

A Colorful Conversation with Jane Tolmachyov, Senior Colorist

This movie buff has color corrected scores of projects – from feature films to reality TV – in her 25 years at DuArt. We cover everything from the magic of motion to the power of being prepared in this most enlightening convo.

You've had a few roles at DuArt when it comes to video imaging, right? What led you to being a colorist?

When I first came to DuArt and began working in the telecine department, there was a wonderful person there named Larry McGowan. He really showed me the ropes, not even really from a technical perspective as much as from the DP's point of view. Larry made me realize what to look for in a picture of moving images – I began to appreciate what light does.

Eventually Larry left the company and I was in charge of the telecine for some time. Today, as a colorist, I feel like I'm still learning certain things, because images are beautiful and every new image pushes you to look for something else. Every new project is a challenge for me, because I'm forced to think about what I see, what light I'm looking at, and what mood I want to translate. And with all the new tools available for color correction today, being a colorist is even more wonderful. I have no limits now.

When you're color correcting a show or a film, what's your role? What do you feel you are there to do?

First and foremost, I listen to the DPs, and I listen to the directors, because I need to understand what it is they're looking for. I listen, and I try to see in my mind's eye the same picture they see. Sometimes it's a matter of different interpretations, but you have to listen and listen carefully, because some people can describe images in very specific terms -- they can say how saturated or contrasted the picture should be. Other people can't do that, and instead they speak in terms of the mood, or color temperature, or the time period.

And, of course some people don't know what they're looking for. They'll come to the color timing sessions to find out what's there. Ultimately, all clients come to DuArt to put their vision on the screen. My job is to understand it, see it, and deliver it.

What are the tools of your trade at DuArt that you really enjoy using?

For non-linear color correction, our most recent major acquisition was a Nucoda, or Film Master <http://digitalvision.tv/products/nucoda.aspx> as it's also known. Because it's software based, as opposed to the older linear hardware systems, it gives you pretty much unlimited capabilities on what it can do – how you can manipulate images, how many changes you can make on one frame. It's a wonderful tool. It gives me all these chances to do more and do it better.

What do you think are the unique aspects that you bring to the color correct phase of a project?

When I look at an image, my first instinct is to find the captured light in that image. To

me, light is what picture is about: I still like images that capture the light.

It's harder to do it now because we've moved to digital capture on film. We capture something organic like light, with a completely non-organic tool like 0's and 1's. I miss the feel we get from film, and my instinct is to find something like that in these images. \

Do you have advice for indie film makers or video producers on a budget who want to make sure their film looks the best it can? What do you want them to know about how they can make the most out of color correct, from a time and budget standpoint?

Well, it's actually really rare nowadays to find somebody who doesn't know a great deal about the medium that they're working in – people are very well versed in the cameras and other tools that they use.

Whether they're shooting in HD video or on film, what makes their life easier in the post work depends on how much they stick to their plan. If you know exactly what you're trying to achieve in the end, and you have a roadmap, then you're fine. If you're shooting from the hip, then things can get a little trickier, because of the amount of FX work that is part of any project today. Compositing and other processes can cause trouble in the end if you don't think about them ahead of time.

If you could have worked on any three films or shows in history, what would they be?

One would be a film that I did work on, *Nadie Eschuchaba* (*Nobody Listens*) directed by Nestor Almendros http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N%C3%A9stor_Almendros. I would love to work on some black and white, and that would be probably Greg Tolland http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregg_Toland, or another of my favorite black and white cinematographers, Gianni Di Venanzo <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0005689/>, he did 8 1/2 for Federico Fellini http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federico_Fellini.

For color, some of my favorite images are from *The Sacrifice* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Sacrifice by Andrei Tarkovsky http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrei_Tarkovsky (Sven Nykvist DP). Those are some of the most breathtaking images, as far as I'm concerned. It's pretty much all about the light, and the mood.

Shifting gears for our last question...What's your favorite NYC hangout?

(Laughs) I don't hang in NYC, I hang on Cape Cod! In Truro http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truro,_Massachusetts, between P-Town and Wellfleet. The best beaches on the Eastern Seaboard are in Massachusetts. If you want to bypass the traffic on I-95, take Rt.15 as far as New Haven to I-95 or you can take the long way: Rt.15 to Rt.84 to Rt.90 to 495.

Wow, thanks for the travel tip! I was afraid to drive up to Cape Cod ever again.

(Laughs) You're welcome -- I'll bet you weren't expecting to learn that!