ON KIT LISTS

AND BUILDING BEACH HUTS AND CASTLES WITH MOATS
FROM YOUR TRUSTY DOP, GYÖRGY LÁSZLÓ

Dear All,

as your prep time is getting shorter and shorter I wanted to share with you a few more thoughts. This should be a lecture in itself, alas it needs to be via this chat window. I'll try to be brief and generic, please bear with me.

You are all facing the same difficulties and do not worry, I know how hard it is to get even small projects done. We will get yours done! And again, I am sharing with you my thoughts as a DOP.

Most of you are not shooting in the studio and I have just received an email from Rali regarding the equipment that will supposedly be checked out tomorrow. IMO this is way too early and you should only check out gear after our consultation. More than anything, you must give yourselves the option to have access to lights for your shoots.

I don't know how fully you realise that everything you see on your screens is a result of lighting.

EVERYTHING.

(He writes in ALL CAPS and makes it blue so it must be important.)

Sometimes you go for available light, sometimes for a combination of available light with a few extra lights, sometimes it's all created from scratch by the DOP.

At this stage in your lives you know very little about the logic and practise of lighting, different kinds of lights, their uses, strenghts and limitations. And that is perfectly okay! This is why you will always have a DOP and that's why a DOP will always have gaffers and sparks.

Imagine that you are investors. You want to build a lovely house. Perhaps you'll wake up and say, "Today, I will build a beach hut!" Perhaps you'll say "Today, I will build a castle with a moat!". You will take care of the financing. And then you'll call experts to build those buildings for you. Architects, bricklayers, plumbers, etc. What you cannot do, however, is to order five planks of wood and two crates of bricks and then tell your architects, bricklayers and plumbers: "I want a beach hut!" or "I want a castle with a moat!"

You have to consult with the experts FIRST and order the building materials SECOND. First you have to consult with the architect what kind of building you want and then they'll tell you what you need to order.

To cut the long metaphor short: if you order lights without consulting your DOP, you will corner yourselves. You will order lights that you know nothing about, that may or may not do the job you wish to get done. You will end up with a planks of wood and crates of brick and the DOP will build you something out of it, but it sure won't be a beautiful beach hut and it won't be a castle with a moat either.

In all my lectures, “newsletters” and short or long emails I am trying to show you the correct procedure as far as my craft is concerned. My point is that I want you to succeed and enjoy shooting your projects. So here is how it needs to be done and this is the only way to do if you want to build something beautiful:

In a practical sense, Rali, please do not pick up the Aladdins tomorrow. They may not be the right kinds of lights for your story! Wait until after our consult on Thursday, we will have a look at your set and then we can make an informed decision. However, this is my message to all of you, wonderful people, wait with the equipment list until you actually know how you wish to shoot your stories.



1. Consult your script with your DOP. Remember that the DOP is not so much interested in dialogue but in sets, floor plans, set designs, lights, mood, camera movement and placement, rhythm - which should all be motivated by the characters. This is a lengthy process and normally, before any project takes days days if not weeks of discussions.



2. Once the DOP understands what you’d like to achieve and the space in which you want to achieve it he or she can tell you what equipment you will need.



3. This simply doesn’t work the other way around. I mean it can, you can decide beforehand that “this is the camera, these are the lenses and here are your two lights, now work with these” but then you have to have a story which you know that can be told with those tools. If you want Blade Runner, you will need the gets lots of lights and the right kinds of lights. If you want the Blairwitch Project, you will be able use less lighting, but you will still need the right kinds of lights.



4. Once you know what the DOP needs you can start negotiating with him or her. “We can’t afford a 20K HMI, could would use a 5K instead?” And then you’ll get some kind of an answer. And obviously, this is something that you’ll have to repeat with every HOD.

Over and out and have a great evening,

György