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U2's Every Breaking Wave Rides the 35mm 2-perf Trend

In order to maximize spontaneous creativity in the filmmaking moment, Steven Annis prefers to approach each assignment with a minimum of planning.

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Scene from "Every Breaking Wave" (credit: Steven Annis)

"I'm a believer in organic filmmaking," he says. "I like to give my interpretation in the moment. If you're surrounded by good production design, and you have a good director, cast, grader and editor, everything just seems to happen. It's a

perfect balance between just enough planning and the director letting his/her actors go, and then you being there to capture organically."

Annis is an in-demand cinematographer who specializes in unique imagery for music videos and commercials. His recent credits include clips for Florence and the Machine, KWABS, Bryan Ferry and Gary Clarke Jr. and commercials for Powerade, UNIQLO, Sony and Adidas.



Scene from "Every Breaking Wave" (credit: Steven Annis)

Another recent high-end project Annis framed is "Every Breaking Wave," a 13-minute visual essay set to U2's song of the same name. Directed by Aoife McArdle, the film is set in Belfast during "The Troubles," the gray and desperate milieu in which U2, now a worldwide phenomenon, got its start.



Scene from "Every Breaking Wave" (credit: Steven Annis)

At the heart of the story is a young couple's desperate love as it blooms amid the desperation and violence. To depict that black time period and setting, the filmmakers shot 35mm film in the 2

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and violence. To depict that break time period and setting, the filmmakers shot 35mm film in the 2-perf format, which results in significant cost savings in stock and processing, and delivers a widescreen frame with more pronounced filmic flavor.

"The 2-perf format made its resurgence as a money-saving device," says Annis. "But I think the format is a perfect balance. You get all the benefits of 35mm – the lenses, focal lengths, great aspect ratio – and it's just beautiful. We had used the format on the Bryan Ferry clip ("Loop De Li") and the director fell in love with the richness, colors, and the look.

When it came to the U2 project, the creative team went with exactly the same tools: a 2-perf PANAVISION PLATINUM camera with a set of Ultra Speed MKIIs, backed up with an ARRI 435 camera on STEADICAM. "I didn't look at any old photographs of the '70s or '80s, I just went in there with an image capturing device that's been around for over a century," the cinematographer explains. "Because of its nature, film needs very little manipulation and I felt confident the Kodak stock and the old lenses would put me on the right tracks."

The video played out over the course of six days around Belfast. There were explosions, car chases and fire scenes. Annis shot the entire promo on KODAK VISION3 200T Color Negative Film 5213. He often underexposed to dig in and to emphasize the grain. He gives credit to the grader, Simon Bourne at Framestore, for perfecting the color and contrast.

"Underexposure works well if you you've got extreme highlights and some ability to control the light," Annis relates. "In murky, flat light, it's harder to underexpose. But at the end of the day, we're dealing with a magical strip of chemicals. Does anybody really, truly know what's going on? Each frame of 35mm is organic and alive! You put some light on it and it plays within boundaries. It's a magical unknown quantity, and I love it."

In one tense scene, a group of young toughs check their weapons in a darkened room where strong daylight knives through a slit in the heavy curtains. A knock at the door proves to be the female lead.

Regarding his approach to this scene, Annis says, "I like a single light source. I never ever put lights inside because it plays hell with the director's vision. I think you have to be responsible as a DP and think about the budget, the schedule and what you're shooting. On a \$50 million feature, that scene

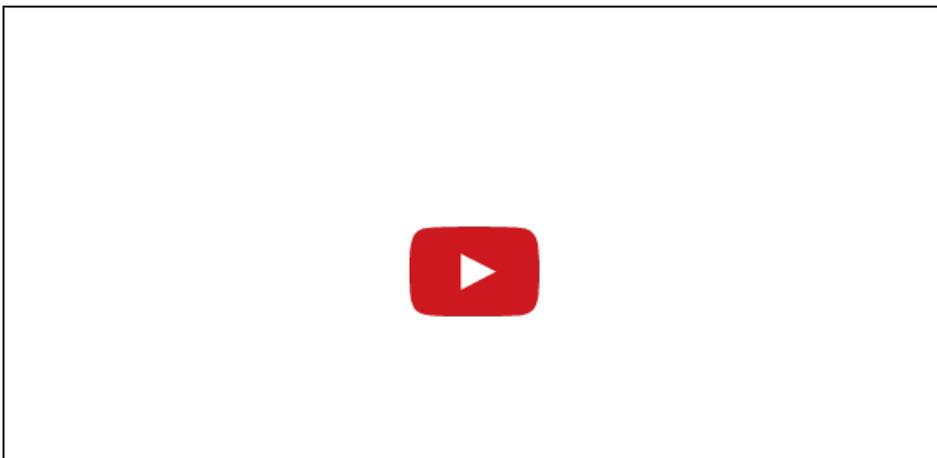
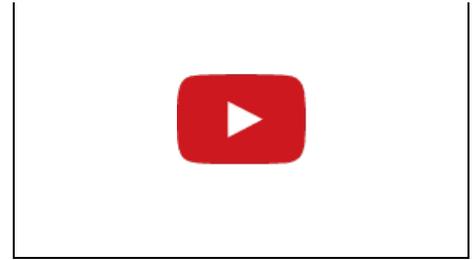
would have been shot over a whole day, and every time you turned the camera around you'd re-light. I didn't have that luxury. We had maybe an hour to shoot that scene, and it's like that on most music video jobs. You go into the location, and you find the best way to light without compromising the final image. You have to have an understanding director. A single light source, a good art department, the right curtains – it's simple, but it allows you a kind of freedom to move quickly and efficiently."

Annis has also made extensive use of the Super 16 film format. Examples include multiple Calvin Harris promos and the new Florence and the Machine videos shot in the Scottish highlands with Vince Haycock.

"Super 16, to me, is the only truly unique format on the planet, and it's an astounding thing," he says. "When I saw the rushes from the recent Florence and the Machine shoot, it took my breath away. That's the power of celluloid. Film is not the right format for every job and every budget, but I think film can live very beautifully alongside the digital formats."

Annis worked as a focus puller for eight years prior to becoming a director of photography. He says he feels privileged to work with talented collaborators.

"For me, heaven is being put in a room with an actor or actress who is going through some emotional strain, and filming this person," he says. "I'm in this industry to be part of a process – a cog in the wheel. If someone out there in the world is affected in a positive way by something I shot, that's me doing my job."





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