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Blending Still and Moving Images

by Mila Werbik (Victoria, British Columbia, Canada)

Mila Werbik has begun to make her mark on the non-commercial movie world with a series of films, many of which blend still images with video to great effect. Mila manages to get away from running the Humboldt House Bed & Breakfast to attend festivals in the USA and the UNICA festivals which are held in a different country each year.

In 2007 she received awards from AMMA and Ten Best Of The West for *Out of Antarctica*. In 2008 *Survival of the Penguins* got an AMMA award, *Venice - My Beautiful Rescue* got a Ten Best of the West award and *Iguaza Falls* received an AMPS award.

Usually stills are incorporated in amateur film as a gimmick and signalled as such - for example a film showing someone using a still camera might cut to the photo they took, often setting it in a white border and turning it at an angle - or faking it to look like the image through a camera viewfinder. They may add a loud click sound to imitate a camera shutter. A film featuring archive material might include photographs with an unspoken apology that "they are all that is available". Now and then people drop a still image in to establish a scene or serve as backdrop behind a performer in front of a green screen - in such cases they try to hide the fact it is still. But Mila blends powerful images and in her work she moves smoothly between still and moving images without gimmicks or apology.

As a newcomer to movie making I am still learning to tighten-up and improve my films. I always try to make them shorter and better by selecting only the best still images and the best video clips.

For making movies I use an Apple Mac computer with the iMovie editing system. I first prepare a story, then I combine still images with what Apple call the "Ken Burns effect".

Next I choose the video clips. When I am happy with the selection of the photos and clips, then I choose music.

My youngest daughter, Cynthia, was always helping me, but now when she is more involved in school I am trying to do it all on my own. In future I would like to make a

Named after the American documentary film maker born in 1953 and best known for *The Civil War* (1990), *Baseball* (1994), *Jazz* (2001) and *The War* (2007),

The Ken Burns effect involves panning over or zooming in and out of still images. He developed it as a means of bringing visual interest to stills, which were often the only visual material available to illustrate his topics. It was developed from the work of earlier cinematographers.

A typical sequence from *Antarctica*:



Still with caption superimposed



blends to ship's prow in the harbour.



Then we see the prow meeting ocean waves ...



better Antarctica movie, choose different music and use also narration.

I am working now on a short movie about the Unica festival in 2008 movie, which took place in Hammamet, Tunisia in North Africa. Once again I am combining still images and clips. I will probably use Paul Simon's song *Under African Skies*. That includes the lines: "His path was marked / By the stars in the southern hemisphere / And he walked his days / Under african skies". I like it very much - and I think it is very important for me to find music which both fits the images ... and which I personally enjoy. I am also putting together a movie about my travels in Thailand.

My approach to movies is simple: I film what I like the most. Because I mostly do documentaries about my travels, I try to create a little story with a beginning, middle, end and a summary.

There is a well-known Stan Stearns photograph of John F. Kennedy Jr. saluting his father's coffin at JFK's funeral where the child seems to be smiling. In his book *Pictures on a Page*, Harold Evans explains that by pointing out that we have all become used to smiling whenever a camera is pointed at us.

I am not a solo explorer - I usually travel with an organized adventure tour - so "waiting for an hour until the light is perfect" is not possible. I need to move fast, having both cameras handy. I like to take still images and portraits of people and these do take time. You can't shoot right away. I first make contact with the person and then I ask if I can take a picture or video of them. The funny thing is that people are often not natural in front of the lens, they try to pose.

In my newest video *Out of Antarctica*, I use a sunset as an ending, fading out, then putting up some credits. As music for this film I used Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto*. I use lots of transitions, as they break the gap between still images and video clips. And I sometimes use background noise, but sometimes when the background noise would be distracting, then I lower it and let the music take over.

- Mila Werbik

and zoom in slowly until ...



we cut to moving footage of crashing waves.