

Sony F65 on Taylor Swift



Like *Rashomon*, the story of Taylor Swift's latest music video is told by four of the prominent participants, above, left to right: Director Declan Whitebloom, Operator Gustavo Penna, Cinematographer Paul Laufer, and off-screen, First AC Shasta Spahn. Photo: Nigel Barker

Declan Whitebloom, Director

Our music video was Taylor Swift's lead-off single "We Are Never Ever Getting Back Together" on her newest album "Red." The song is about 3 minutes, 14 seconds long. It's the story of a breakup between a girl and a guy. I've always wanted to do a single-take piece. It's a filmmaker's dream: one continuous take.

We had 5 sets with varying degrees of complexity. Her apartment with a trick wall that backed away, leading to a live "split-screen" type scene of her on the phone. Boyfriend on the phone in a bar. A cardboard cut-out car with rear projection. A walk through a park where the seasons change at the same time. Then we end up back where we started.

With many one-take videos, people usually stay in the same wardrobe. But we tackled it with Taylor's team who do her quick-changing on tour. They were able to change her seamlessly while moving from set-up to set-up. There were so many moving parts and balls in the air I wasn't sure whether we could pull it off. But everything clicked and it ended up working like a charm.

We had these areas on set that they called the "car wash" where Taylor was meant to change. I'm not sure she ever went into one of these car washes. She just changed on the fly while everything else was moving. Taylor literally would run. There would be a person on each arm and each leg putting stuff onto her. Whether Velcro or whether she was wearing three outfits and one of them would come off to reveal the next, it was all meticulously designed with the costume designer. He was involved from the get-go. When people see it they will ask, "How did they do that?"

We used Leica Prime lenses. The Leica's really played into the scope of the camera, the Sony F65. Sony is a brand partner of Taylor's. We heard from the beginning that they wanted to be in-

involved in a more organic way with a Taylor project. And rather than just showing product placement, like a Sony TV or a Sony phone, they decided to come at it in a smarter way, use the Sony facility in Culver City, all their equipment and, of course, their new camera to shoot it on. So Sony is embedded in the look, in the feel, in everything to do with the project. It's not in your face and actually more organic, which is what Taylor is all about.

I was prepping for about six weeks. Having done two other videos with Taylor, I was one of the directors considered. I wrote a treatment and ultimately we ended up getting the job. I think it was the one-shot idea that sold her on it, because she is somebody who wants to try something different, wants to be adventurous. And that did it for her. It's a new single. It is arguably the biggest-selling album in the world. They wanted to make a splash with the video. And she said to me yesterday that she thinks this is her best video to date.

Gustavo Penna, operator of the camera stabilized rig, was fantastic. He nailed it time and time and time again. Obviously everything was on audible cues. What really helped was that he is actually a classically trained pianist and therefore his timing and his understanding of music and changes really played into that. And he is also a ballroom dancer, which he says works incredibly well with his rig. It is like dancing with the rig. He sees the camera as a dance partner. He was definitely in the zone the whole the time.

On set, we were watching on 4K Sony monitors. It looked amazing. You could see every single detail. With so many parts moving, we had to be very meticulous. The 4K monitor really played into that, really helped us see every single pixel and determine whether that frame or setup worked.

We then worked at Colorworks and got to see it in Sony's screening room on a massive screen in true 4K and Taylor was blown away. I was very impressed working in the 4K color space. It is definitely, noticeably different and you have more control. It held up and it didn't look video-like. I think this true 4K is a force to be reckoned with.

It becomes a real passion and quite the obsession, the one-taker. Because there were so many people watching the monitors, I felt like we were all rooting for it to work out. Everyone knew where things could go wrong. We got past that and I heard a collective sigh of relief as we moved on to the next hurdle. It was like watching the Olympics, like wondering whether Michael Phelps was going to get his 19th gold medal. I really felt it was a collective of people rooting for the same team, which was really a pleasure.

After the first day of shooting I did another 50 takes in my sleep later that night. And I kept on doing them. I have no fingernails at this point. They are gone and my hair is a little grayer. But maybe Colorworks can fix that, too.

Paul Laufer, Cinematographer

On the project for Taylor Swift, we used the new Sony F65. Our director, Declan Whitebloom, came up with the idea of a one-shot video. We had Gustavo Penna doing the continuous shot with an MK-V body-mounted camera stabilization rig. It was a really ambitious concept where she is going from set to set, changing clothes, and the same characters reappear in little vignettes in different clothes, different scenarios. It involved an incredible

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amount of coordination with lighting cues, costume changes, people running around each other and a lot of choreography, a lot of timing, and it came off wonderfully.

Since Taylor Swift is a spokeswoman for Sony and the face of Sony, that's why the F65 played an important part. I was very interested to use it, especially with the support and feedback of the Sony team. I was not disappointed. It was very interesting. I'm a film guy. I'm coming to digital cameras from that point of view. And I thought it was very good. I thought that the 4K image—I hesitate to use film look because I think digital is digital and film is film—but there is a certain grain quality to it that I actually liked. It's got enormous latitude. There's a highlight and shadow button so that you can actually see what you are getting in the shadows and in the highlights on a normal monitor, which I thought is a great innovation. The low light performance is fantastic. And I thought that the color space is very, very good. They've really achieved something there.

I used the Leica Summilux-C 25 mm lens. The Leica's a very, very sharp lens. I think that the challenge is becoming how to control the sharpness of the image. And what's old is new. I'm finding myself going back to diffusion filters and in this case I used a black net on the back of the lens, just to take the edge off it and to blend the image slightly. I think it worked very well. One of the nice things about the Leica lens is that it has a net holder in the back. You've got to be a little bit careful if you are getting big sun flares because you will likely resolve the pattern of the net in the flare. It's not for everything. The nice thing about the Leicas, from what I understand, is they've designed the lenses so that the light coming out the back, the exit pupil, is the same for every lens and the net is in the same point optically on every lens so that it doesn't matter which lens you are using, wide of telephoto, the net will have the same effect. From what I know that's the only set of lenses that actually do that.

We shot in 4K, and the general public will be able to see it actually projected in theaters in 4K, which is pretty exciting. We shot on Stage 24 at Sony. The one-take scene took about six hours. Not too long because Taylor is so good. I don't think she made a single mistake, which is incredible when you see the costume changes and her performance. It's uncanny, really because she was staying in the moment where her performance was right on and committed. And then a split second later, the camera would be off her and she would have to drop out of frame, change clothes, run around the back of the set and appear in character in the next scene. And I'm talking split seconds—it is all done practically. What you see is real. There are absolutely no camera tricks.

As heroes, if you had to single anybody out it would be Gustavo Penna, and the wardrobe people who had the hardest job on the whole shoot. Shasta Spahn is an amazing assistant, just brings great skill and wonderful energy.

Going back to the camera, I think that the camera is a step forward, certainly in terms of the feel of the image. A few things I would like to see changed. Of course, we camera people by nature are ungrateful and cynical and the moment we get incredible tools we want something more. I rated the F65 at 800 ASA. That set the pace for all my lighting. The lights were all run through a dimmer board for the cues, and it was very easy to set the levels. The stop of the day was T4 – 5.6.

Gustavo Penna, Camera Operator



I used my MK-V body-mounted camera stabilizer. In this picture, you can see it with the Sony F65, Sony 4K onboard recorder, HP HD transmitter, audio wireless receiver, timecode sync box, Leica 25 mm Summilux-C lens, Preston Cinema Systems MDR wireless lens control, Cinematography Electronics CineTape, and Transvideo CineMonitorHD6 SuperBright. We were totally self-contained—no wires. It was like a ballet. Everyone was totally involved.

Shasta Spahn, First Camera Assistant



Focus was a challenge.

The entire music video was done in a continuous, single 3 minute 14 second take. Every take was slightly different in terms of focus.

I was pulling from 17 feet right up to 1'6". The camera package came from Otto Nemenz International.

We used a 25 mm Leica Summilux-C. Paul used his special, secret nets behind the lens. The Leicas have a very helpful behind-the-lens net holder, which

stretches the net nicely. It's much better than using snot tape. We had a Preston FIZ2. I prefer this to the FIZ3 because I know how to fix it if anything goes wrong. I know how to take it apart. I know the FIZ3 is programmed and pre-set for the Leica lens focus barrels, but I was fine marking my own focus disk for the 25 mm Summilux-C. The Leica was a beautiful lens.

I had a Cinematography Electronics focus tape as a quick reference because there was no time to run a tape measure. But I was always watching the action, because I find if I look at the readout, it's too late.

This was a fun project, so challenging, we never stopped thinking. Everyone was so...focused. It was so different from many jobs because no one could make a mistake, everyone had to be involved, every department paid attention all the time.