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SHOWTIME'S TUDORS

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Showtime's *The Tudors* embraces HD

By
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TORONTO — Combine one of history's all-time-great dysfunctional families with 21st Century video technology and what do you get? Showtime's *The Tudors*, a lavish Ireland/Canada co-production that's currently shooting season three.

The Tudors covers the life of Henry VIII and his six wives, and depicts the monarch, known for his rapacious appetites, as he's never been seen before: young, sexy, intriguing, romantic and infinitely more complex.

Jonathan Rhys Meyers plays Henry and in the series' first two seasons it has featured some of the industry's top actors, including Jeremy Northam, Sam Neill, Natalie Dormer, Peter O'Toole, James Frain and Gabrielle Anwar in key roles. Michael Hirst, who scripted *Elizabeth* in 1998 for the big screen, is the series' writer.

Emmy-nominated costume designer Joan Bergin has clothed more than 1,400 extras and 105 principals in the cast while production designer Tom Conroy has recreated 16th Century Tudor England on locations and soundstages in Dublin, building dozens of main sets and hundreds of sets in total.

A WELCOME GENESIS

With season three's eight episodes midway through principal photography in Ireland at press time, *The Tudors* has returned to Canada for post production at Technicolor, Dufferin Gate Productions, Core Digital Pictures, and Tattersall Sound & Picture, all in Toronto. While the production has switched from HD acquisition with Panavision's HD-900F camera to the Panavision Genesis, the HD post process remains largely the same.

"The show's dark environment is perfect for HD, which provides great shadow detail and rich colors in the color space," notes coproducer Bill Goddard, the executive in charge of post production at Dufferin Gate (www.dufferingate.com), a longtime production and post services provider to Showtime (*Queer As Folk*, *The Hoop Life* and dozens of Showtime Networks movies).

Noted Canadian director of photography Ousama Rawi shoots a lushly-costumed cast in "castles and catacombs — entire scenes are candlelit with just a bit of fill light," Goddard points out. "Ossi [Rawi] has had compliments from all over the world; people think he's shooting 35mm. Pioneer is even using *The Tudors* content in demos for its new HDTV set."

This season, Panavision Canada is outfitting Rawi and his team with three fully kitted Genesis camera bodies. "Ossi uses two cameras for main photography and big dance and crowd scenes" lensed in and around Dublin in historic sites and bucolic countryside, says Goddard. The third camera is reserved for 2nd unit and VFX, which are con-

Goddard likens the "sheer volume" of the series' post production to "doing a feature every week from a remote location." The HD camera originals and location sound are flown from Dublin to Technicolor Toronto, which turns around Digital Betacam synced dailies, available to the production via the secure Internet-based Sample Digital distribu-



Dufferin Gate uses five Apple Final Cut Pro systems, with EditShare storage, for *The Tudors'* edit.

siderable. "In season one for the 'Valley of Gold' episode Henry and the King of France meet in France. Core Digital created an entire CG encampment with 3D castles, cloned armies and tents. They went to Google Earth to get the correct geography and discovered that Google had scanned the area the day they were shooting — you can actually see the partial set wall that had been built for shooting."

The first two seasons were "HD all the way," apart from some ultra high-speed film elements. Season three will include Phantom HD high-speed cinematography for an execution sequence.

Rawi, especially, and Goddard lobbied to make the switch to Genesis. "The show is very well thought of, and we had the desire to kick the game up a notch," Goddard reports. "For us in post, using Genesis and going up to 4:4:4 means greater latitude for cleaner mattes and VFX. And Genesis delivers an amazing punch in color and quieter blacks." The move to Genesis also brings a complete selection of Panavision primo lenses to the production for the first time.

tion system, and Digital Betacam for editorial.

Dufferin Gate runs five Apple Final Cut Pro systems on EditShare storage. Editors Wendy Hallam Martin and Lisa Grootenboer work on odd- and even-numbered episodes simultaneously cutting on Final Cut at 23.98 while the production is still underway.

"We block shoot two episodes at a time in Ireland then fly the director to Canada for his director's cut," Goddard explains. The assistants output EDLs for Technicolor to re-conform in HD component. Rawi returns to Toronto for the color grading after all the visual effects are in.

"On the set, Ossi uses Gamma & Density's 3CP system, which creates a high definition still capture off the camera," says Goddard. "He goes home with a USB drive with every set-up so he can do a little color grading at that stage, then we compile a master file along with the metadata of his work for reference when he does the final color grading with Technicolor colorist Ross Cole," who uses a da Vinci 2K.

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Shot on a Genesis, this series gets its post north of the border.



Wendy Hallam Martin and Lisa Grootenboer (L-R) share editing duties.

[cont. from 24] Tattersall Sound & Picture handles sound editorial, mixing, sound design and sound effects. ADR is done in Dublin, London, New York, LA



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— "wherever the large ensemble cast is," he notes. The loop group is based in London.

Deliverables required for distribution are HD

16x9, HD pillarbox (4x3), SD 16x9, SD 4x3 and DVDs, with sound in both 5.1 surround and LT/RT. "Combined, we delivered 60 hours last season for the English-language versions and one French-language international version," says Goddard. "Although we shot the first two seasons HDCAM, the second season we started to deliver HDCAM SR; it has 12 soundtracks and helps limit some artifacts from pure HDCAM acquisition."

Goddard observes that "HD has evolved several times" since Dufferin Gate began HD post for *Queer As Folk*. Just in the two-and-a-half years that *The Tudors* has been in production HD "has gotten progressively better. When we hit Genesis, it was like another reinvention of the camera, a real filmic device.

"With a 10-day shoot per episode, all the VFX photography, chasing sound all over the planet, *The Tudors* has been a full-time job for me for the last two years," he declares. Season three is scheduled to air on Showtime in 2009.

TM Productions and Peace Arch Entertainment are the Irish and Canadian producing partners, respectively.

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