

ICG

INTERNATIONAL CINEMATOGRAPHERS GUILD

MAGAZINE

I AM NUMBER FOUR

also featuring:

Hall Pass

Oprah Oscar Special

Awards Season Coverage

Unity Series Part I: GRIPS

AWARDS SEASON

February 2011
vol. 82 no. 02
US \$4.95 CAN \$6.95
ICGMAGAZINE.COM



OSAY CAN YOU SEE ME

WHAT'S IT LIKE WHEN TELEVISION'S MOST FAMOUS
PERSONALITY HANDS OFF HER MICROPHONE TO
HOLLYWOOD'S BIGGEST STARS, JUST A FEW NIGHTS
BEFORE THE ACADEMY AWARDS?

by DEBRA KAUFMAN

In the season of award shows culminating with the Academy Awards®, *The Oprah Winfrey Oscar® Special*, which aired on March 3, 2010, on the ABC/Disney Television Network, stood out. Neither a live event nor a scripted broadcast, the special was an intimate look into the lives of celebrities as they engaged each other in free-flowing conversation in comfortable environments. What made the show even more unusual was the absence of the Queen of Talk Shows herself; Oprah brought together Hollywood's most interesting stars, and then stepped back to let them interview each other.

The pairings of celebrities created the suspense and attraction, with highlights including: *Avatar* director and Academy Award-winning director James Cameron sitting down with three stars from his nominated film – Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana and three-time Oscar®-nominated Sigourney Weaver. Academy Award-winner Halle Berry (for Actress in a Leading Role in *Monster's Ball* – 2002) chatted with Supporting Actress winner, Penélope Cruz (*Vicky Cristina Barcelona* – 2009), who was up for a Supporting Actress last year for her role in *Nine*, while Ben Affleck, an Oscar winner for original screenplay (along with Matt Damon, for *Good Will Hunting* – 2008) got up close and personal with Jeremy Renner, nominated for Actor in a Leading Role for last year's Best Picture winner, *The Hurt Locker*. And this very special Oprah special also reunited two stars from the Oscar-nominated 1987 hit *Fatal Attraction*: five-time Oscar-nominated actress Glenn Close and multiple Oscar recipient Michael Douglas.

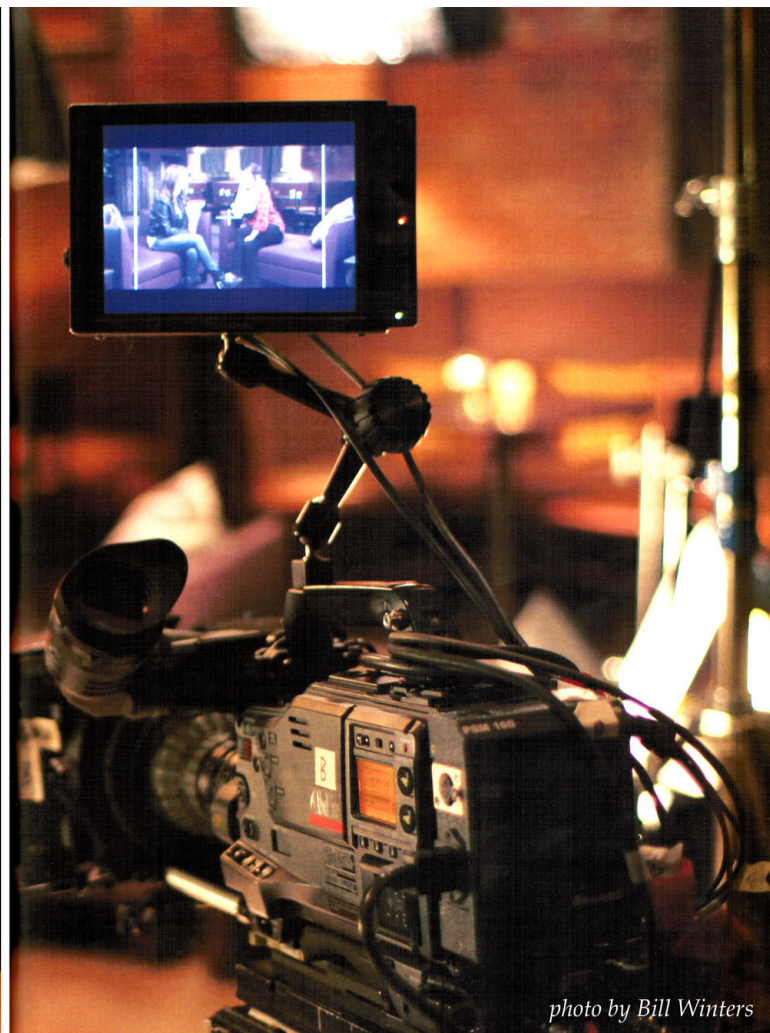


photo by Bill Winters

Ron Tom/Disney ABC Television Group/Getty Images



"[Kail] wanted a continuous sliding shot so the biggest challenge was to find where to slide and where not to slide," he says. "It wasn't a dolly move, but it was quite particular. I had to edit in my own head when to slide left or right and when to compose a two-shot or a single shot, and that was a decision that I had to make in the moment. It's almost like panning but more complicated because you have to pan and slide at the same time."

Hauer says that for the Affleck/Renner interview at Chez Jay and the Cameron interview at Lightworks, he operated the long end of a zoom.

"Mark wanted me to pick up details and close-ups of faces or hand gestures," he describes. "It was fun because it was more of an energetic camera and we went with the spontaneity of the event."

On the East Coast, Winters did two days of scouting and shooting, first for the shoot with Close and Douglas in a screening room at Steiner Studios in Brooklyn, and then for the interview between Cruz and Berry at the restaurant Tao, in Manhattan.

Winters' crew included operators Ruben O'Malley, Rachel Morrison, Oliver Cary and Axel Baumann, as well as gaffer Brooke Stanford (replaced by Michael Berg for the Berry/Cruz shoot), grip Cesar Baptista, AC Jay Eckardt and D.I.T. Robert Brilliant.

Since the restaurant was closed for the shoot Winters was able to place almost all the lighting in the balcony. "We also hung units from the GoBox so we only had two stands to avoid," he says. "It's always tricky with four cameras shooting 180 degrees. You may not be able to put the lights exactly where you want them but the [actors] still have to look good. You're doing close-ups of movie stars so moving the light 6 inches this way or that could make a big difference. Getting it to the right spot was a challenge."

Operators captured a close-up of each person, using a Fujinon zoom lens. Another camera, operated by Morrison on the Douglas/Close shoot and O'Malley on the Berry/Cruz shoot, was on a telephoto lens to do what Kail called "sharp-shooting" – capturing details such as hands and expressions. "Finding those unique frames, given certain restrictions on the fly, was the challenge," Morrison observes.

For the Douglas/Close interview, Winters described two different lighting scenarios (in one setup) that the crew had to seamlessly move between in real time. "The first scenario

was them talking to each other in the screening room with the house lights up," he begins. "The second was when they watched the clips. For that, we simulated the light coming off the screen to reflect on their faces. But they still watched the film so it wasn't a total cheat."

The "lighting gag" as Winters calls it, was done by bouncing Miceys (a 1K open face light made by Mole-Richardson) onto bead board on the side of the screens so it wouldn't wash out the image for Douglas and Close. Winters says the lighting cues were tested (on the dimmer board and the flicker box) with a CTB gel with stand-ins to make sure it worked. "Getting a proper tech scout and then coming in early the day of the shoot, the DP says, allowed us to do a little tweaking."

One unusual element was having Morrison cover Douglas' journey from the star's apartment in Manhattan to the shoot in Brooklyn, a 20-minute trip that ended up taking an hour and a half. "I was wedged in a town car, shooting backwards," she laughs. "It was a long time to be in a pretzel position. But because I'm small in size and frame, it wasn't a position I was unfamiliar with!"

Winters says *The Oprah Winfrey Oscar Special* differed from his past TV work in several key ways. "Sitcom or film style," he explains, "you typically have a shot list and a storyboard, whereas here, the director wanted to keep it as real as possible, and we were trying to figure out how to have the most possible simultaneous angles using four cameras. It was live and on the fly, but we still needed coverage."

The solution was to create a camera plot. "We knew where we wanted the cameras to be and what we wanted each camera to do," Winter adds. "My camera, on a 4-foot slider, gave movement and kept it from looking like live TV, and [Morrison's] sharpshooter camera gave it a cinema verite feel. [The operators] were on their own to cover the scene."

After having successfully captured the interviews, Fried reminisces about the challenge of capturing such iconic figures and making sure they all look and sound as good as possible. "It ultimately falls back to that quote in *Almost Famous* where the reporter is following the band, and the musician says, 'Just make us look cool!'" Fried laughs. "These people were gracious enough to put themselves in our hands, and we were fortunate enough to be guests at their tables." 🍷