



CANADIAN CINEMATOGRAPHER

A publication of the Canadian Society of Cinematographers

The Canadian Society of Cinematographers (CSC) was founded in 1957 by a group of Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa cameramen. Since then over 800 cinematographers and persons in associated occupations have joined the organization.

The purpose of the CSC is to promote the art and craft of cinematography in Canada and to provide tangible recognition of the common bonds that link film and video professionals, from the aspiring student and camera assistant to the news veteran and senior director of photography.

We facilitate the dissemination and exchange of technical information and endeavor to advance the knowledge and status of our members within the industry. As an organization dedicated to furthering technical assistance, we maintain contact with non-partisan groups in our industry but have no political or union affiliation.

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Courtesy of Sarah Moffat

Sarah Moffat's Global Journey *By Fanen Chiahemen*



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SARAH MOFFAT'S GLOBAL JOURNEY

By Fanen Chiahem
Photos courtesy of Sarah Moffat



Filming in Mexko.

In 2012, cinematographer Sarah Moffat spent three weeks travelling in Mexico, Bosnia and Zambia with the Cineflix production *United in Hope: A Global Journey*. A Komen International initiative in the fight against breast and cervical cancer, the film profiles women in those countries affected by the disease. With a lean crew of just four and a tight schedule, preparation and focus were key to capturing cinematic images and heartfelt, inspiring testimonials, as Moffat tells *Canadian Cinematographer*.

What camera did you shoot with and how did the parameters of the project inform your choice?

I chose the Canon C300 (rented at Dazmo Digital) because it's the best documentary camera on the market. Its form factor is very practical, and its sensor is brilliant. I knew using C300 in C-log would be the best choice. It has great dynamic range, therefore there's more latitude in your stops, in your lowlights and highlights. I knew right from the start in those types of climates, with those specific skin tones and environments, that using a log file would work in my benefit for providing the best possible control over the image in postproduction. What happens with extreme hard sunlight, for example in Zambia, on dark skin tones you can end up with a very underexposed face when trying to expose for the environment, making it challenging to see features and leaving awful white spots on foreheads. In documentary, unlike narrative, you don't always get to control the lighting environments, hence a choice of C-log.

What other tools were useful to you on a project like this where you have a small crew and you're moving a lot?

I needed some kind of travelling jib arm that I could take on the road, set up within a short amount of time and would achieve some really nice graceful, arcing shots. So I used MICRODOLLY HOLLYWOOD's jib arm from DJ Woods that could get a reach of 12 to 15 feet up in air at ultimate height. Instead of weights or bags for scales, it has a collapsing milk pail-like bucket, which folds down flat, pops open, and you mount that on the back of the arm and then fill it with rocks or whatever else, and that becomes your counterweight. This lets you travel lighter. You don't have to take specifically designed weights that fit on specifically designed rods.

In Bosnia, we shot at the Latin Bridge and were able to do a really beautiful establishing shot from the side of the river with the mountains in the background. We had the subject walk across the bridge, and I was able to jib up as she walked across and get the beautiful movement of birds flying through the frame, and the whole frame lifting up over the bridge as it revealed the river down behind the bridge and the rest of the city – it was quite dramatic. With that tool, I offered a more cinematic look and more emotion to the documentary, which is what the production wanted, rather than a run-and-gun or amateur look.

Another tool I used was the Teradek Cube. Field monitors can be quite heavy, but with the Teradek Cube you have the ability to use an iPad as the monitor; the Cube can encode and decode an image to the iPad. So I was able to transmit the image from the C300 to the iPad and use that as the field monitor.

How did you approach the lighting?

For lighting I used two Rotolight Anova lights from Vistek. I chose them because I knew I could run them off of a battery and I knew I could control the colour temperature. And I knew they were specifically a soft light, but for the most part I knew that's all I would have time for – fill in and add to the ambient light in the space and then control the light a little bit with a flex fill or negative fill. I also carried two small LED lights – one is the Rotolight ring light, and the second is a generic multifaceted light that I bought on Amazon.ca, a 30\$ no-name, made-in-China piece of something that runs on my old P2 batteries. Those smaller eye lights and generic LED lights are powerful, and I can use that as a backlight, a kicker on the background. Anova lights weigh 7 pounds only, so again, keeping the package lightweight. And they served very well for interviews, having a very nice soft fill on faces to make for a natural, yet brighter look.

The Anovas were a great choice when we were in such locations as a witch doctor's hut in Zambia. We were in a very dusty and wild market. There were no windows in his wooden shack, only a small door. I pulled out one Anova on a stand and asked my Zambian helper, Nelson, to squish against the wall and hold the stand close to him with the light raised above his head. He did, and it worked perfectly. The light filled the room with soft light



to match that of the sun coming through the door, and because I could dial in the colour temperature to match, it proved to be a perfect fill for the space. This allowed me to keep the ISO down with a decent stop on the lens for depth of field, while also giving me enough to see the dark skin tones of a patient and doctor very well, along with all the natural medicines lining the shelves.

Can you describe the workflow on this project?

I didn't have a DMT (data management technician) or a DIT (digital imaging technician), so I did all the workflow myself. You can usually hand your data over to the DMT, or AC, and then focus on your cinematography, but on a shoot like this that's not an option. So at the end of the night after we'd finished shooting all day, I'd take my cards, do all the offloading and back up to two main hard drives and one smaller external drive. And at the end of each location, I would FedEx the small drive of that location's data to Cineflix so they could start ingesting it.

So how did you remain efficient, especially with no camera assistant?

Some things I always ask on arrival is, 'How much time do we have in this location? One hour? What is the purpose of this location?' So I know I have to accomplish A, B and C in one hour, and we're going to use this tool and this tool and this tool,



Above: Moffat shoots the scenery in Zambia.
Below: Filming in Mexico.



focus this way and this way, and you map it out very quickly in your head, and you go through your mental checklist as you shoot and you get your coverage.

For example, in Mexico we set up a scene between our subject and her friend. The location was a parkette in between two rows of buildings, these small cement structure homes. The scene was to establish the relationship between the subject and her friend and to have an establishing shot of the surroundings. So we drove around the parkette area, found the best angle at one end where we could look all the way down through the trees to get a really nice shot. I said, "How long do we have here? Two hours? I can set this jib up in 15 minutes and then rehearse a couple of shots." Away I went and ended up doing a really lovely tracking shot.

Also, the sound person Steven Outhit became my jib arm technician. While I was off shooting B-roll or something, he would multitask and build up the jib arm. And then he would fill up the buckets with whatever rocks he could find and also

some of his sound equipment to counterweight it. He was a great team player, and this added greatly to efficiency.

But my average workday was approximately 20 hours. There wasn't time for down days. Down days were for getting reorganized for the next shoot day. Keeping two steps ahead of production was crucial because I'm in charge of the image. Charging all the batteries, making sure all the data is backed up, making sure cameras are working and everything's clean. You have to be your own technician, your own data management, your own repair person and electrician. You don't even sleep on the planes. They're packed, so you're sitting up for 30 hours.

How did the subject matter affect the way you shot the interviews?

Even though you have to put your head down and focus, dealing with sensitive subject matter there's a huge compassion inside of you as well. So you're talking to a woman about her battle with cancer and creating the environment for her to sit there and tell her story, and there's a huge role for cinematographers working in those types of environments because you're dealing with real people, not actors. My approach is that being a human being comes first, and camera comes second. You're not shooting sensationalistic reality TV. I always introduce myself without a camera. And even when there's a language barrier, a smile goes a long way. It becomes a very energetic exchange rather than verbal. Learning a few words of the local language also goes a long way. With these women it was important to make sure they felt good and beautiful and accepted because they've gone through so much stigma. They've lost parts of their body and their hair, parts of a woman's body in many cultures that tend to be tied to beauty, self-worth and self-value. It's vital to the story and the message that the subject is comfortable with you and all the gear. 🍎

Above: **Filming in Mexico.**
 Below: **Shooting at the Latin Bridge in Bosnia.**

