

Wyatt Garfield Takes Film To Its Extremes on *Mediterranea*



When a story calls for a trek over a desert, a precarious boat ride across a sea, and storms both figurative and literal, it's hard not to focus on the grand scope of it all. Instead, cinematographer Wyatt Garfield and director Jonas Carpignano's goal with *Mediterranea* – a film about two Burkinabe men attempting to emigrate to southern Italy for a better life only to find more poverty and discrimination than the home they left – was to stay within the characters' space and tell their tale from a more intimate place.

“When you're filming a journey across vast landscapes,” says Garfield, whose next projects include two shorts for Sundance's Directors Lab, “there's a temptation to show the scale of the locations and the insignificance of the characters in relationship to them. But when you're climbing over rocks in the

desert, it's much more about the physical struggle and what's right in front of you. Throughout the film, we tried to avoid the temptation of classical beauty and focus on the human experience.”

For the 40-day shoot in Erfoud, Morocco, and Rosarno, Italy, Garfield employed Super 16mm, including KODAK VISION3 200T Color Negative Film 7213 and KODAK VISION3 500T Color Negative Film 7219 for day exteriors and night work, respectively. Garfield has always been partial to the tungsten stocks’ look in daylight with the 85 correction. They used an 85 filter in Morocco, and an 85C filter for daylight scenes in Italy to give it an ever-so-slightly colder look.

“The tungsten stocks corrected for daylight have a more classic film look to me,” explains Garfield, a Maine native and Savannah College of Art and Design graduate. “It's subtle, but every time I’ve tested (KODAK VISION3) 250D (Color Negative Film 7207) against 200T, I have preferred the 200T.”

Garfield is drawn to shooting on film partly because of the ease of use with the cameras. He used an ARRIFLEX 416 as the A camera, and had an ARRIFLEX 16 SR3 as the B camera for shooting ensemble scenes. He finds it hard not to gush about their lightweight, ergonomic and expertly balanced weight for operating from the shoulder. “They lend themselves better than any other system I've worked with for following subjects closely,” he says. “While it doesn't have the resolution of 35mm, 16mm has ample resolution for giving detail in faces in medium shots and close ups, and the deeper focus lends itself to moving closely with subjects. Because of our proximity, the focus fall-off was still dramatic, and we never hit the limits of the resolution. It’s the ideal format for point-of-view, character-driven handheld cinematography.”

For *Mediterranea*, Carpignano did an enormous amount of research. He moved to Calabria and lived with immigrants on and off for a few years, listening to their stories and penciling them into his script. Over time, he assembled a huge cast of real-life characters, and talked many of them into

playing themselves in the film.

“Some had non-permanent status in Italy,” says Garfield, “but Carpignano embraced the challenges of bringing them together to make a movie. His entire approach was based on creating real events and then capturing them on film. In a scene where people are hanging out and having a good time, they were actually hanging out and having a good time. If they were rioting and flipping cars over, they were actually rioting and flipping cars over. When working with non-actors, it’s not just about what’s in the frame, it’s about creating a world, letting the characters live in it, and then documenting it.”

Admittedly, there are many challenges with this approach. Often a scene that Carpignano was creating would start happening before Garfield and his gaffer David Kavanaugh had finished lighting. The filmmakers always tried to light in a way that allowed them to shoot 360 degrees, so that once a scene started, they could keep shooting until it was in the can.

“Often,” adds Garfield, “things evolved in ways we never anticipated, and film is a great friend in those situations.”

For principal photography, Garfield and his first assistant John David Devergiliis utilized the ZEISS Ultra 16 series. Their workhorses were 25, 35 and 50mm, often starting wider in calmer scenes and going longer in the more action-oriented scenes, like interactions with the police during the riots between the immigrants and the native Italians.

“The more urgent the immigrants’ situation became,” explains Garfield, “the more Jonas pushed us to shoot with longer lenses and let the background fall away. It forced our operator, Tim Curtin, to focus on the emotions and decisions of the characters. The longer the lens, the more agitated the frame would become, and Jonas really encouraged us to push the limit of what we could control.

“There was one sequence where Ayiva (played by Kuodous Seihon) was

running down an old stone stairwell in Rosarno, and Tim was chasing after him with Jonas and our key grip bracing him on either side,” the DP continues. “After nailing a take on the 25mm, Jonas had us go again on the 35mm, and then again with the 50mm (equivalent of 100mm in Super 35). When the operator can hold the frame, those longer lenses can really intensify and concentrate a handheld scene.”

Garfield notes the rugged reliability of film was also an advantage. During a particularly chaotic day of filming on the Mediterranean, he had a magazine get submerged in seawater and flashed by a work light, and it still came out unharmed besides a slight burn-in outside the frame lines. Film Factory in Paris handled the processing. Beyond the extreme situations, Garfield could shoot in such a range of environments with film, and not be worried about what the ‘look’ was going to be.

The digital intermediate was also conducted at Film Factory with colorist Elie Akoka. They graded with Nucoda, and used the Clarity plug-ins to reduce the grain in the pushed scenes to match the non-pushed footage.

“There were many situations where we had very little control over the lighting,” he says, “and the great thing about shooting film is that even when the conditions aren't ideal, the footage is all unified by a consistent grain and color rendition.”