



Left: Still frame from a forthcoming music video that Mark recently shot (above) for Maverick Sabre's *Into Hope*, directed by OJ Deady

a glass act

For almost as long as GTC member **Mark Warmington** has been excited by creating cinematic imagery, he's been on a quest. Appreciating that the choice of glass one selects for the camera is perhaps the most vital decision when creating any shot, lenses have always been a very particular, personal kind of passion. Having owned literally dozens of different lenses over the years, his most recent optical acquisition highlighted to him that perhaps the search for his own sweet spot might not be fulfilled off the shelf.

Talk to anyone who uses cameras for a living, or even just as a hobby, and they'll probably have some strong opinions regarding their favourite lenses. As well they might: being the first place that the light lands, the lens is a crucial element in creating an image – still or moving.

It might just be the case that we live in a 'golden age' for cinematographers. As camera technology develops, we have more and more technical options available to us, which in turn opens up greater creative freedom.

Keep your lens close

Many cinematographers have really strong, long-lasting relationships with certain lenses. Of course, not every lens is suitable for every project, but it's not uncommon to see DoPs returning to their favourite glass over many years of a career. Familiarity, when it comes to lenses, can breed trust – there's a certain comfort in really knowing how a particular optic can perform under a variety of different circumstances. It's common knowledge that the much-lauded Roger Deakins ASC, BSC has shot multiple movies on the (in my opinion superb) ARRI/Zeiss Master Primes, citing their flawless performance, optical clarity and control of flare as being important to his style of naturalistic cinematography.

However, digital sensors have brought about a huge renaissance in the 'vintage' lens market – in both the cine and the stills worlds. I often think it's interesting that the term 'vintage' can get used to describe pieces that are, quite simply, just old; shove an ageing bit of glass on a camera and, hey presto, that's 'vintage'. The *Cambridge English Dictionary* definition actually shows the word to mean 'of high quality and

lasting value', which I think is pertinent when using the term to refer to lenses of old.

Regarding vintage lenses within the context of this article, and in the interests of simplicity, I'm going to keep things spherical, as opposed to anamorphic.

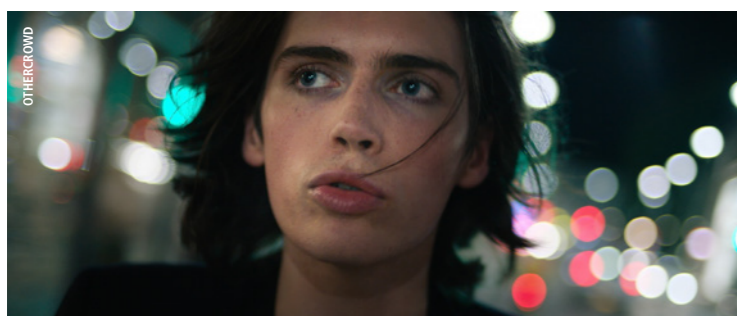
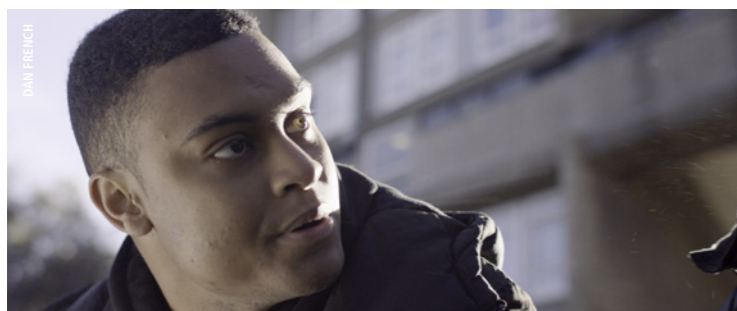
Fortune favours the old

It's undeniable that the regaining of popularity of some of these lenses from the past in recent times has led to their prices rocketing. A friend of mine told me recently that just over 10 years ago, he could have bought a full set of Zeiss Super Speed MkIIIs for about £8000 – a figure that nowadays you could multiply nearly tenfold. I've heard similar tales from people who have previously passed up on Canon K35s and old Cooke Speed Panchros, as they had considered them to be 'old' technology – only to see the error of their ways now!

Personally, I've long been a fan of Leica for the distinctive look that comes with their lenses: warmish tones, creamy bokeh and buttery fall-off on focus. I've owned a Leica Rangefinder for many years and take all my still photographs on it with Leica M lenses. It's a special little camera and the lenses are incredible.



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Still frames (from top): Music video for Hollie Cook's *Dance in the Sunshine* (dir: OJ Deady); documentary feature *Maverick* (dir: OJ Deady); commercial for Maybelline New York (dir: OJ Deady); short film *Loitering* (dir: Dan French); and music video for Val James' *Perfect Night* (dir: Othercrowd)

Narrowing the field

The wide assortment of cameras and lenses I've used is as varied as the projects for which I have chosen each pairing of body and glass. As each combination brings its own unique characteristics to the final images that are captured, I enjoy exploring this visual variety from project to project as appropriate. There is also the question of practicality – for example, I shoot most of my documentary work on a pair of Angénieux Optimo zoom lenses I own. Prime lenses are lovely, but not always suitable when I need to be reactive to an unfolding situation.

I was finding that the more I worked with the ARRI Amira, the more I appreciated its versatility and relevance to the type of work I do and it soon made a lot of sense for me to own one. So I went for it and, lined up with the Angénieux, a True Lens Services 'Morpheus' (itself a rehoused stills lens – the classic photographer's favourite Nikon 80–200mm zoom), and some handy accessories, this would form the backbone of my standard filming kit for a lot of my work from then on. I did still have a set of Sony prime lenses left over from a previous camera package I'd owned (a Sony F55), but found I didn't really have a place for them in this new kit lineup. They were actually very good for what they cost, but when I wanted a sharp, modern optic for a project, they couldn't compete with the – albeit much more expensive – options from other lens manufacturers. So, I found they were often staying on the shelf whilst I generally opted to use either the ARRI/Zeiss Master Primes or Cooke S4is, as better quality alternatives to the much cheaper CineAlta glass.

Familiarity breeds contentment

As they weren't getting much use, I decided to sell the CineAltas, but then, being a bit of a lens geek, I started to think about building up a set of primes that would have a more distinctive look. I'd been shooting a bit on K35s and Super Speeds, but as these were becoming very expensive, it would have been hard to justify that kind of cost for something I knew I wouldn't be using all the time. Everyone has their personal view and perspective on the idea of having one's own glass. I, for one, like owning lenses and whilst not wanting to shoot everything on the same kit, I think – as said earlier – there's definitely a value in being really familiar with a set of lenses before embarking on a job with them. Of course, one can test, but knowing exactly what characteristics a lens has under different stresses can only be found out, in my opinion, when they've been put through a wide variety of real-world situations. I read once that Stanley Kubrick liked to personally own lenses – he would go to Schneider, for example, and test out several supposedly identical 50mm lenses, then pick his favourite for his own collection.

Looks Leica perfect match

As a Leica fan I was aware that fellow appreciators were using lenses from the Leica R range – made for Leica's reflex stills cameras from 1960–2001 – but generally with adapters on things like RED cameras with EF mounts. Even with some cine modding and focus gears etc., this wouldn't really work for me, as I require PL lenses with a proper focus throw that can withstand the rigours of lens motors and such like. As I was keen to keep all my lens collection PL, because faffing with lens adapters on set isn't ideal, this, to my mind, kind of ruled out the R series. Then I did a bit more research and discovered that it was possible to have the vintage optics from these lenses stripped out and fully 'rehoused' into brand new PL

mount cine housings. The fact that these Leica lenses also cover 24x36 full frame sensors was also a big plus, with the camera manufacturers now all developing large format or full frame sensors for their new products.

After some productive telephone conversations, I decided on the company I wanted to undertake this work for me: Van Diemen Films, based in Surrey, just outside London. As the sales blurb on their website says: "Our range of Motion Picture lenses are constructed using the Van Diemen Patented Wireform™ lens drive system. This mechanical drive system provides very smooth focus movements, durability in service and resilience under severe conditions of use."

Sounded good!

Leica R – a wonderful pane

Then it was up to me to source some lenses! I found The Classic Camera store in London to be a great place to acquire vintage kit – and, as Leica specialists, they have a large catalogue of R lenses available. After some solid research on eBay, I discovered that Classic Camera charge very fair prices, not dissimilar when compared to most private sellers across Europe, but they also provide a warranty and good information on the provenance of items they stock, which, for me, is invaluable. It turned out that a couple of my lenses had been owned by a senior British monk who enjoyed collecting them, without any intent to actually use them, ever! As these lenses were made over a 40+ year period, there can be some variance in the look depending which era you buy from, as the coatings were changed periodically when Leica released newer iterations of the various focal lengths. I decided to



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focus on fairly late production models, lining up those from the 1990s in my sights. This meant I could get the second generation, improved versions in a couple of focal lengths – of course, this also made my choice the most expensive option!

After much consideration, I went for it and bought a 19mm Elmarit f2.8 (V2), 35mm Summilux f1.4 (V2), 50mm Summilux f1.4 and 80mm Summilux f1.4; the most expensive lens being the 35mm at a little over £3000. I'm having a bit of a pause until I make a decision on which focal lengths I seek out next to complete the set, but I've found these four lenses to be very workable on most jobs. The downside with the Leica R range is that they don't have consistent speed across the range. The Summilux are the fastest with an f-stop of 1.4 (this equates to a T-stop of 1.6 after conversion), but they were only made in the focal lengths as listed. The Summicron range is all f2, but doesn't go wider than 35mm, leaving only the Elmarit line for wide angle options, which are all f2.8, and Super Elmars which are slower. This is a bit of a shame, as it would be amazing if they'd made a Summilux 28mm.

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The new contract period will run from 1 May 2020 to 30 April 2021 and applications/renewals for this period can be made via the GTC website from 1 April 2020. Any applications prior to that will cover the current year (ending 30 April 2020) and should only be considered if urgent cover for an imminent shoot is required.

The GTC policy is managed by Performance Film and Media insurance, is underwritten by one of the UK's largest insurers, and is only available to fully paid-up members of the GTC.

Find out more on the GTC website: www.gtc.tv/members-area/insurance.aspx





Another still frame from *Into Hope*

Nowadays Leica have brought out a 24mm and 28mm Summilux M lens, both at f1.4; I am tempted to have one converted to slip into my set, but I suspect the look will be a bit too modern and crisp to match my R lenses. No surprise that I'm planning to do some testing on that front.

Anyway – back to the lenses that I have had converted so far. Rehousing costs were £3–4k per lens and one great thing Van Diemen managed to do, as well as create robust housings and smooth gearing, was actually to improve the close focus on the lenses – the 80mm has a minimum focus of 1.8ft from the sensor plane and the 35mm just 8in, a substantial improvement on the 20in minimum focus of the original Leica R Summilux 35mm.

Home, sweet rehome

It was an interesting experience using my set for the first time – I was somewhat nervous because, although I'd had the optics checked over by Van Diemen (and they'd been serviced at Classic Camera), they hadn't actually been on my camera yet. I'd hired a set from Cinescope (another great option for Leica R rehousing, with more top-quality engineering from True Lens Services) to use on a couple of studio shoots which



Sure, they have all the lack of performance I was fully expecting... but boy did they have that 'Leica magic'!



Clockwise from top left: Mark's treasured set of rehousing Leica primes; Van Diemen Films' rehousing Leica 50mm f1.4/T1.6; and promo of their range of Motion Picture lenses constructed using their Patented Wireform lens drive system



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involved filming closeups of models for a beauty commercial. I loved the look I got from those particular samples, but was I going to be disappointed with my own lenses? Perhaps I'd gone for the wrong era of glass and should have spent less money and bought some from the 1970s... maybe I shouldn't have started any of this in the first place? I needn't have worried; as soon as I saw the image I was thrilled. Sure, they have all the lack of performance I was fully expecting: chromatic aberration on highlights at wide open T-stops; edge softness, but boy did they have that 'Leica magic'! I've actually found since that they are much more versatile than I'd thought they might be. Unquestionably, I wouldn't shoot a car commercial with them, or anything that demanded absolute optical clarity, but where character is important (which, to be honest, is most things), I've found I can get a range of different looks out of these lenses, depending on lighting, exposure and grading. I hope the images supporting this article reflect this.

I started out by saying that cinematographers have some pretty knowledgeable opinions when it comes to lenses, so everything I've said above is highly subjective – it's down to personal sensibilities and taste around creating imagery. For me, it's less a case of technicalities, numbers and stats, and more one of instinctual process. ASC President Kees Van Oostrum summed it up brilliantly when touching on vintage optics in a recent piece in *ASC Magazine* titled 'Optical Unconsciousness' by saying that we need to: *"think, feel and be inspired to combine technical innovation with the mysterious veil of surrealism"*.

I couldn't agree more.



Fact File

Mark Warmington is a London-based Director of Photography, known mainly for his work on commercials, music videos and documentaries.

Since 2008, Mark has been filming for clients including Warner Bros, BBC, Stink Studios, We Are Social, Amazon Prime, Firecracker Films, Netflix, Twelve A.M. and Evoke. He has shot for major brands including Rolex, Jaguar Land Rover, Nike and Maybelline, and filmed a wide range of stars such as Salma Hayek, Paul Weller, Lewis Hamilton, Maverick Sabre and Andy Murray.

For more information and to see Mark's work please visit: www.markwarmington.com. Mark can also be found on Instagram – @markwarmington.

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