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# Lights, Camera, Action

By CAROL J. BURR

Just a semester shy of his radio/TV/film degree, Shafer packed his bags for Hollywood hoping to spend the summer gaining experience and making contacts that might help him win entrance to graduate work at the American Film Institute, USC or UCLA. But after a stint as an extra on "The Ratings Game" for cable TV's Showtime channel, Shafer got lucky.

He landed a job as assistant to Producer Frank Levy, a partner with Actor Gregory Harrison (Gonzo Gates of "Trapper John, M.D.") in Catalina Production Group, Ltd. The balance of his summer was spent in Los Angeles, Toronto and the Virgin Islands filming "Seduced," a TV movie for CBS starring Harrison and Cybil Shepherd, with a supporting cast of José Ferrer, Mel Ferrer, Michael Gwynn, Jordan Christopher and Adrienne Barbeau.

With this first door to a film career propped open, Shafer rushed back to Norman to make arrangements to finish his remaining course work before going on to Catalina's next project.

As exciting as his glittering summer had been, Shafer doesn't claim to have it made, but he has made an impressive start. He does feel, however, that he has shown that the University of Oklahoma film program — far from the roar of the Hollywood crowds and the whir of the cameras — is offering training competitive with the more

**T**he time is a few years hence; the place, a local movie theatre — or maybe you're just watching HBO in your own living room. You settle into your seat, popcorn and coke in hand, as the house lights dim, and the credits flash onto the screen. Title, principal players, producer — then "Directed by Dirk Shafer."

You've never heard of Dirk Shafer? Well, if the last six months are any indication, it's only a matter of time.

Until the spring semester, Dirk Shafer was part of a group of aspiring young film makers on the University of Oklahoma campus, albeit one of the most talented. But in March, a Shafer film, "The Last Lullaby," won the prestigious Alpha Epsilon Rho National Broadcasting Society competition, and doors began to open.

heralded programs on the West Coast.

Shafer came to the University as an award-winning high school film maker with acting and dance experience. Hooked on movies at an early age, he found his first "angel" in the seventh grade when a teacher gave him an old Super 8 projector, enabling him to persuade his parents to buy him a Super 8 camera. First he made silent movies, recording sound effects and dialogue on a tape recorder. Graduating to a sound camera in high school, he became a one-man production company, turning all his friends into actors for his short films, and twice winning the Oklahoma State University's film festival.

He followed much the same production formula when he brought his motion picture camera to OU. With severely limited budgets and only a small pool of performers willing to donate time and abilities to his productions, Shafer tailored his films to fit the available talent.

"You need talent, but you also need people who are dependable," Shafer says. "I knew what my good friends could do, where their talents were, so I wrote some sort of story around them."

One chance meeting proved especially profitable for Shafer Productions. When the TV show "Dance Fever" scheduled auditions in Norman, Shafer received a call from an acquaintance looking for a partner for an OU dance major who wanted to enter the contest. With a week's practice, Shafer and Vivian Paxton won the state competition, a trip to California and an appearance on the nationally televised show. Paxton, who now is touring with the road company of the Broadway musical "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas," also became the star of Shafer's two best film efforts, including "The Last Lullaby," which eventually won the National Broadcasting Society prize.

"The Last Lullaby" is a mood film about a mother who has just lost her daughter and the stages of bereavement she experiences. Shafer drew heavily on the death of a close relative in fashioning the script, cast his little sister opposite Paxton and shot the film in his parents' home in Edmond.

The second Paxton film, "My Love

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*Shortly after winning his prestigious national film award, Sooner Dirk Shafer is back at work editing 16mm film in the basement laboratory at the art school.*

Affair," Shafer's favorite of the 13 films he has produced, is a 1940s genre in black and white.

The project which brought Shafer the most attention on the OU campus was a seven-episode soap opera called "All My Sooners," which appeared on Norman Cable TV last year. The serial was Shafer's solution to several problems inherent in completing a 30-minute movie assignment.

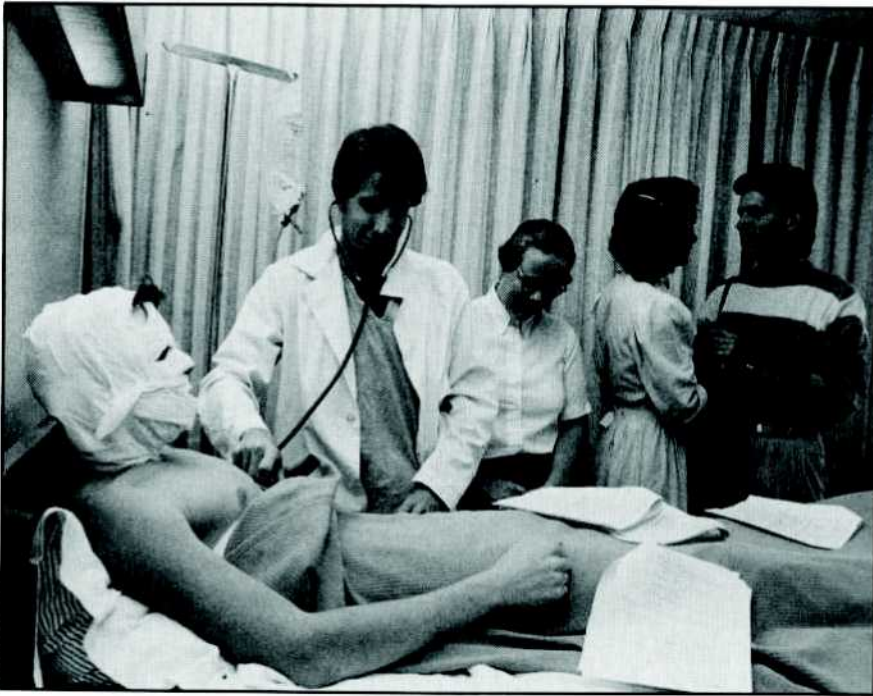
"For a 30-minute film, you've got to have action and different locations,"

A seven-episode TV soap  
opera, "All My Sooners,"  
was Shafer's solution to  
several filming problems.

he explains, "but you don't get the equipment for a very long period, and shooting a lot of action in different locations takes too much time and money. So I thought that the only way to pull off some kind of really dramatic presentation for television would be a soap opera—and it also would be a way to get students on the campus involved."

Shafer pulled together a 10-member cast, commandeered student apartments for the domestic scenes and





For seven episodes, the campus followed the tribulations of "All My Sooners." Here hero Trip Orlick (Brian Griffin), swathed in bandages from a chemistry lab explosion, is attended in Goddard Health Center by absent-minded Dr. Ludepains (Matt Bailey), little dreaming that Ruth Bickham (Jennifer Hibdon), who has come to comfort him, is about to become his wife. Meanwhile Trip's coed sister Missy (Cathy O'Hara) holds hands with porno king Sid Huskque (Brad Newquist).

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Dirk Shafer studies a shot during the  
filming of his soap opera, "All My Soon-  
ers," at Goddard Health Center.

Goddard Health Center for the ob-  
ligatory hospital setting, while  
struggling to coordinate wildly diver-  
gent student schedules with site and  
equipment availability.

"Everybody had something to do,"  
Shafer says. "If you weren't in the  
scene, you held a mike or worked the  
lights or got behind the camera, since  
other people had to shoot the scenes I  
was in."

Although much of Shafer's show  
business experience has been perform-  
ing as an actor or dancer, his career  
goal is to be a director. "I'm not com-  
pletely comfortable with myself in  
front of the camera. I'm just happier  
behind the camera. I feel more crea-  
tive," he claims. "Lately, I've been  
doing a lot of screenwriting, and I'd  
like to do more. Everything in film  
stems from writing, and many big-  
name directors have written a lot of  
their own scripts."

The multi-disciplined arrangement  
of the OU film program, working  
through English, art and journalism,  
has given Shafer the opportunity to  
view film making from every angle  
while finding the phase of the business  
he likes best. While Shafer's degree  
will be in radio/TV/film through the

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While on location in the Virgin Islands for the TV movie "Seduced," Dirk Shafer,  
right, goes along with Catalina Productions still photographer Jim Globbus to  
take publicity shots of the stars, Gregory Harrison and Cybil Shepherd, left.

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*Gregory Harrison of "Trapper John, M.D." fame and Cybil Shepherd are shown in a scene from "Seduced," a TV movie which was filmed this summer in the Virgin Islands.*

*The star can't be expected to do all the work while on location, so the assistant to the producer, Dirk Shafer, stands in with Shepherd — a tough job but somebody has to do it.*

School of Journalism and Mass Communication, he has spent equally valuable time in art and English.

"Greg Durbin in the art school uses a kind of company approach," Shafer says. "In his Film Crew Production course, the students all submit story treatments, and the class votes on which ones to spend the rest of the semester producing — say, four of them — then everybody works on different crews, as characters, directors, etc.

"I submitted three story ideas in that class, and two of them were voted in," Shafer adds. "In Durbin's class you have to learn to get along with each other and work with each other. That's hard to do when you are used to doing everything by yourself — to getting all the credit if it's successful, but all the blame if it's not.

"It was really interesting to see something I had written being made by someone else. And the directors did a really good job taking my script and making their own image out of it."

Shafer's work with his faculty adviser in journalism, Ned Hockman, was on a more individual basis. "A lot of students take Hockman's courses like they would any other courses, just

because he is such a good lecturer; they don't want to be film majors. But the few who are serious about film careers really can take advantage of his experience and information. Of course you have shooting assignments, but individually as opposed to the company approach. And you see lots of films, examples of things that have worked before in student and professional productions."

In the English department students are exposed to the critical side of film, the academic approach. Working with Ray Merlock and Joanna Rapf, Shafer viewed films, wrote papers, submitted scripts for critical evaluation and gained insight into the pre-production aspect of film making.

"Joanna Rapf is number one in my book," Shafer insists. "She's inspirational, really excited about what she does. She just loves film, and you can tell it."

Rapf scheduled Shafer's "My Love Affair" as a short subject before the regular English department-sponsored film series. "It was neat to see it on the big screen," Shafer confesses. "Altogether about 400 people saw it, and I got reactions back from those people."

Shafer admits that the facilities for film making at OU are not the best, as compared with the prestige curriculums in the heart of movieland. Journalism's film majors work in a converted barracks on South Campus, and equipment is hard to come by.

"The art department has some all-right equipment, but it's expensive to keep it in repair," Shafer says. "Checking it out is like going through Fort Knox. You have to sign your life away — and I don't blame them.

"But as far as the people go," he adds quickly, "OU is as good as anywhere. Ned Hockman, Ray Merlock, Greg Durbin, Joanna Rapf may not be big celebrity names, but as teachers they are as good as any in the nation."

Equipment, facilities and faculty notwithstanding, the final test of any program, film or otherwise, is the achievement of its graduates, and the road to success in the film industry is particularly treacherous. In Dirk Shafer, however, the OU teaching conglomerate seems to have produced a winner whose chances of putting his name on the big screen are awfully good.

"Directed by Dirk Shafer." Just give him time. 