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# SEXPOSE

By Ron Prince



**Indie director and cinematographer Joshua Z. Weinstein has built a reputation as a filmmaker who likes to bring a gritty, documentary-style, realism to his work, along with a sense of humour and pathos. And he's always embraced unusual, unique projects.**

He wrote, shot and directed 2017's tender drama *Mensashe*, which was performed entirely in Yiddish and garnered Best First Feature at the Independent Spirit Awards and Breakthrough Director at the Gotham Awards. The film was also nominated for a Sundance Film Festival Audience Award for Best of Next.

With much of his work featured in festivals such as Sundance, Berlin and Camerimage, Weinstein's director credits include the feature documentaries *Drivers Wanted* (2012) and *Flying On One Engine* (2008), with his director of photography credits including the TV series *Blackballed* (2020), *Bikini Moon* (2017), *Elaine Stritch: Shoot Me* (2013) and *Code Of The West* (2012).

That resume alone probably made him the ideal choice to shoot *Sell/Buy/Date*, the new hybrid doc-narrative written and directed by Tony Award-winning playwright Sarah Jones making her feature film directorial debut.

Adapted by Jones from her one-woman show of the same name, and executive produced by Meryl Streep and Rashida Jones, *Sell/Buy/Date* is a provocative look at the sex industry that combines a traditional scripted narrative with the spontaneity of a documentary. In addition to featuring real sex workers, the film also stars its director playing multiple characters simultaneously in a single scene – something that was impossible to do in the stage version.

"When Sarah first called me about doing this, she had more of a 'stagey' idea of how to do it," recalls Weinstein. "I get a lot of calls to do these hybrid films, and people want more realism, real locations, and I'm good at making them feel cinematic and very specific to people and places, and yet they're also wildly chaotic."

"So I told her, 'I love all the different characters you play. What if they're all together and actually talk to each other?' And that sparked a whole new direction, as her characters are based on those in the play, but the rest of it's all-new."

In terms of look, the DP says, "Sarah didn't want it to have that predictable sex industry documentary dark look. She wanted it to be bright and poppy, and we looked at comedies like *Girls Trip*, as she wanted to go against topic."

Prep was initially delayed by two months, "because my second child was about to be born," he reports, "but we did a test shot of Sarah on a sofa playing all five characters, and I showed her how easy it was to blend frames. A month later we were shooting, but it was really a start-stop film, as we shot in New York, LA and Las Vegas, and we'd prep for a couple of weeks, shoot and repeat the whole process for each place."

The total shoot was under 20 days and Weinstein shot the film with the ARRI Alexa Mini and used the ARRI Amira as the B-camera. Workflow was 3.2K 4444 Log C.

"We did have a LUT originally, but in the end we just went with one in the ARRI, as I know the camera so well and trust it completely," he adds. "I've tested all the other cameras out there and I just love ARRIs and trust the colours and accuracy. I've shot a lot of people of colour, and I love the way it picks up all sorts of tones on people's faces and I know I can rely on it in dark and bright light situations. We were shooting outside in 110-degrees in Vegas, and I got all the detail and contrast I wanted."

For lenses the DP used his own set of Canon FD Primes (a mixture of NFD and SSC) rehoused by GL Optics, plus a Leica R 18mm for two shots and a 50mm on the B-camera, and well as Zeiss Compact zooms. Filters were Tiffen 1/16 and 1/8 Black Pro Mists.

With regard to the lighting, "the goal, as usual, is always to make it all look as natural as possible," notes the DP. "But to do that, we had tons of different

lights and two amazing gaffers – Jacob Abrams who did all the LA and Vegas stuff, and Dave Reichman who did all the New York stuff.

"The thing about indie films is, you can't fudge the light, so obviously you have to look at what the light's doing and then augment it and enhance it. We used a few HMIs and always had a lot of LEDs going. The whole look is geared to working with the clock and getting the best-possible look in the limited time you have for set-ups and so on, and it can be very tough."

As an example, he cites the scene shot outside an In-N-Out Burger restaurant in LA where Jones' multiple characters are eating burgers.

"That's a disaster of a scene to shoot like this, as it takes 30 to 40-minutes for Sarah to act the part and then change into another character, and we only had just over a three-hour window to light and shoot all five characters," he reports.

"So you're always chasing the clock. But I wouldn't have it any other way, because when you shoot like that in a real location it just enters the movie and it feels different. You can't fake a real street and location. It never looks real."

Weinstein goes on to note that shooting on the East and West coasts can be quite different.

"I've shot a ton of work on both coasts, but I'm from New York and started shooting on the streets there, and the mentality is, 'We'll figure it out and just get it done.' Imperfections are part of the picture. In LA it's more, 'What's the easiest way to do this? Can we drive





Images: BTS photos by Danielle DeBruno and Colin Lane.



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The film’s opening sequence where Jones plays multiple characters all talking to each other in a single frame is a tour de force. How did he shoot it?

“I immediately thought of Eddie Murphy playing multiple characters in *Coming To America*,” he says. “That barber shop sequence was all done in-camera. I

don’t think there were any VFX shots at all. Also, I’d done something similar in a music video years ago, which I showed Sarah. The key was really working it out and storyboarding and blocking it very carefully, and then having plenty of rehearsals. That scene was mostly done with doubles and mirrors. Jacob and I had everything on LEDs, and we had it all dialled in so we could change the lighting pretty quickly as needed. There are only two small VFX shots. The rest was all in-camera. There was room for vocal improvisation, but not anything else. And

it was especially challenging for Sarah, playing five characters and directing the whole scene too.”

Working on the DI with colourist Tony Shek was also a challenge, largely because of Covid protocols, Weinstein reports.

“I was in New York and we did the DI in LA at Fancy Film Post, so it was all remote for me. I used my computer as my monitor and it wasn’t ideal. It’s always better to be at the DI in person, but it worked and I’m very happy with the way the film turned out.”



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