



Actress Priya Anand



THE COLOUR OF MAGIC

Famed colourist Kevin Shaw shares his experiences from working on Tamil-Telugu bilingual movie, 180



Early this year, I was approached by Jayendra Panchapakesan, co-founder of Chennai-based Real Images Media Technologies, to work on 180, his directorial debut. My brief was to ensure stunning images and to manage the deliverable versions so that film cinemas, digital cinemas, DVDs and internet copies would all look the same in spite of their different technologies and colour.

The easy way to keep everything the same was to grade over the smallest space, typically HD television, but neither Jayendra nor his sponsors would settle for that. They wanted the feature to exploit the full richness of film projection and the vivid colours of digital cinema.

On my arrival at Gemini Labs in March this year, I made a short test sequence on the Nucoda Film Master grading suite, which boasted a Barco DP90 projector, and then arranged for a viewing over a print as well as Qube's reference digital cinema screen. The results were wildly different and disappointing as neither of them matched the test grade.

The grading suite was recalibrated, the set-up of the film lab and digital cinema was checked, and technicians focused on all the mastering stages. Problems were discovered, tweaks made, and the test was repeated. The results were better, but still did not match.

So I started to dig deeper. I knew that the only real way to get the suite and both cinemas to match was to generate a film profile for the lab and use that in both the grading suite and the DCP mastering, but there was a concern that the film lab could not produce consistent results and the preference was to create a calibrated digital master and have the print matched to it. The match remained

Saturated images taken from a Red Camera



Actor Siddharth Narayan



unsatisfactory, however, and I continued to push for the better solution.

Discussions with the brains of each location led to an exciting discovery. The film lab, the DCP mastering, and the grading suite all used THX CineSpace to create colour management profiles for their calibrations. There was no need to record new colour tests and use a colour management service, since the necessary profiles already existed and the required software had already been installed.

The film print profile from the lab was combined with the calibrated P3 profile of the grading suite projector using the CineSpace OFX plug-in in Film Master to generate a 3D LUT for the grade. The lab easily matched its own profile and the same print profile was combined with a reference P3 source profile to make the DCP master. Finally, the three locations matched perfectly.

But that was not the final problem. To record a full-range inter-negative, I always prefer to grade in log space. Most of the source media was Red files, which could be debayered as "filmlog", but the Phantom and Canon cameras recorded linear files that did not blend in well. So these were prepared using the Film Master lin to log tool and a CineSpace conversion from rec709 to P3.

The results were stunning: saturated images that graded well and cut seamlessly with the Red scenes. The director of cinematography, Balasubramaniam, attended the colour sessions and asked me to enhance textures and lighting



Images were prepared using the Film Master lin to log tool

with shapes, keys and mattes, knowing that all audiences would see the subtleties that would make his work stand out.

Both press and audiences eagerly anticipated 180, and there was a constant demand for publicity stills. To show the visual impact, many of the stills were taken from the grading timeline and exported using another CineSpace cube that emulated the film print profile in sRGB space.

This attention to detail has paid off with complimentary reviews from both critics and audiences, many of whom single out the look of 180. Great images require a visionary director and a talented director of photography. Enhancing and exploiting those images is the responsibility of the colourist.

In the past, colourists were lucky to get a screen credit, but DI colourists can now expect to see their name along with the other post-production artists.

Since working on 180, the International Colorist Academy (ICA) has become a training partner for THX, and among the classes I teach, there is now one called "Display Calibration and Emulation" to help others understand and achieve a similar workflow.

Kevin Shaw is the co-founder of the International Colorist Academy and has been colourist for movies such as *Walk Wood*, *Monsters*, and *Break Dance*. ■