



Resource Review

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Name of reviewed item:	The Travelling Companion, DVD and related website.
Author(s) / Editor(s):	Andrew Ireland
Publisher / distributor details (see note below):	Andrew Ireland The Media School Bournemouth University Talbot Campus Poole Dorset England BH12 5BB
Publication / release date:	2007
ISBN number (if applicable):	
Technical details (if software – see note below):	DVD and web address http://www.travellingcompanion.co.uk/ which has open/ free access to all.
Price:	DVD Free from address above once A5 jiffy bag sent with prepaid postage – limited numbers available.

Review:

The Travelling Companion is a double DVD and website developed to support learning and teaching of television, digital film and video production. The one-hour television drama based on the Hans Christian Andersen story, "The Travelling Companion" is at the centre of this resource. The steps in the process of making the TV drama are organised online as downloadable notes/ templates/ interviews and technical online booklets. The original script, the shooting script and editing exercises are other elements of this multimedia tool.

The film was the inspiration of Andrew Ireland, the drama's director and made with industry professionals, students, graduates and staff from the Media School, Bournemouth University. There are 2 discs in the DVD set. Disk 1 contains the full drama to watch and production stills. Disk 2 contains original rushes from 4 scenes. Students have the opportunity of using these scenes to improve editing skills and green screen compositing. Scripts and CGI backgrounds are part of the downloadable tools on the website.

There are a various parts of the DVD and website resource that are especially useful. Log and call sheets can help media students understand how to organise their shoot and can be adapted to use for their own work. A timeline of the planning and shooting process would have been useful but can be pieced together from the interviews. In his interview Andrew Ireland revealed his editing background. The resource he has created is very strong on providing editing exercises for students to practice with which are usually hard to source. He has provided well-shot scenes from all the angles needed, the script and the out takes. Students finally have the opportunity to practice editing and learn their craft with the right materials rather than trying to make the best of the incomplete footage provided by their learning student peers. Of course directors can learn how to shoot a scene from these editing exercises as well. Students can practice special effects creation as well as picture and dialogue editing. Andrew's skill as an editor means that the whole project is very organised and focussed on the end product. He is clear about what he wants and his organisation and planning seems to be impeccable although I feel that his editorial knowledge sometimes works against him. In his online interview, he admits, "*during the shoot I began relying more on post production. I knew that I was going to have to anyway, for example there were telegraph poles which I knew I was going to have to paint out – and that's quite straightforward. There's a lot of requirements for blue-screen.*" Post production can be very time consuming and expensive and I feel more emphasis should have been placed on getting things right during the shoot.

Andrew confesses to being a lover of science fiction, ghost and fantasy stories and so picked a project that could fascinate him for a year and was worth spending his teaching fellowship grant on. Many students seem interested in these genres but I question the wisdom of choosing to do a costume drama on a low budget. He did so many things right with the budget; chose a small cast and organised a short but manageable shooting period (12 days) but I feel that money spent on getting the right costumes, finding and then paying for period locations in addition to the post production time needed to get rid of any incongruous modern details could have been spent elsewhere to more effect giving a slicker more professional finish. The period language also created unnecessary challenges for the writer and actors. Having fantasy sets, for example the Magician's Lair, created exercises for students to practice special effects but the re-shoot of this sequence cost £3000-£4000 and many hours in post production. How long will these special effects exercises be in date? There was a missed opportunity to shoot an original script written by a student, lecturer or graduate.

The DVD and website are laid out very simply and are very user friendly. The Travelling Companion is a page on the CEMP website (Centre for Excellence in Media Practice) with clear instructions and fast opening links with all downloads working. Technical notes such as on camera and editing refer directly to techniques used in *The Travelling Companion* so the reader can view the scene discussed immediately if the technical detail needs an example to become clearer. Of course this works the other way around, when seeing a particular lighting / camera technique in the film, one can find out how it was created by reading the notes online.

Sections can be extracted by various courses for their own use, from MA editing (the tasks on Disc 2) to Film Journalism (first years could use the interviews) as well as any media student (pre-degree even) making a film. I wish there had been more emphasis on film rather than TV as films have a life that continues through film festivals and screenings, while the TV drama created has to compete against much bigger budgets to get screened on television.

Despite this nit picking I find the combination of DVD and website to be inspirational on many levels despite my own reservations about the choice of story, using a TV

drama rather than a film, the genre and some of the acting. It succeeds in being a useful learning and teaching tool in separate parts and as a whole. It provides a resource with elements to use in lectures and workshops or independent practice and reference for students. It is clear that the process of making the drama was an incredible learning experience for all involved from students to lecturers. As a finished work it offers tips on making the filmmaking process run smoother. Andrew admits he made some mistakes and identifies them clearly. That is in itself a valuable lesson we are all able to learn from. His example reminds us of the importance to move from simply telling students what they should be doing and grading them to taking the risk of pushing our own skills and practice forward and experiencing the risks and challenges students face. Whether intended or not this useful, free resource offers examples of what to avoid (a budget guzzling costume drama), reminders of how work can date (Andrew admits the special effects will look dated and will need to be re-done) as well as best practice to follow.