

## MYSTERIES REVEALED

### The Final Cut Pro X Post Process for *Voice from the Stone*

As someone who's worked on a number of independent films, I find it exciting when an ambitious feature film project with tremendous potential comes from somewhere other than the mainstream Hollywood studio environment. One such film is *Voice from the Stone*, which features Emilia Clarke and Marton Csokas. Clarke has been a fan favorite in her roles as Daenerys Targaryen in *Game of Thrones* and the younger Sarah Connor in *Terminator Genisys*. Csokas has appeared in numerous films and TV series, including *Sons of Liberty* and *Into the Badlands*.

In *Voice from the Stone*, Clarke plays a nurse in

1950s Tuscany who is helping a young boy, Jakob (played by Edward Ding), recover from the death of his mother. He hasn't spoken since the mother, a renowned pianist, died. According to Eric Howell, the film's director, "*Voice from the Stone* was a script that screamed to be read under a blanket with a flashlight. It plays as a Hitchcock fairy tale set in 1950s Tuscany with mysterious characters and a ghostly antagonist." While not a horror film or thriller, there is a supernatural element in the exploration of the emotional relationship between Clarke and the boy.

*Voice from the Stone* is Howell's feature

directorial debut. He has worked on numerous films as a director, assistant director, stuntman, stunt coordinator, and in special effects. Dean Zanuck (*Road to Perdition*, *Get Low*, *The Zero Theorem*) produced the film through his company Zanuck Independent. From there, the production takes an interesting turn toward the American heartland, as primary postproduction was handled by Splice in Minneapolis. This is a market known for its high-end commercial work, but Splice has landed a solid position as the primary online facility for various film and TV series, such as History Channel's *America Unearthed* and ABC's *In An Instant*.



Editor Clayton Condit and director Eric Howell during the offline edit at Splice

## TUSCANY, MINNEAPOLIS AND MORE

Clayton Condit, who co-owns and co-manages Splice with his wife Barb, edited *Voice from the Stone*. We chatted about how this connection came about. He says, “I had edited two short films with Eric [Howell]. One of these, ‘Anna’s Playground,’ made the short list for the 2011 Oscars in the short films category. Eric met with Dean [Zanuck] about getting involved with this film, and while we were waiting for the financing to be secured, we finished another short, called ‘Strangers.’ Eric sent the script to Emilia [Clarke] and she loved it. After that, everything sort of fell into place. It’s a beautiful script that, along with Eric’s style of directing, fueled amazing performances from the entire cast.”

The actual production covered about 35 days in the Tuscany region of Italy, where the exterior location was filmed at one castle and the interiors at another. This was a two-camera shoot, with ARRI Alexas recording to ARRIRAW. Anamorphic lenses were used to record in ARRI’s 3.5K 4:3 format, but the final product is desqueezed for a 2.39:1 “scope” final 2K master. The DIT on set created editorial and viewing dailies in the ProRes LT file format, complete with synced production audio and timecode burn-in. The assistant editor back at Splice was loading and organizing the same dailies so that all materials were available there as well.

Condit explains the timeline of the project: “The production was filmed on location in Italy during November and December of 2014. I was there for the first half of it, cutting on my MacBook Pro on set and in my hotel room. Once I travelled back to Minneapolis, I continued to build a first cut. The director arrived back in the States by the end of January to see early rough assemblies, but it was around mid-February when I really started working a full cut with Eric on the film. By April of 2015 we had a cut ready to present to the producers. Then it took a few more weeks working with them to refine the cut. Splice is a full-service post facility, so we kicked off visual effects in May and color starting mid-June. The composer, Michael Wandmacher, created an absolutely gorgeous score that we were able to record during the first week of July at Air Studios in London. We partnered with Skywalker Sound for audio postproduction and mix, which

took us through the middle of August.”

As with any film, getting to the final result takes time and experimentation. He continues, “We screened for various small groups, listening to feedback, and debated and tweaked. The film has a lot of beautiful subtleties to it. We did not want to

cheapen it with cliché tricks that would diminish the relationships between characters. It really is first a love story between a mother and her child. The director and producers and I worked very closely together, taking scenes out, working pacing, putting scenes back in, and really making sure we



Edward Dring (Jakob) and Emilia Clarke (Verena) in a scene from *Voice from the Stone*



Marton Csokas (Klaus) and Emilia Clarke (Verena)

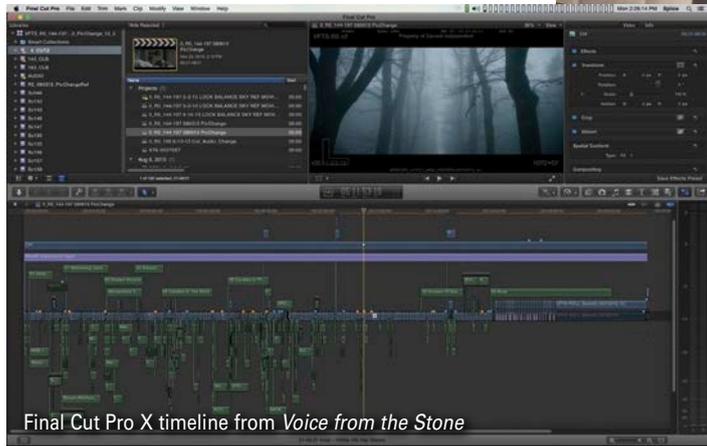
PHOTOS BY PHILIPPE ANTONELLO



Eric Howell (left) and producer Dean Zanuck



On the set



Final Cut Pro X timeline from *Voice from the Stone*

with [Blackmagic Design] DaVinci Resolve. Today we are sort of an 'all of the above' shop, but for my offline projects, I really think FCP X is the best tool. Eric also appreciated his experience with FCP X, as the technology never got in the way. As storytellers, we are creatively free to try things very quickly [with Final Cut Pro X]."

were renamed by scene and take numbers using different keyword assignments to help sort and search. The film was shot with two cameras, which Cody grouped as multicam clips in FCP X. He used Sync-N-Link X [from Intelligent Assistance] to bring in the production sound metadata. This enabled me to easily identify channel names. I tend to edit in timelines rather than a traditional source and record approach. I start with 'stringouts' of all the footage by scene and will use various techniques to sort and track best takes. A couple of the items I'd love to see return to FCP X are tabs for open timelines and dupe detection."

had an effective story."

Splice handled visual effects ranging from sky replacements to entire greenscreen composited sequences. Condit explains, "Our team uses a variety of tools including [The Foundry] Nuke, [SideFX] Houdini, [Autodesk] Maya and [Maxon] Cinema 4D. Since this film takes place in the 1950s, there were a lot of modern elements that needed to be removed, like TV antennas and distant power lines, for example. There's a rock quarry scene with a pool of water. When it came time to shoot there, the water was really murky, so that had to be replaced. In addition, Splice also handled a number of straight effects shots. In a couple scenes the boy is on the edge of the roof of the castle, which was a greenscreen composite, of course. We also shot a day in a pool for underwater shots."

### PIONEERING THE CUT WITH FINAL CUT PRO X

Clayton Condit is a definite convert to Apple's Final Cut Pro X. Condit says, "Splice originated as an Avid-based shop and then moved over to Final Cut Pro as our market shifted. We also do a lot of online finishing, so we have to be compatible with whatever the offline editor cuts in. As FCP 7 fades away, we are seeing more jobs being done in [Adobe] Premiere Pro, and we also are finishing

"Of course, like every FCP X editor, I have my list of features that I'd like to see, but as a creative editorial tool, hands down it's the real deal. I really love audio roles, for example. This made it very easy to manage my temp mixes and to hand over scenes to the composer so that he could control what audio he worked with. It also streamlined turnovers. My assistant, Cody Brown, used X2Pro Audio Convert to prepare AAFs for Skywalker. Sound work in your offline is so critical when trying to 'sell' your edit and to make sure a scene is really working. FCP X makes that pretty easy and fun. We have an extensive sound library here at Splice. Along with early music cues from Wandmacher, I was able to do fairly decent temp mixes in surround for early screenings inside Final Cut."

On location, Condit kept his media on a small G-Technology G-RAID Thunderbolt drive for portability. Once back in Minneapolis, he upgraded to Splice's 600 TB Xsan shared storage system that enables collaboration among departments. Condit's FCP X library and cache files were kept on small dual-SSD Thunderbolt drives for performance, and with mirrored media, he could easily transition between working at home or at Splice.

Condit explains his FCP X workflow: "We broke the film into separate libraries for each of the five reels. Each scene was its own event. Shots

Final Cut Pro X has several features to help refine the edit. Condit says, "I used FCP X's retiming function extensively for the pace and emotion of shots. With the optical flow technology, it delivers great results. For example, in the opening shot you see two hands—the boy and his mother—playing piano. The on-set piano rehearsal was recorded and used for playback for all takes. Unfortunately, it was half the speed of the final cue used in the film. I had to retime that performance to match the final cue, which required putting a keyframe in for every finger push. Optical flow looks so good in FCP X that many of the final online retimes were actually done in FCP X."

Singer Amy Lee of the band Evanescence recorded the closing title song for the film during the sound sessions at Skywalker. Condit says, "Amy completely 'got' the film and articulated it back in this beautiful song. She and Wandmacher collaborated to create something pretty special to close the film with. Our team is fortunate enough now to be creating a music video for the song that was shot at the same castle."

Zanuck Independent is currently arranging a domestic distribution schedule for *Voice from the Stone*, so look for it in theaters later this year. **dv**