

SCOTT BLURTON - SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 13:15

MICROBUDGET FILMMAKING 101

How to make the film of your dreams without breaking the bank ... or your mind

OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

- To go through the filmmaking process with a micro budget lens.
- Give you an idea of what equipment you will need, how to organize yourself, and how to move forward one step at a time.
- At each step in the filmmaking process, I won't go into too much detail (not enough time) but provide you with advice on what you'll need to consider with a micro budget.
- One caveat - the terms and definitions that I use in this presentation are my own. They may not match industry standards
- Won't be taking questions until the end and will be available outside to answer questions one-on-one
- Won't go through everything on the slides due to lack of time. Will be posted to my website: www.scottblurton.ca

WHAT IS A MICRO BUDGET FILM

- **Studio Film: \$25-300 million budget**
 - Supported by a promotional and marketing campaign, typically equal to the production budget
- **Independent Film: \$100k-25 million budget**
 - Has recognizable actors and depends on the film festival circuit to build word of mouth
- **Microbudget Film: \$5k-100k budget**
 - Has volunteer actors, unpaid crew and will have difficulty being accepted into the film festival circuit. No budget and marketing campaign.

WHO AM I?

- **Scott Blurton**
 - **Public servant by day, micro budget filmmaker by night.**
 - **Moved to Ottawa in 2005**
- **Ran for Ottawa City Council in 2014**
 - **Lost in a landslide**
 - **Convinced me that it would be a good topic for a film**

MY FILM: THE CANVASSER

- Will use as the case study for this presentation
- Made the film based on my experiences running for city council, being unemployed and my theories on political communication
- Budget: \$40,000 - originally \$5000
- Production: Six years (2015-2021)
 - Pre-Production - 1 year (2015-2016)
 - Principal Photography - 2.5 years (2016-2018)
 - Post-Production - 3 years (2018-2021)
- What did I do?
 - Producer, director, lead actor, almost all pre- and post-production



WHAT WE ARE COVERING

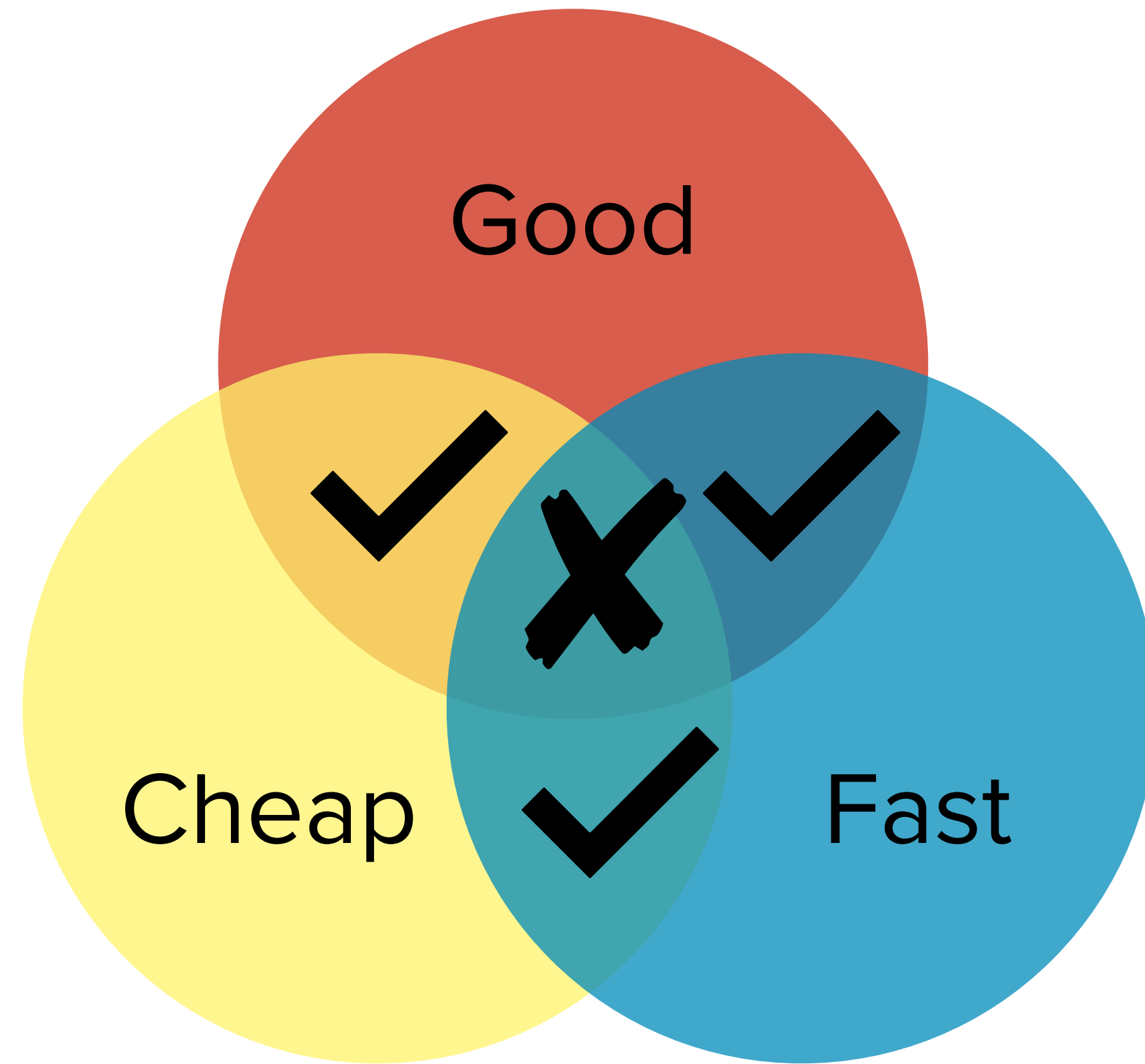
- **Should you make a microbudget film?**
- **Key Principles**
- **Pre-Production**
- **Production - Principal Photography**
- **Post-Production**
- **Distribution and Promotion**
- **Final Thoughts**

WHY MAKE A MICRO BUDGET FILM?

- Not likely to lead to a big break in Hollywood, either as an actor or a director
 - Better off going to Hollywood to find work in the industry, make short films and build your networks
- Not likely to make money. Even many studio and feature films lose money even with sizeable promotion and bankable stars
 - More lucrative opportunities elsewhere
- Will consume a massive portion of your life, eat up all of your free time and distance you from family and friends.
 - The Canvasser took a year for writing and development, 2.5 years for principal photography, and 3 years for post-production. Often working 3 hours a night after my day job.
- Why then would you try to make a micro budget film with all of these disadvantages?
 - Short Answer: Because you have to.

KEY PRINCIPLES

GOOD, CHEAP, FAST - PICK TWO



**“FOCUS ON WHAT YOU NEED, NOT
WHAT YOU WANT”**

YOU WILL NEVER GET THE IMAGE IN YOUR MIND ON SCREEN, YOU HAVE TO TAKE WHAT YOU ARE GIVEN

**YOUR CAST AND CREW ARE NOT YOUR
EMPLOYEES, THEY ARE YOUR
COLLABORATORS**

YOU CAN'T FIRE PEOPLE WHO ARE WORKING FOR FREE

**EXPECT EVERYTHING TO GO WRONG,
BECAUSE IT WILL**

BE CALM, PATIENT AND FLEXIBLE

**THE MOST IMPORTANT SKILL YOU WILL
NEED AS A DIRECTOR IS THE ABILITY TO
MAKE DECISIONS QUICKLY**

EVEN IF THEY ARE THE WRONG ONE

**“CAST AND CREW ARE HAPPIEST WHEN
WORKING”**

THEIR TIME IS VALUABLE, DON'T WASTE IT

PRE-PRODUCTION

PROCESS

- Screenplay
 - Story Idea
 - Outline
 - Story Treatment and Story Pitch
 - Writing the first draft
 - Reviewing and revising
 - Converting to Shooting Script
- Storyboard (helpful, but not necessary)
- Finding Crew
- Casting
- Scheduling

I have a line on some great places south of the city.

Marie turns and glares at her.

MARIE
No. This is where I belong.

SCENE 45 - INT. MARIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

She pours herself another glass. She takes another gulp and then considers the bookcase. She stands and approaches it. She reaches down and slides a GARBAGE PAIL closer. Marie starts shifting through her books and tossing them out, one by one in the garbage pail.

INSERT: BOOKS DROPPING INTO THE GARBAGE PAIL.

Into the pail she tosses out books by WARREN KINSELLA, FRANK LUNTZ and other political communication gurus. She picks up one book, starts to toss it out and then stops. She considers it for a long beat and then looks up.

SCENE 46 - EXT. OTTAWA NEIGHBOURHOOD - DAY

Devon is canvassing at a small house.

DEVON
I hope that I will earn your vote sir. Have a nice day.

Devon turns from the door and sees Marie. She smiles.

MARIE
(v.o.)
You don't respect what people like me do, do you?

SCENE 47 - INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Marie and Devon are sitting in a coffee shop. Marie is drinking coffee while Devon is drinking milk with his right hand.

DEVON
I wish I could do what you do. There're just some things I'm not capable of.

THINGS TO REMEMBER FOR A MICRO BUDGET

- As few actors as possible, as few locations as possible
- No montages
- Focus on character and dialogue - “Dialogue is cheap”
- No montages
- Think about genre before you start.
 - Horror can be done on a budget but it’s more dependent on carefully constructed shots, music and sound effects.
 - Comedy is almost completely character and dialogue based but hard to get right
- No montages
- Focus on character goals and how they plan to get there. What characters do is more cinematic than what they think.
- Crew - Need at least two depending on what you are doing (acting, directing, etc.). The more complicated the shots, the more crew you will need
- Casting - Most important trait is people who show up on time

PRODUCTION - PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY

EQUIPMENT

■ Camera

- Whatever you can get your hands on, even your phone (Filmic Pro)
- Better cameras will give you better image quality and faster shooting
- Pay attention to color space (linear, log) and frame rate (23.976 is not 24)

■ Lens

- More important than the camera.

■ Audio Recording

- Most important, need a good microphone and recorder and someone who knows how to use it.

■ Lights, reflectors

- Flexibility and speed to set up. Lots of affordable options. Gels are cheap but lighting color can be changed in post

■ Teleprompter

■ Slate - helps with colour correction and audio synchronization

■ Tip: The more equipment you use, the more time it will take to set up. Keep it light.

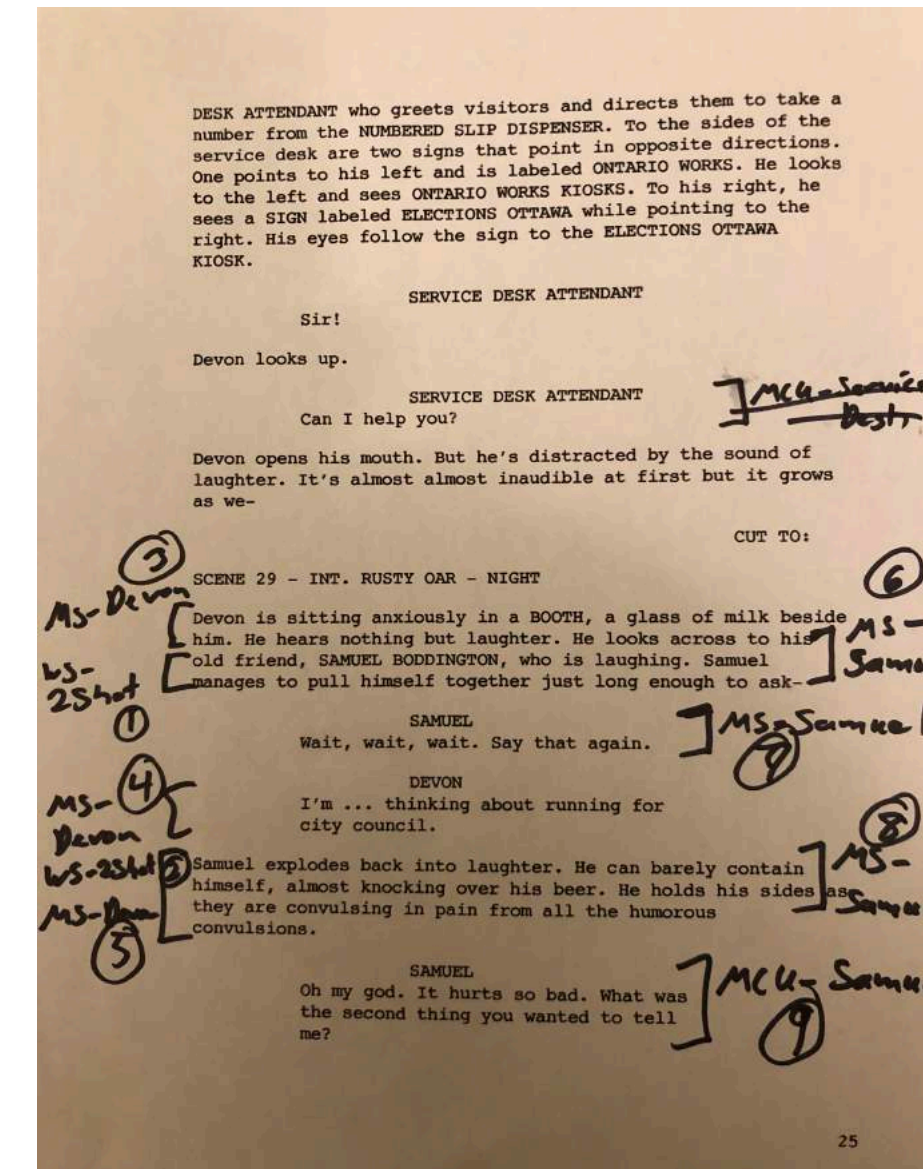
- That said, the more work you can put into the image on set, the less work you have to do in post.

LOCATIONS

- **As few locations as possible.**
- **Interior locations that you control are best and helps with audio recording**
- **Exterior locations require requesting a permit from City of Ottawa, NCC, or federal department (i.e. CEF) and can have challenges from noise pollution**
- **When on site, always be respectful to people who pass by, even when they're jerks.**
 - **Your objective is the film and your crew, not your ego**

PREPARATION FOR SHOOTING DAY

- Call Sheet
 - Tells everyone who is involved, what they are doing, what they should wear and when they should show up.
- Annotate your shooting script with the shots you need
 - Shooting lists take up too much time to prepare and one more thing that you have to keep track off on-set.
- Charge batteries and have empty memory cards ready
- Set up your camera with your expected settings ahead of time
- Arrange transportation for yourself
- Have a backup plan if everything goes wrong (i.e, shoot background plates if actors are no-show)



"The Canvasser"
Call Sheet COFFEE SHOP 2 - Saturday, March 17, 2018

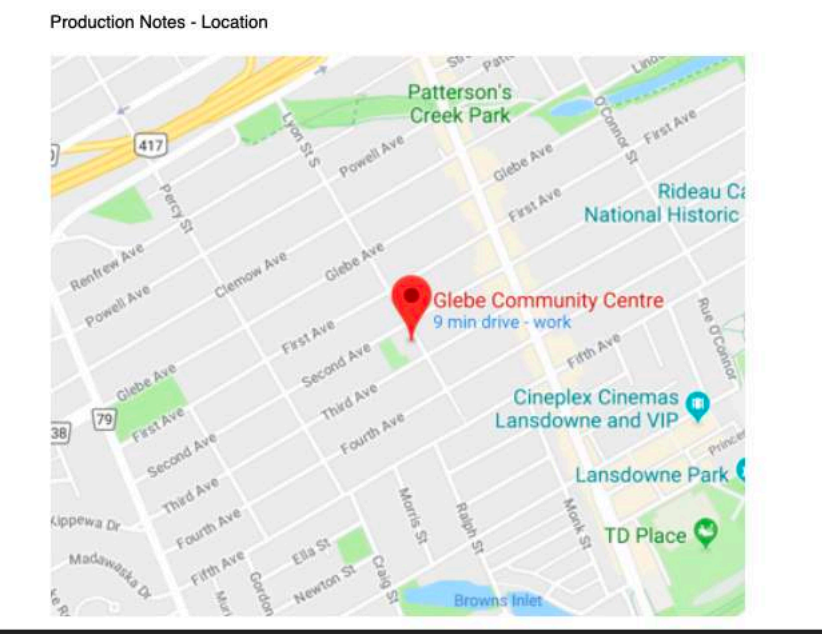
Crew Call Time	13:00	Estimated Wrap	16:00
Makeup Call Time	N/A	Sunrise/Sunset	18:00
Wardrobe Call Time	N/A		

Location Address	Glebe Community Centre 175 Third Ave, Ottawa, ON gcCafe (upstairs at the back of the large hall)	Production Company	N/A
There should be lots of parking at the community centre or in the surrounding neighbourhood.			
Unit Base Address	N/A	Contact Details	613-897-8895

Director	Scott Blurton	Bring Equipment	Normal: Canon T3i Rebel, Lens, Script, Shot List, Tripod, iPad, Shotgun microphone, lights.
Director of Photography		Bring Equipment	N/A
Director of Audio		Bring Equipment	Standard Microphone setup. Will be filming Medium and close up shots.

Sc.#	INT/EXT	SET/SYNOPSIS	Day/Night	Cast #
73	INT	COFFEE SHOP - Various shots from the Ultimate Canvass Montage	DAY	1
9	INT	Devon is a barista during the "Every job under the sun" montage	DAY	1

Cast #	Artist	Character	Pick up	Makeup/ Hair	Wardrobe	On set	Scenes
1		Devon Shire	Yuan will pick him up and deliver him and the equipment to the location	Normal	Typically Devon Shire attire. Bring also an apron and coffees.	13:00	73, 9
2		Coffee shop customer	N/A	Normal	Casual	13:00	73
3		Coffee shop customer	N/A	Normal	Casual	13:00	73
4		Coffee shop customer	N/A	Normal	Casual	13:00	73
5		Coffee shop customer	N/A	Normal	Casual	13:00	73
6		Coffee shop customer	N/A	Normal	Casual	13:00	73
7		Coffee shop customer	N/A	Normal	Casual	13:00	73



MANAGING YOUR CREW AND CAST

- Crew arrives one hour before shooting time to set up
 - If you can't set up the first shot in one hour, you're trying to do too much. Don't waste your crew's time.
- Cast arrives 10-15 minutes before shooting time.
- When shooting time hits: Go!
- Tip: You have to be the calmest person on set. If you lose your temper, apologize as soon as possible.
- Tip: Problems will arise. Focus on solving them. Listen to people's suggestions to solving them.

FILMING

- **Set-up**
- **Shot Coverage**
 - **Not enough time for full coverage. Will help you focus on what you need by forcing you to make decisions. You should almost have the movie edited on paper but coverage gives you options if your initial instincts are wrong.**
 - **Need: Wide 2-Shot (WS), Medium Shot (MS), Reverse Medium Shot (RMS). Go through the scene with these three shots, almost every single time.**
 - **Want: Additional shots as determined by the script. Close-ups, insert shots, oners, tracking shots**
 - **Only shoot these shots when needed by the script (not the entire scene) - plan it out ahead of time**
- **Shoot with flat colour profile so you collect as much data as possible**
- **Check your footage, check your audio.**
- **Make sure you take the lens cap off (Yes, this does happen)**
- **Tear-down**
- **Try to keep it to 3-4 hours, max. Filming is an exhausting experience and people will burn out fast. Move quickly and get what you need so you build momentum in your shoot.**

FILE MANAGEMENT

- When you record video and audio, protect it with your life
- RAID hard drive system is best but may not be affordable, another option is affordable external drives
- Off-site backups on portable hard drives. Make sure the original media is backed up in a different location
- Research how files should be organized and managed on your computer and come up with a plan
 - The Canvasser - Original Media organized by shooting day. Edited in separate projects based on sequence (series of scenes in the movie). Not industry standard
- Super important as it can save you lots of time later. Hard to research though

POST-PRODUCTION

EDITING

- **Equipment**
 - Computer (Macintosh or PC)
 - Non-Linear Editing Software (i.e., FCX, Davinci Resolve, Adobe Premiere)
 - Monitor - Colour Accuracy
 - Keyboard, mice and if affordable, editing controllers
- Organize files into scenes, synchronize video and audio, edit using your annotated script as a guide. Don't try to put the entire movie into a single project.
- Get the order of shots right and then work on the timing, focus on maintaining continuity
- Will take at least 4x the amount of footage you have to edit it.
 - 3 hours of footage = at least 12 hours of editing for a rough cut



COLOUR CORRECTION AND GRADING

- **Colour Correction**

- **Goal: To get all of the individual shots in the scene consistent with one another**
 - **Stretch absolute black to 0, absolute white to 100, move mid-tones to 50.**
 - **Correct skin tones. NLE will have a mark that will guide you**

- **Colour Grading**

- **Goal: To apply your desired look to the scene as a whole**
 - **If footage is corrected, then you can apply a LUT to the scene as a whole, save time**

- **Shot touch-ups**

- **After colour grading, can apply individual touches to each shot to make them perfect (i.e. vignetting)**

VISUAL EFFECTS

- **Most visual effects are used to fix problems encountered during filming, not to add CGI.**
 - **Most common visual effect is painting out things in the background (i.e., strangers walking onto location)**
- **Rotoscoping**
 - **Helpful to separate out foreground actors from background**
 - **AI (Runway ML) have made this relatively easy if the lighting is good.**
- **Lots of resources on YouTube to learn how to do most VE you will need**
- **Davinci Resolve Studio is a powerful and affordable resource for VE**
- **Never apply visual effects to a single shot in a project. Export the shot, process it for visual effects, and then re-import the finished shot back into your project.**

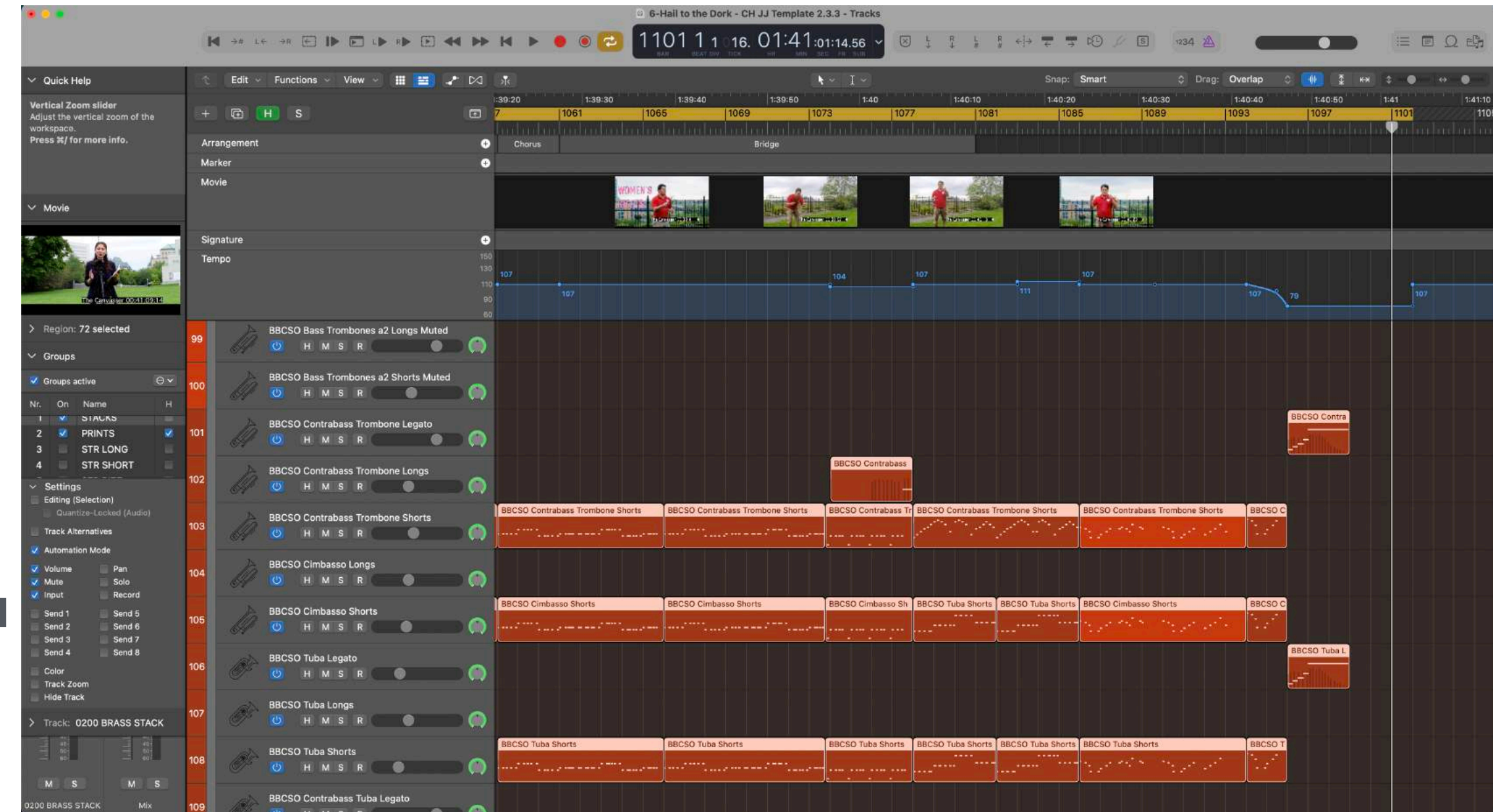
DIALOGUE PROCESSING AND SOUND EDITING

- Sound Editing Software (LPX, Davinci Resolve, Premiere, lots of options)
- Dialogue Processing
 - Dialogue recorded on location may need some processing to clean it up
 - Best affordable option is Isotope RX and related software
 - Can remove background noise, adjust tone of dialogue and use AI to improve its clarity
- Sound Editing
 - Can buy sound effect libraries or subscribe to services like Pond5 that allow you to download individual sound effects
 - Need a tool to manage downloaded sound effect libraries (included in Davinci Resolve)
 - May wish to outsource this step (The Canvasser took 6 months to edit sound effects and it was painful)
- Foley
 - Whenever a character touches something with something. Predominantly footsteps. Not industry standard term (my simplification)
 - The Canvasser used Edward Ultimate Suite. Add footsteps in by tapping keys on MIDI keyboard



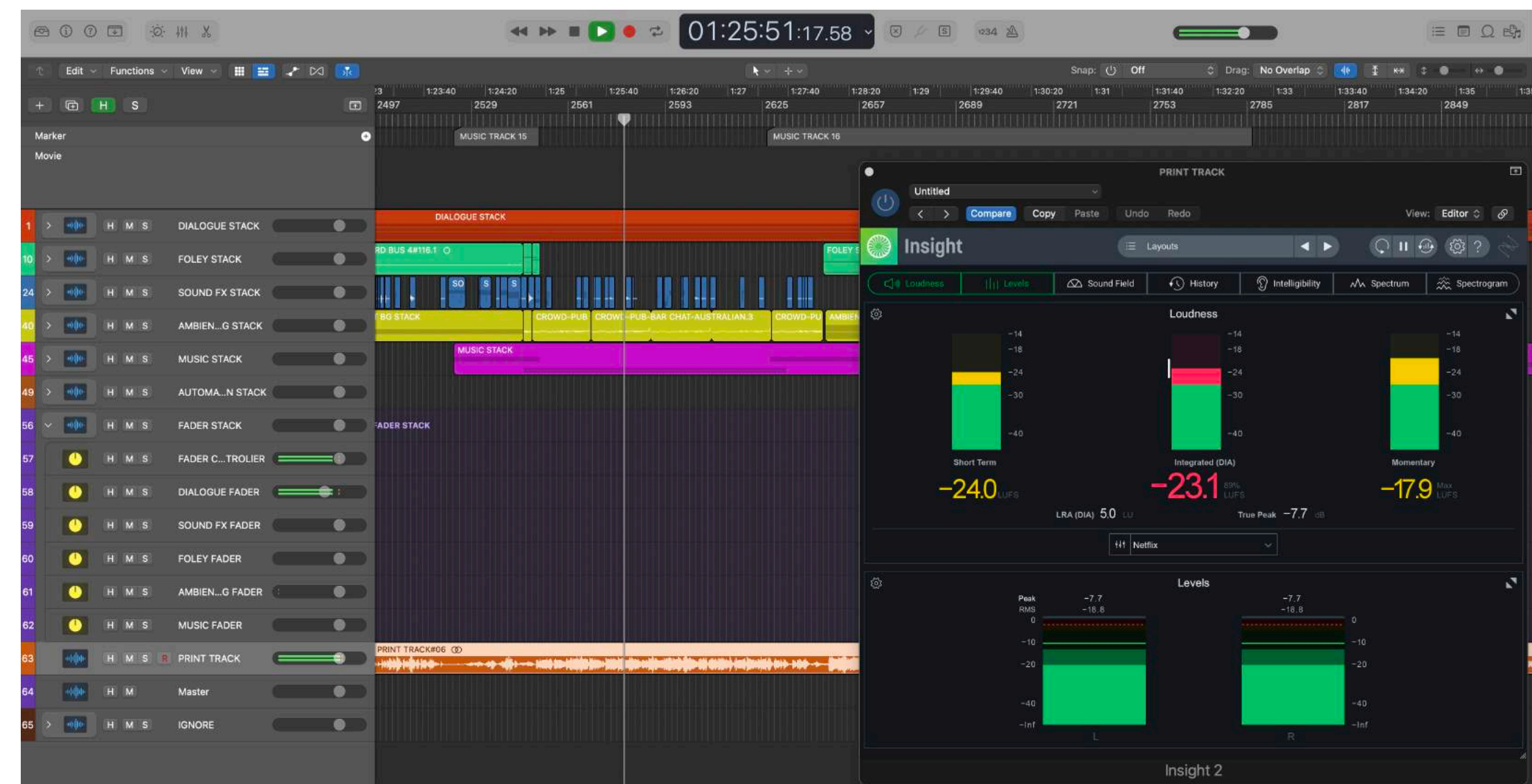
MUSICAL SCORE

- Lots of subscription options (i.e. Pond5) to download music to use in your movie
 - Probably the best and easiest option
- If you insist on creating your own bespoke score, then you need:
 - Computer, Reference Audio Monitors, Midi Keyboard (NI Komplete Kontrol)
 - Digital Audio Workstation (DAW): Cubase, Logic Pro, Pro Tools
 - Software Plugins: Kontakt, Kontrol, Spitfire Audio,
 - Music Libraries: BBCSO, Damage 2
- Can get really pricey and time-intensive
 - The Canvasser took 1 year and about \$5000 in equipment and software
- May want to consider outsourcing the music



SOUND MIXING

- Mix for Stereo or Mono. Don't bother with Surround Sound Formats. Mono is a very acceptable option and will save you a lot of time.
- Dialogue at dead centre, pan sound effects and foley to the left and right
 - Mono is perfectly fine. Stereo will be very time intensive but is nice for home streaming options.
- Adjust volume levels to meet the prescribed standard
 - Theatres have one standard, streaming VOD has another. Must create different sound mixes for each using Loudness meters (e.g., Insight 2)
- Focus on clarity of dialogue.



EXPORTING

- Export Clean ProRes 422 or equivalent entire movie
- Use that ProRes or equivalent to make everything else
- For Cinema: Digital Cinema Package (DCP)
 - If video file isn't perfect, the DCP won't ingest at movie theatres
 - Can test DCP-O-Matic or a local movie theatre
- For Blue-Ray and Video-On-Demand (Streaming): H.264 or H.265
 - Each VOD distributor will have different standards
 - Will likely have to use an aggregator at this point. Need to follow their directions.



DISTRIBUTION AND PROMOTION

PROMOTION

- Website
- Social Media
- Trailer
- Film Poster
 - SGPosters was amazing, scaled project to my budget
- Podcasts



FILM FESTIVALS



- Challenge is that the supply of films is growing far faster than the number of film festivals.
- Getting more difficult every year to get your film into a film festival as competition is fierce.
 - The Canvasser applied to 30 film festivals, was only accepted in the Maryland International Film Festival
- FilmFreeway makes applying to film festivals far easier and more manageable but does not include all film festivals
- Canadian Academy has a good list of Canadian Film Festivals as well.
- Try to focus on applying for film festivals that you could actually attend

SCREENINGS

- Screening for cast and crew
- Premieres: Local, Province, Domestic, North American, World
- May be limited as it is difficult to break even or make money.
- Promotion and marketing is difficult without a budget.
 - Looking for local podcasts, distribution list for the theatre it's playing at



STREAMING (VIDEO-ON-DEMAND)

- Will likely need to find an aggregator
- May need to additional budget to get through their process.
- Will try to find a streaming outlet for The Canvasser this Fall.

FINAL THOUGHTS

SCOTT BLURTON

CONTACT

- Twitter: @ScottGBlurton
- Web: [https://
www.scottblurton.ca/the-
canvasser](https://www.scottblurton.ca/the-canvasser)

