

# American Cinematographer

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**Delinquent** (United States)

**Director:** Peter Hall

**Cinematographer:** Todd Crockett

A truly independent effort, *Delinquent* was a labor of love for first-time director Peter Hall, who enlisted the aid of cinematographer Todd Crockett (*Alligator Eyes*) in bringing his semi-autobiographical script to the screen. An anti-war activist and ex-journalist who once freelanced for *Rolling Stone*, *The Village Voice*, *Mother Jones* and other publications, Hall's filmmaking debut is a haunting and incisive tone poem about teen angst. The story concerns Tim (Desmond Devenish), a 15-year-old boy trapped in an abusive relationship with his alcoholic father (Jeff Paul), a small-town cop whose life has deteriorated after the death of his wife. Seeking escape from his father's ferocious tirades, Tim wanders away from the trailer they share and soon stumbles upon the vacant summer house of a wealthy family. After breaking into the dwelling, Tim begins rifling through the possessions of Tracy (Shawn Batten), a pretty teenage debutante who is away at boarding school. As his father's ill temper worsens, Tim entertains an imaginary relationship with the girl he has never met, until her unexpected arrival at the house triggers a series of tragic events.

"A lot of first-time directors will try to prove their manhood by showing their chops to the world," Hall says. "But I wanted to make something that would communicate an emotional state in a dramatic fashion. Without access to the marketing world, I felt more secure in telling a truth that I knew very well. I wrote the script from my own memories of what it was like to be a teenager with a very troubled family. This movie is about the dark side of adolescence."

Hall managed to finance the project with a combination of cash savings and credit, and borrowed the house location from some Dutch friends who were in Africa working for UNICEF. An ardent admirer of Hitchcock and Kubrick, the director also appreciates the inde-

pendent spirit of films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Laws of Gravity*. "Those films make you realize that you really can create a film if you have the initiative," he says. "They were made with wit, grace, and a total knowledge of their own economic limitations."

Hall confronted similar restrictions on *Delinquent*; without access to either a dolly or a crane, he and cinematographer Crockett shot nearly the entire picture on a tripod, with two scenes handheld. The production did have access to HMI lights for a short period, but went back to a smaller tungsten package when the bigger rigs proved too cumbersome. Hall says that he hired Crockett



because he felt that the cameraman was willing to work on the fly. "I interviewed several cinematographers, and most of them came in talking about powerful camera packages, and their own set way of doing things. When Todd came in, he had the flu, and he brought along these paintings and sketches he was doing. He was humble, and I liked him immediately."

While scouting the film's locations, the duo blocked out various scenes in advance. Crockett shot the film with an Arri SR-2 outfitted with Zeiss Superspeed prime lenses (as well as the Zeiss 10-100mm zoom and an old Angenieux 25-250mm zoom), using Kodak's 7245 and 7296 16mm stocks. Dailies were printed at Technicolor New York, and the footage was later blown up for 35mm release by John Allen in New Jersey. "John is incredible; he just lavishes attention upon you," Crockett enthuses.

Bearing in mind that the film would be blown up to 35, Crockett framed and lit accordingly, striving for a lyrical use of contrast. "In lighting *Delinquent*, I applied some fundamental principles from my painting background," he says. "I tried to work with the face or human figure and its juxtaposition against the background. I would either keep the face or figure light and the back-

ground dark, or work with mid-tones on the actors against a brighter background. That approach makes everything seem more three-dimensional, and creates a kind of 'apparent sharpness' that really lends itself to a blowup. If the film had been more flatly lit, it would not have blown up as well."

In order to heighten the film's Grimm-like fairy-tale aura, Crockett placed special emphasis on silhouettes, which he feels are "more dreamlike, and less real." One of his favorite moments from the film is a shot of Tim when he first approaches the house. "He was strongly backlit, in magic-hour light, and we used an old 25-250mm Angenieux zoom, which lent the visuals a very dreamy, misty quality. It wasn't the sharpest lens in the world, but it was the perfect lens for that situation. When Tim entered the house through a basement doorway, we switched perspective to the inside of the house, and showed him in perfect silhouette. The silhouette shots in the house were intercut with shots of his feet moving in and out of darkness, which helped create the sense of contrast I mentioned earlier."

*Delinquent's* edgy merits did not go unnoticed at the Montreal Festival, and the film was recently picked up for worldwide distribution (excluding the U.S.) by Beyond Films of Australia. "We were thrilled with this acquisition, which underscores Beyond's commitment to represent quality and commercial non-Australian feature films," said Beyond's General Manager, Gary Hamilton. Echoing that enthusiasm, Hall added that he and Crockett are currently prepping for their second collaboration. — S.P.

Photo courtesy of Peter Hall and Big Bad Productions