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Seeing RED in Kenya

Malaika Media & Productions is the first production company to go RED in Kenya. “We decided to jump right into the RED One camera” says Kire Godal, filmmaker and owner of Malaika. “The decision was a bit nerve wracking, as we are the first user in East Africa, but after doing our research it became an easy and exciting choice.

We just didn't want to get into something that would become obsolete in a few years. We can trade up and grow with the RED company and after looking at all the other camera options, there was simply nothing to compare to the RED One in price, innovation, or quality. We can do our usual HD television productions with it, and also move into feature films.”

Wildlife documentaries

Kire Godal and her soundman Mike Moller specialize in African ethnographic and wildlife documentaries. They currently have three documentaries showing on the National Geographic Channel, as well as commercial and NGO productions for the East African market. They often work in extreme and remote locations, living in the bush for more than a month at a time, while operating from a tented production studio. “Our work is about being



Kire Godal from Malaika Productions in Nairobi has purchased the first RED One camera in East Africa. It's being used to produce wildlife documentaries and had barely hit the ground when it was put to work on 'Africa Sings – Africa Dances', a 50-minute documentary for international distribution.

organized while delivering the best quality possible,” Kire explains. “At first we thought that the RED One camera would be too complicated and fragile in hot, dusty and remote locations. We heard rumours that it overheated easily and also was hard to operate handheld but after working with it in our usual extreme situation, we are happy to say it performed really well. It only overheated at 40 + centigrade, filming a mid day ceremony under a sweltering sun. It politely turned itself off, and needed about 15 minutes to cool, then straight back to work. In the future, we will think about how to protect and keep the camera cooler in a similar situation.”

Hit the ground rolling

Malaika's RED One camera barely hit the ground in Kenya before being put to the test filming “Africa Sings, Africa Dances” a pan Africa feature documentary film, and another 50-minute tribal documentary for international television. On

both shoots the RED was configured to shoot 2k. On the first shoot, as second unit, 2k matched the DOP's Sony HD900R Cine Alta camera. "The DOP shooting on the Sony kept saying he was glad I was shooting with the larger depth of field provided by 2k, because he was worried the RED footage would out shine his Sony's footage," laughs Kire mischievously. "On that shoot the RED delivered exceptional, haunting images that completely surpassed anything we have ever shot before."

Soundman Mike Moller adds, "digital storage and backup was a main concern for us, and through advice from other filmmakers on the RED user website and people we know, we discovered an easy way to backup the flashcards while in the field to a Nexus drive and then onto a SATA raid drive and LTO3A tapes at the end of the day. The SATA and LTO3A deck are part of the Fieldmaster System sold by Silverado in the USA, and has proved to be a life saver for people like us who need a portable and reliable back up system for digital media. It's a bit more complicated than working with tape, and we are very careful bordering on paranoid about transferring media each day, but have software in our laptop that catches problems as they occur virtually eliminating corrupt file transfers."

Steep learning curve

Having mostly worked with Sony cameras from the HDW730P, DSR370P, down to Sony HDV-Z1 cameras and various Canons, the move to the RED



required a bit of a learning curve for Malaika. "The RED One is simple to use once you understand it," says Kire. "In many ways, it's like operating a computer. The operations guide provided by RED gives the most basic information. The rest we learned by joining the reduser forum where you get answers to common questions, and on-going discussions on every RED topic imaginable by the RED makers, as well as people using it in the field. Personally, I would have liked much more written material with the camera. Everything is so new with the RED you have to hunt and search for answers online to the most basic questions. It can be time consuming."



Kire Godal explains that the difference between using the RED One digital camera and her older Sony HDW730P is quite significant. "The weight balance on the RED is a little off," she says. "Working with the Sony is like carrying a rocket launcher. It's built for the shoulder and is easy to control. Working with the RED is like carrying a fridge. It's blocky and hard; and you wish you had three hands to control it all."

Kire asserts that the camera controls and basic configurations are very different from most ENG cameras, and it takes a little time to get used to them. "At the moment everything in the system is manual, so you have to be ready to do all exposures, zoom and focus manually. This is making me a better camera person, but I do look forward to RED's new Scarlet cameras coming out later this year, which will have an optional handle with exposure and focus controls."

Like carrying a fridge

Kire explains that the difference between using the RED One and the Sony HDW730P is quite large. "Working with the Sony is like carrying a rocket launcher, built for the shoulder, and easy to control with two hands. Handholding the RED One is more like carrying around a small refrigerator. It's blocky and hard, and you wish you had three hands to run it! But the moment of truth comes at the end of the day when you see the rushes. The RED is far superior. The images are heartbreaking, and it constantly amazes us that we're getting such quality in remote and difficult African locations. We can also do immediate colour, white balance, exposure and ISO changes in REDALERT as we preview our footage each night. The way the camera works is much like a digital still camera shooting raw. Half of the fun is trying things out after you've already shot."

Easy to configure

The RED One camera setup can be configured in many different ways all depending on shooting requirements. "I am currently using Nikon lenses with screw-on ND filters, rather than a heavy matte box," explains Kire. "The camera can support many different lenses, but I am using Nikon because they are lightweight. I also use lightweight rods for support, and many handles to help me find a grip when I am moving around with the camera quickly. I have found I like shooting literally from the hip rather than the shoulder. I have my battery on a belt clip to keep the camera's weight down. The viewfinder is well made and I like that it is in colour. There are exposure and focus assist buttons on both the camera and viewfinder that are very helpful. I own the LCD monitor but am not using it yet because I



don't really need it in brightly lit outdoor situations. I can imagine it would be great inside a studio."

Broad range of accessories

Mike adds, "The camera has four channels of audio, and the only complaint I have is the mini XLR outputs, which are a bit fragile to work with. There are breakout boxes available, but it's another expense and like a boat, you could never stop spending money on this camera. There are now several companies making accessories for the RED One and its easy




to find new things to customize your set-up including hand held systems, viewfinder mounts, rain covers and other mounting options. These added items do cost, but considering the price point for the camera, and all the basic kit, you still coming in way, way below the prices of a HD camera from another company. As far as post production, Kire explains the process so far has been plain-sailing. "Post production is not as complicated as we thought it would be. For 2k (HD) productions we can simply use the QuickTime proxy files created by the camera's R3D files, and work with REDALERT and REDCINE both free downloads from RED for basic colour grading. Everything else we can do in Final Cut Studio Pro, and master out to HD tape. There are several ways to work with REDs R3D files, you can also ingest them right into FCP, which then creates its own version of the file, however this does take quite a bit of digitizing time. I prefer working with the QuickTime proxies that are generated with each clip and import them in a few seconds and edit away. Right now we are only working in 2k for HD, but once we begin needing to edit 4k for feature film, things will get much more complicated, and we will need to upgrade our editing facility or find one outside of Kenya to use for online."



Kire Godal and Mike Moller have not experienced too many problems with their RED One camera. "The RED development team is very aware of the demands of the marketplace and are developing the camera on an on-going-basis," say the busy duo. They're also impressed with the help that they access through the 'reducer' website. "I'm amazed that we're working with such a powerful tool and although it was a bit tricky at first, it's all been worth the effort," says Godal.

Online support

Kire and Mike haven't experienced too many problems. "Any complaints I have about the RED One are actually being dealt with by team RED at this very moment. They are aware of the RED Ones limitations, and are constantly fixing them. For instance, in each new build that comes out (I can

upgrade by downloading the firmware myself), things are improving - the new beta build 18 eliminates the annoying ten second wait between camera shut down and start up. I'm amazed that we are working such a powerful tool and although a bit tricky at first, it's all worth the effort. We plan on growing with RED for a very long time." 

Port Elizabeth upgrades sound in historic opera house

As a result of their continual technical support of the venue, Magnetic Storm of Port Elizabeth, a city along South Africa's Eastern Cape coastline, were approached by the Port Elizabeth Opera House to upgrade the sound system in their historic theatre.

Opened in 1892, the Port Elizabeth Opera House is the oldest theatre in Africa and when it opened, according to local press reports, it was recognised as "the finest theatre in the World". It was erected on the site of the old city gallows. Public hangings took place on this ground before the theatre was erected and the many sightings of ghosts and spooks have enhanced the theatres old-world charm.

For assistance in designing a loudspeaker system that would not only meet the current demands of the venue but would continue to do so for the foreseeable future, Magnetic Storm turned to Prosound in Johannesburg. The resulting design is based around the Meyer Sound self-powered loudspeaker system and comprises a pair of UPQ wide-coverage loudspeakers for



coverage of the balcony, a pair of UPQ loudspeakers for coverage of the mid section of the stalls, and two UPJ compact speakers for coverage of the front section of the stalls. All of these units are located left/right of the proscenium. In addition 4 UPM-1P UltraCompact wide-coverage

loudspeaker units are located under the balcony for the seats at the rear of the stalls. To ensure correct sound imagery for seats closer to the stage, 8 Electro-Voice S40 compact loudspeakers are used as "front fills" built into the stage edge.

Additional bass in provided by 2 Meyer Sound 600HP sub bass loudspeakers. All system processing is via the Meyer Sound Galileo digital signal processor. Prosound assisted with the final system commissioning and staff training. The first show to utilise the new hardware was the Australian touring production of Beatlemania. During March the Fab Four performers remained true to the original sound of the boys from Liverpool to bring a night of fun, dancing and singing along to the revamped Opera House. 