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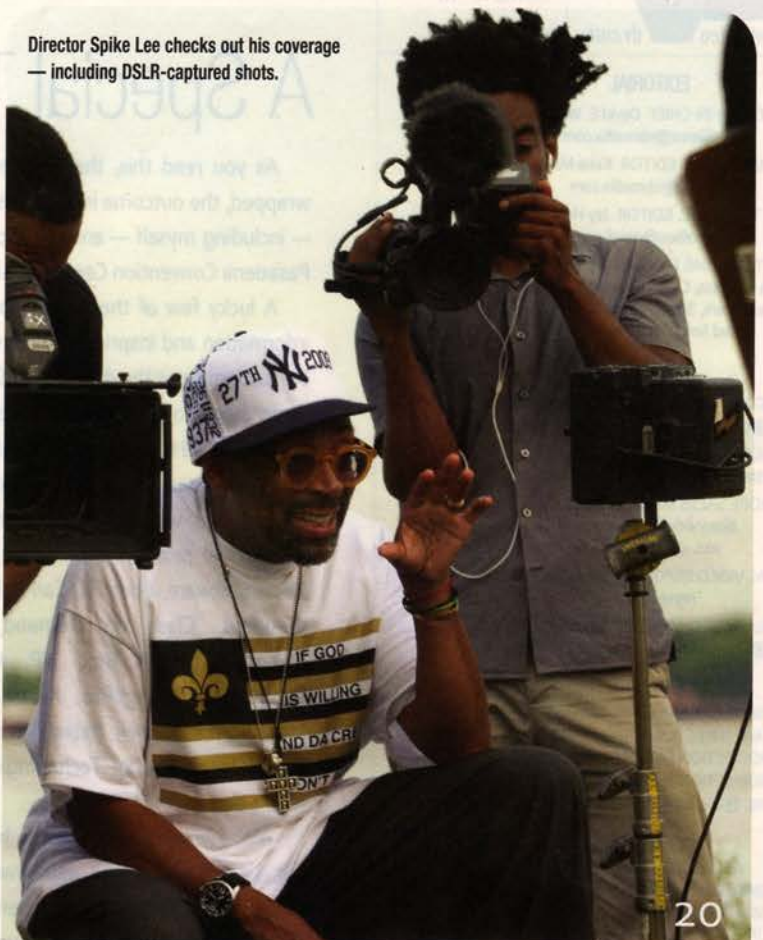
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say, but the most basic problem with digital still cameras is that one can't hold them in the way that a motion picture camera needs to be held. Using a tripod is one simple answer that helps in some situations, but there's a lot more to shooting video than just a camera. Also requiring attachment to the tripod or handheld rig are an external viewfinder/monitor, a matte box, a follow-focus knob, a wireless mic receiver, cable harness, and so on.

The concept isn't new. "Build-up kits" have been made available since long ago so that smaller cameras and camcorders ordinarily used for field production could also be used in a studio setting. Even HDCAM camcorders need rigs to make them work like a film movie camera. But with digital still cameras, a build-up kit is needed to make the camera practical for any kind of video shooting, whether handheld or on a tripod. Plan for spending a figure in the order of

16-bit PCM audio stereo pair, and even then, only through a 3.5mm mini plug at best. At least one of the cameras in the chart only records mono sound through a 2.5mm very mini plug. Many of the cameras in the chart have no facility to manually set the audio record level.

Given the DSLR's shortcomings when it comes to audio, the best solution is to record the sound separately, and there are now a lot of nice solid-state portable audio recording and mixing devices from Roland, Sony, Zoom, BeachTek and others for that purpose. The sound recorder and mixer may also need an attachment to the DSLR rigging, and what we now see is almost a complex "scaffolding" arrangement that holds various devices in support of the digital SLR to make the whole collective become equivalent to what



Third-party companies are making up for the deficiencies of DSLRs in order to make them viable for use in pro production. These tools include Redrock Micro's inexpensive Nano line of supports — such as the Running Man setup here — and Carl Zeiss's EF-mount optics, including the Planar T1.4/50 ZE lens.

ket as a primary acquisition device, and they are also now largely accepted in the high end of the market as a secondary or supplementary camera.

In the case of the season finale of the medical drama *House*, which aired in May, the Canon 5D Mk II was the primary camera for the whole episode for two key reasons. Firstly, director Greg Yaitanes wanted to convey extreme emotional states through the use of very shallow depth of field. The large 36mm x 24mm sensor in the 5D Mk II requires much longer lenses compared with the usual 35mm movie film or HDCAM CineAlta cameras, and it can thereby provide a very shallow depth of field when needed. Secondly, a large part of the episode was shot in very tight spaces, requiring a smaller and more agile camera rig. In other words, it's horses for courses, as always. If you need extreme deep depth of field, such as was deliberately created for the Orson Welles classic *Citizen Kane*, the 5D Mk II may not be the best choice.

What we're seeing is a squeezing of the middle ground. The HD video image quality from consumer-level still cameras is remarkable enough to make indie film producers jump ship from their trusty DV and HDV camcorders. And the ever-reducing prices of HD broadcast equipment like the HDCAM EX are attacking the DV and HDV market from above.

But there's no free lunch. The shortcomings hinted at in this article are now the subject of a lot of product development at Canon, Nikon, Panasonic, Sony, Pentax and their other competitors. We can expect

plenty of improvements at this low end of the market in the coming years. But just to add a little extra confusion where none was needed, this year's NAB unveiled new prosumer camcorder lines from Sony and Panasonic. The key feature mentioned for each is the use of the same large image sensors as in their digital still cameras. Look out for the new Panasonic camcorders based on their Micro Four Thirds format sensor. And look out for Sony's new NEX-VG series camcorders using the same APS-C format sensor as the NEX and Alpha series still cameras.

The era of the low-priced large sensor camcorder with interchangeable lenses is coming, if not already here. One can't dismiss the desirability of these cameras. Even a conservative and highly credible company like Carl Zeiss has acknowledged the validity of these tools and is already making a new series of high-quality prime cine lenses for the Canon EOS mount. Ironically, the company most worried about this new trend is probably RED. I say ironic because it was RED who pioneered the use of a single large Bayer array sensor for professional HD video capture. And now the marketing power and financial might of the world's biggest electronics manufacturers is behind the push to create whole new lines of products in a whole new low-price category where even RED cannot compete. These are interesting times. **dv**

Look Who's on Our Cover

Seeking a unique look for the post-Katrina New Orleans documentary *If God Is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise*, director Spike Lee and director of photography Cliff Charles employed Canon EOS 1D Mark IV and EOS 7D DSLRs, in addition to an array of other cameras. "I was interested in getting run-and-gun shots with a small, lightweight camera," said Charles (pictured here). "As a cinematographer, however, I also wanted to acquire these images at the highest quality and resolution. I had always owned Canon cameras, and when I learned about Canon's large-sensor digital SLRs that could also shoot HD, I wanted to see what they could provide for us in building a collage of multiple formats."



\$5,000 on the rigging and accessories that you may need to make a digital still camera seem like a good video production tool.

The suggested \$5,000 is just so the camera can be held, moved and monitored like a video camera normally needs to be. But what about the audio? Most of the cameras in the comparison chart can only record mono sound, or perhaps a 44.1 kHz

a normal broadcast camcorder has always been. To some, it starts to look like a bit of a Frankenstein, but that's actually a part of its appeal to other users. It may be an ugly baby, but from the point of view of the DOP on a tight budget, it's my baby, and it is therefore beautiful to me.

In the overall scheme of things, these HD-capable DSLRs are now accepted in the low end of the mar-