called Haus and that really launched my career, leading me to work with director, Matilda Finn who is represented by Stink Films. We shot three videos together that all received award nominations and won Matilda Best New Director at UK MVA whilst getting my name out there at the same time. I got signed to WPA based off of those videos.

You say in your website bio that you should “never feel bigger than the script” or “in the way of the performance or the art” - what do you mean by this?

I try to approach projects in a way that doesn't force my DNA onto it. It's strange but I don't want people to see a piece of work and know that it was shot by me - I want to have the opposite effect because to me it feels like a disservice to the script. I'm there to serve it and do it justice. I don't want anyone to be able to identify who shot it because the story should be strong enough on its own. There are a lot of films where you can identify the DoP without looking at the credits - it becomes more about their “style” than the story.

Where do you find your inspiration from?

I find inspiration in connections with people. I work best when I have common ground and feel emotionally invested in the people I'm collaborating with. As well as that, I find inspiration from the world around me: paintings, books, animation and music. Rhythm really helps me think in a certain way. If I tap out a rhythm, I am focusing on one sound rather than the chaos around me and helps clear my mind.

Have you worked much on film cameras? What have been some of your award-winning projects shot on film?

Half of the projects I've worked on have been shot on film. The Ayes Have It is one of my strongest projects. I had a really good connection with the director, Savanah Leaf. The project spoke to me straight away as the story is about being bi-racial and it's personal to both mine and Savanah's lives. We knew each other from before and she

approached me to create this film with her. I really believed in the idea so insisted on providing the stock for the film, which I got from Cinelab. It was amazing being able to draw upon our experiences through this film. It got nominated for Best Cinematography at Kinsale.

What sort of projects would you say are better suited to film over digital cameras?

There are many factors such as budget, lighting conditions, resolution, influences, but the core reason for me comes down to feeling an emotion. When I read a script or treatment, if there is a track to it I ask to be sent the track so I can feel the whole experience of the film and understand what is trying to be portrayed. If I feel like the story is a really personal human experience, then I tend to push for it to be shot on film. But more commercial projects or those that are very technical, or not financially viable for film, I tend to shoot on digital.

There's a balance to understanding what's right for a project and what's not. I try to make an honest decisions based on each project... as it's not about me, it's about the script!

You need the money to be on the screen and not in the media. You also need to think about what other departments will be affected in your decision, so that's a major factor in making the choice.

In this digital age, do you think film still has a place in the industry?

Yes, definitely. You can get a different result completely, whether you want a grainy image, softer texture, muted or vibrant colours, something crisp and clean, or how you want highlights to behave.



LOUS AND THE YAKUZA: DILEMME

Having different brushes and tools at my disposal allows me to deliver the best choice for the project.

I also find that the crew put in extra effort when shooting on film because of the prestige and finite nature that comes with the medium. The level of attention to detail increases and the amount of mistakes gets smaller. I really like that.

Who have been some of the most interesting people you have worked with or shot?

Lous and The Yakuza: Dilleme with director Wendy Morgan was the first time I got to work with heavily choreographed movement. I learnt a lot on it and enjoyed the challenge of paying attention to dancers whilst capturing emotion to intertwine with the lot.

I also loved working on Aldous Harding: Fixture Picture with Jack Whitely. He had been watching a lot of old Eastern European films and wanted to create a sense of intrigue and something unique and weird about the video. We focused a lot on the mise-en-scene, from space, movement and costume to colour.

The reds were the most vibrant thing in the whole image against bleached out and blue-hued backgrounds. I married this very vintage Zoom lens with a combination of contrast and resolution-reducing filters to really deteriorate the image as much as I could. I then added a red enhancer to make the costume's colour pop.

For me, the most interesting people to collaborate with are the ones that really want to push the art and go for something new or unique. Too many to name.



ALDOUS HARDING - FIXTURE PICTURE

How do you hope to develop your work this year?

I've started to assemble my own lens kit so I can take it wherever I go. I've always been a bit of a gearhead when it comes to cameras and I want to create more meaningful unique-looking narrative projects.

With the lockdown measures in place I'm not working as much right now but I'm using the down time to research as well as working on personal health and reconnecting with family and friends.

CREDIT: LBB ONLINE