

# Panavision in depth

## 'Animal Kingdom' DOP praised by critics



One of the most talked about films this year has been David Michôd's 'Animal Kingdom' notable for being the *Winner - World Cinema Jury Prize: Dramatic, Sundance Film Festival 2010*. Box office figures in Australia, traditionally the toughest market for locals to crack, have been so good that the distributors broadened the release almost straight away, increasing screens nationally.

Critics have given plenty of kudos to the cinematographer, Adam Arkapaw, for the richness of his widescreen pictures. These have caught their eye through the balance of genuine Melbourne backgrounds and locations, impactful acting by a terrific cast and a number of audience-jolting set-pieces involving a tangled world of violence.

There's been plenty of crime on the small screen over the last couple of years: not so much on the big screen. But now critics are hailing this film, for its depth and particular look, as one that may well have started a renaissance of quality crime movies in the tradition of Scorsese, Michael Mann and Coppola.

Cameras were from Panavision and Adam Arkapaw's first decision as DOP was to shoot 3-perf.



Top, left to Right:  
Andrew Jerrum (1st AC),  
Glenn Arrowsmith (Key Grip),  
Sky Davies (2nd AC),  
Emily Barr (Camera Attachment),  
Adam Arkapaw,  
Adrian Goodwin (Grip)'

Below, Adam Arkapaw

**Q.** Congratulations Adam on being part of the team that had such an impressive international win. Where were you when you heard the news?

**A.** Thanks.

Well actually David was superstitious about remaining at Sundance for the awards night and although I didn't find out until I arrived there, we were all booked to leave the day before.

So we were all kind of spread out across LA when the award was announced. I was in a dodgy motel in West Hollywood watching the broadcast on my iPhone that was dropping out every few seconds, so when I finally saw that we had won I could hardly believe it. I ended up consummating the win by heading down to the Saddle Ranch on Sunset Blvd with some friends and riding the mechanical bull for exactly 1.8 seconds. Much to the ire of the largely male population there that I think were keener to see girls with big boobs riding the bull.

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Q. Was the decision to shoot 3-perf budgetary, artistic or was it planned as a digital theatrical release?

A. The decision to shoot 3 perf was a really easy one. Animal Kingdom is a real ensemble performance piece and 3 perf gave us a 25% better shooting ratio to offer the actors. Also we shot for a 2.35 aspect ratio so we still had a comfortable amount of room to reframe my dodgy operating up or down within the native 1.85 frame.

Q. What differences then, are there in conceiving and setting up shots for the particular ratio of 3-perf?

A. There were no real differences in preparation or on-set working with 3 perf.

Q. 3-perf has its own parameters and can create some challenges in post for visual effects editors. Was that the case on 'Animal Kingdom'? If so, can you give some specific examples?

A. Animal Kingdom didn't really have any visual effects so everything was achieved in camera.

Q. The critics have praised your work on this film, calling it 'perfectly crafted' and one even saying that your shooting was 'staggeringly inconspicuous' allowing every aspect of surprise in the film to catch the audience unawares. How closely did you and David (Michôd) plot this aspect?

A. I did a good amount of pre-production and there was a lot of ground covered in discussion with David and Jo Ford (our wonderful production designer). One thing we were interested in was how to develop a shooting style that allowed the actors as much freedom as possible. Where possible we tried to not have any film hardware inside the locations allowing the actors to freely explore the space in their performance. Animal Kingdom is essentially an ensemble character piece and as such had a lot of scenes with up to 8 characters inhabiting a space at any one time. We didn't want to just have the characters standing still all the time; we wanted to inject energy & life into the scenes. Thus another idea we ended up relying on quite heavily was that every shot should have a beginning, middle and an end. By that I mean that the shot we started on which might be a close-up on Ben with James in the background became a 2 shot when Ben moved out of frame and Sullivan joined James in the background and then became a close-up on Jackie when she came into shot at the end of the scene. Doing this meant we weren't cutting every five seconds and allowed the actors to get into a flow with their performance. I think that helped with the tone of the film, it meant there were less cuts required and nothing was too jarring.

Q. Your background pre-film school was heavily slanted towards the visual arts. Can you fill us in on what informs your work as a cinematographer and how you tie aspects of your interests and education together?

A. Before I went to film school I studied fine arts for a time. I guess the qualities learnt there such as composition, light and colour control meant that I had quite a natural affinity with cinematography when I came to it a couple of years later. I still have a love for the arts and paintings are a great source of inspiration. Every cinematographer has the tools of the trade at his disposal and the job is about using references and making decisions about which are the most appropriate tools to use to augment a story.

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**Q. What was your 'big break' in the industry?**

A. I think there have been a few watershed moments so far but the main ones would be being nominated for an AFI on the short film 'End of Town' which led to a few big TAC campaigns, which paid for 'Jerrycan', which won Cannes and led to my first feature 'Blind Company', which led to the second 'Animal Kingdom'.

**Q. Your career to date has covered a broad territory of shorts, TVCs, docs and features. Do you have any particular genre preference?**

A. Variety is the spice of life. Films are great because you have the time and space to create something quite deliberate. Doco's are great because there is nothing quite like the rush of capturing something that cannot be replicated. And TVC's are great because you have the means to do exactly what you want. I guess all cinematographers want the same thing. To be working on something that means something to them, in as favorable shooting circumstances as possible.

**Q. Your next project is ...?**

A. Well actually I am typing this from the lounge room of director Justin Kurzel as we work together in pre-production on 'Snowtown'. The bodies in the barrels story told through the eyes of a boy.

Adam's select credits from a very long list include:

**'Animal Kingdom' for (dir: David Michôd 2010)**

**(Winner - World Cinema Jury Prize: Dramatic, Sundance Film Festival 2010)**

**'Jerrycan' (Dir: Julius Avery 2008) winner Cannes jury prize**

**'I Love Sarah Jane' (Dir: Spencer Susser 2008) the latter two shorts screened at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival.**

**Nominated for an AFI Award for Best Cinematography**

**Winner of Best Cinematography at the Jackson Hole Film Festival (USA) for his work on the film 'End of Town' (Dir: Julius Avery, 2005)**

**Shot feature film 'Blind Company' (Dir: Alkinos Tsilimidos, 2009)**

