

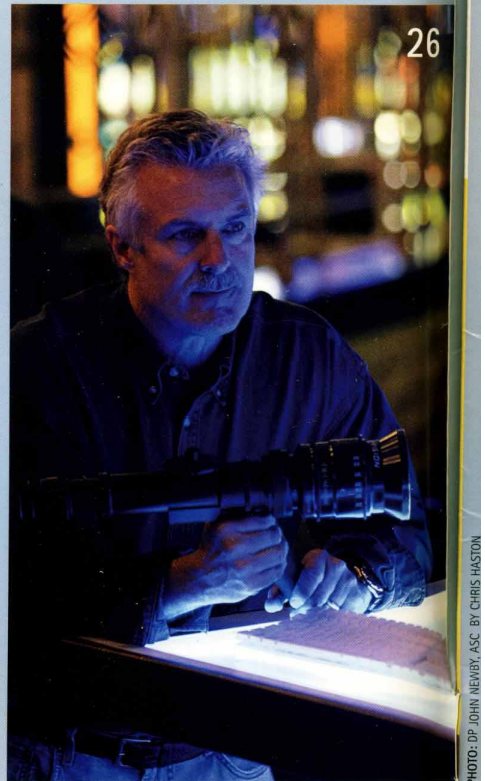
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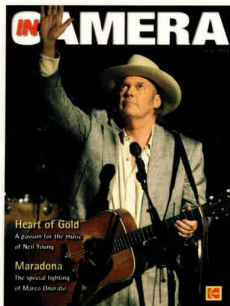
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**COVER PICTURE:** Neil Young in a scene from *Neil Young: Heart of Gold*, shot by DP Ellen Kuras, ASC.

**PHOTO:** BOB VERGARA

PHOTO: DP JOHN NEWBY, ASC. BY CHRIS HASTON

PHOTO: JOHN STABLE

# The Proposition:

## an Australian Western

**T**he *Proposition* is set in rural Australia during the late 1800s. Captain Stanley, played by Ray Winstone, captures two of the four Burns brothers who are accused of murdering an entire family. Stanley offers the captive brothers a deal: find and kill older brother and mastermind Arthur, and go free. If Arthur remains alive after nine days, beloved younger brother Mikey will be hanged.

*Daily Variety* describes it as a "blood and thunder Western." Benoît Delhomme, AFC, says violence in the film is brief but extremely powerful. The film was directed by John Hillcoat, who once again collaborated with musician Nick Cave. Cave wrote the script and provided the music for *The Proposition*.

"The script was very visual to begin with," says Delhomme. "I knew that John loved the way Sam Peckinpah depicted violence. We wanted to show the landscape as magical, mystical and a little scary for these English people, who have come from so far. When you think of those Western genre films, in your imagination, you see CinemaScope. That led to our decision to shoot Super 35 for display in the widescreen 2.4:1 aspect ratio combined with digital intermediate timing."

The production schedule in Australia was 48 days. For the many day exteriors, Delhomme relied on natural light

augmented with negative fill. Sometimes he spread white bed sheets on the ground to reflect light into the actors' faces.

"I wanted to keep it harsh, and show how the Australian light is in real life, instead of in postcards," says Delhomme.



"I wanted the exteriors to be hard and bright, and interiors very dark and contrasty. In a place like Australia, you go from very bright exteriors where you can't make out all the detail to indoors where your eye cannot adjust right away. I wanted to play with this organic idea in the film."

The exception was Emily Watson, who played Martha Stanley and often carried a parasol. Delhomme lit Watson "as though she brought England with her," he says. Watson's light was more even, less direct, softer and cooler in color.

For interiors, Delhomme worked "from scratch," meaning that he tented the windows and created window light using large HMI fixtures. "I really wanted to play with the very dark spaces between windows to create more mystery," he says.

The filmmakers used the widescreen frame carefully, eschewing dramatic camera movement in favor of a static frame and careful composition that kept the attention on the actors. Delhomme did occasionally use a small jib arm for a subtle push in or a floating sensation. Only the dramatic conclusion is handheld. This approach dovetails with the deliberate editing pace.

Delhomme used Panavision cameras and prime lenses. Some second unit shots were done with zooms. He chose one of three film stocks depending on how much light was available. "Because of the blow-up, I wanted the film to be really crisp and sharp, and I wanted to use a low sensitivity stock for the landscapes especially," he says. "I was trying to use Kodak VISION2 100T 5212 film as much as possible, even indoors. At the end of the day, I was going to Kodak VISION2 200T 5217 film, and some days to the Kodak VISION2 500T 5218 film."

*The Proposition* was Delhomme's first opportunity to do a complete digital intermediate. Framestore CFC of London handled the DI, with colorist Adam Glasman at the controls. Framestore also handled about 25 visual effects shots.

"Knowing I was going to DI helped me move more quickly," Delhomme says. "I used the DI to make the images more graphic and more monochromatic. I added grads, and adjusted colors and contrast to make shots match consistently since the exteriors were often difficult to control. We also desaturated the skies and added to the bleak, hot, inhospitable feeling."

"Compared to the chemical process, everything in DI is a miracle, in a way," says Delhomme. "I was able to take more creative risks and say 'yes' more often, which was important to the success of this film. I hate saying 'no.'" ■

**Below and inset:**  
Actor Guy Pearce  
in a scene from *The  
Proposition*, shot by DP  
Benoît Delhomme, AFC.

PHOTOS: KERRY BROWN