

The Dark Mile - Production Notes

I was intrigued by the original title of the script, 'A Darling Hush.' I thought it was a great title, and I had not shot a low-budget project for a while. I think I was missing the challenges and freedom of low-budget filmmaking. There is often a sense of camaraderie on very small projects with small crews more reminiscent of a documentary setup.

The film was shot entirely on location in the Lochs of Scotland and nearly all handheld apart from a few shots using my old homemade skateboard dolly. I love the immediacy and flow of a handheld camera when motivated by the movements of the actors. The idea of living on Dutch barges that doubled as our shooting interiors would, I felt, be a little different. It was a great production plan to use the boats to travel to the various locations with everybody on board filming the same boats as part of the story.

The budget was minuscule and we shot the entire film in 17 days. I persuaded Vince Wild, then at Take 2 (London), to lend us an Arri Alexa XT with a basic set of Cooke primes and a zoom. I had one electrician, the very capable Matt Buchan, who was my Best Boy on 'An Adventure in Space and Time'. I also persuaded the highly organized 1st AC Clare Connor to join us. She kept everything shipshape on the camera side, and all the rushes pin sharp. We had a very limited amount of equipment, 4 (battery) LED panel lights, a 2.5k Fresnel HMI that we could power from a small portable generator, plus a few flags, frames, clamps etc. For the night exteriors. I used an Octodome and a couple of Atlas heads, which worked as 'boat lights.' Everything was kept to a minimum and packable to a small size. There was not a great deal of space on the boats. My friend and colourist John Claude graded the film and secured a fantastic post-deal for the project with Technicolor.

Much of the drama plays out within the confines of the sailboat cabin and sleeping quarter. For me, the awkwardness of shooting on the boat adds to the sense of claustrophobia and forces us to lens close and wide, keeping us very much in the moment of the performance.

I have always been a fan of Spielberg's 'Dual,' and in some ways, the story has elements of 'Dual' but a chase with a Dutch barge instead of an American truck. Production designer Sarah Kane managed to paint one of the Dutch barges in a formidable dark grey. The paint would need to be quickly taken off to restore the boat back to its yucky bright green for the pending holiday season. She only had her art director to help her.

The two principal actresses, Deirdre Mullins and Rebecca Calder worked very hard to get their characters working for the story, and I think they did a fantastic job. They were also a delight to work with and kept us all going when things got tough.

JP

