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“Some DOPs like that, they talk about increased intimacy between actor and audience,” Shipman-Mueller goes on. “You can tweak one parameter – put more light in – but the producer’s going to be upset. You can move back, but the room may not be big enough. DOPs look at opportunities. Given unlimited resources, perfect lenses, infinite room sizes and lighting budgets, you can make Super 35 look like large format. In the real world, that’s not an argument.”

RESIZING ON THE FLY

It’s not often a single project uses many of these approaches all at once, but one example of just that is cinematographer Eric Bader’s

GOOD ENOUGH FOR THE BEST Arri’s Alexa 65 offers a huge canvas to work with – and has been picked up on flagship Netflix shows

work on a series of music videos for LA-based singer Brendon Urie and his project Panic! at the Disco, which released the studio album *Viva Las Vengeance* in August 2022. With the album’s tracks linked in a loose storyline, Urie and director Brendan Walter planned six related music videos that would play with the relationship between the Sony Venice large format camera and, for the majority of the work, Cooke’s Anamorphic/i lenses.

Each video would evoke a time period, with the album’s title track presented as a 4x3 live television broadcast from the sixties. *Don’t Let the Light Go Out* would look like a monochrome mid-century thriller, with a Cinemascope-aspect feature look for *Sugar Soaker*. An almost Kubrickesque, wide-angle seventies style was used for *Sad Clown*, with *Do It to Death* feeling nearly modern to anyone who grew up in the eighties and nineties.

Bader selected the Special Flair variant of the Cooke Anamorphics to establish a consistent visual style which would unify the project, but set the Venice up for aspect ratios and frame sizes to individually suit each piece. “We had about two months to prep it, which is pretty cushy as far as music videos go,”



Bader says. “Usually, you get a week before shooting. We had a very loose treatment that [director] Brendan and [singer] Brendon had cooked up, and we spent a month honing down our style and trading images back and forth, how we could make them all feel like one.”

EXPANDED AMBITIONS

Using lenses built for Super 35 on a full-frame camera only caused one moment of confusion when, as Bader says, “my AC was going over the package. He assumed we needed an expander for the lenses and I said no!” To avoid problems communicating desired framing to post, given a schedule requiring material for several pieces shot on the same day, traditional framing charts were used.



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"The only thing they didn't have to crop was *Sugar Soaker*," Bader confirms. "I was amazed all the notes transferred from my team to post. I was expecting to have to police it, but it was pretty remarkable they kept everything straight." Bader's choice of Cooke Anamorphic/i lenses worked out exactly as planned. "They're not full-frame, but the way they covered the Venice was exactly what we were looking for. If you look at *Middle of a Breakup* and *Sugar Soaker*, you have the same lens sets, but a slight difference in sensor size. The latter is 4K 6:5, the former 4K 4:3, so you get a bit more seventies fall-off top and bottom."

The finishing touch was put on with Fotokem's Shift AI process,

which records pictures out to film, processes them and scans the result back in. "It was an easy sell. For our initial pitch, we were trying to shoot two of the videos on Super 16." Shift AI (the initialism stands for analogue intermediate) is, Bader confirms, "significantly cheaper... and we saw how good it looked." Bader sometimes chose to have the laser-recorded image downsized to increase grain, creating sort of a variable sensor area in itself. "We'd shrink the image down to get more grain out of the transfer, even down to Super 8 size!"

Not every project will need to get all the toys out of the box in the same way. But as cameras improve, an ability to choose different active areas without compromising resolution will keep everyone full of options. ●

DON'T PANIC The Sony Venice proved versatile enough to create six totally different looks for Brendon Urie

CHECK YOUR SIX Along with classic Cooke Anamorphic/i lenses, the Sony Venice worked wonders

Tuning up

Creating a useful combo of the camera and lens has always demanded thorough knowledge of both, although, according to LA-based lens maestro Matthew Duclos, the fundamentals remain reassuringly independent of sensors. Like several of the specialists consulted in the preparation of this article, Duclos is keen to dispel the still-common misconception that lens focal length changes depending on the sensor in use. 'Crop factor' often comes in that context, which – based on stills photography formats – Duclos describes as "very misleading. Cinematography was always based on Super 35. Doing it the other way around didn't make sense to cinematographers.

"One of my favourite sayings is that there's no bad lens, only bad lenses for particular projects. The biggest trend we've seen is detuning. It seems everyone wants a bespoke uniqueness, something that was done for them. When you're tuning up a car, nobody wants to slap on the same kit."

This popular approach is not one, Duclos confirms, that's seriously affected by variations in the required size of the projected image. "So long as the customer's aware of the limitations. If a concern of coverage comes up and they specifically say yeah I don't mind that, that's an artistic choice.

"Alexa 35 is really something to the industry," Duclos concludes. "It allows people to confidently and professionally choose Super 35 without compromise... I don't think that will change anything in the industry, full-frame isn't going away." In the end, though, all of the popular enthusiasm for the minutiae of glass remains just as relevant. "I think large format, the Monstro and the Venice are going to be just as popular. There's no right or wrong format."

