

Interview with Buddy Squires <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/newyork/series/filmmakers/squires.html>

## **INTERVIEW** **BUDDY SQUIRES** CINEMATOGRAPHER

What kinds of shooting needs to take place to make a film like this? You do interviews, scenic locations and archival shoots. Is there a kind of continuity of style between the three kinds of shooting?

They're all clearly different elements. Certainly, archives, interviews, landscapes, cityscapes, are different types of work -- and I think in the most basic sense, the thing which ties them all together is -- it's about paying attention, it's about really looking and really seeing what's there. If you're looking at an old photograph, what are you seeing in the faces of the people in the photograph? What are you seeing in the construction of a building, if that's what you're looking at in an old photograph? If you're working in an interview situation, it's about trying to light the interview, and frame the interview in a way that allows the person to really come out most strongly. In an historical film, one's perhaps less interested in who this person is today in their lives, and more interested in creating a tableau, a visual setting, a scene, where the storytelling is going to be most evocative. And so we try to light and set a scene that's going to allow those stories to come out in the strongest fashion. In terms of landscape work, cityscapes, again it's the same thing -- it's about paying attention to light, paying attention to movement, to color, to shape, to shadow, and really trying to see what's there and to bring it back. The person I think of most, when I think of these questions is a great old photographer named Walker Evans who photographed New York extensively, along with many other places in America. Walker Evans would often talk about "the thing itself," and so if there's a guiding principle behind all of my work it's to try to find the thing itself and let that thing come out through the imagery.

That goes just as well for people, buildings, cityscapes?

Yeah, it can sound simplistic, it can



Buddy Squires shooting archive photos in the Steeplechase Films offices.

sound like a cliché, and there's all these truisms, but I think that it is essentially true that in the type of documentary work that I'm interested in, we are interested in getting at, what are you looking at? What is the thing itself, and how does one, as an image maker, bring that home to an audience? How does one make that real? Among the comments that I've heard from a few people who have seen the film already or pieces of the film, it's a comment that, "God, I've never seen New York look so much like New York." It's like this image of New York that I carry in my head.

What challenges did this film bring you as a cinematographer?

Making a film like this in New York, the challenges are enormous and the opportunities are phenomenal.

New York is probably one of the most photographed places on earth. Everybody who has any access to mass culture in any way has an image of what New York is; we see New York all the time, every day, on television in a thousand different ways, from the NBC morning show that has their studio in Rockefeller Center to a thousand cop shows, so people are very familiar with it and therefore in some way can get very bored with it very quickly. It's like, "God, haven't I seen everything there is to see about New York already? How could you possibly show me something about New York that I haven't already seen?" And that's a huge challenge, to find a uniqueness in the imagery, and an energy and an essence and an excitement that brings people in and shows them New York the way I see it, the way Ric sees it, the way Lisa sees it, the way that Allen Moore, the other cinematographer, sees it -- and that there's something to our vision of it that is going to be appealing and interesting and sustaining to them, so it's a huge challenge in that way.

On a less abstract level, New York is a tough place to shoot in many ways. Frequently in historical work we try to look for imagery that we would call timeless -- we're shooting historical tales, you don't always want to know that we're shooting in 1998, 1999. You want that sense, if you're doing a film like *THE WAY WEST*, you want to believe in some ways that you're back in 1875. Well, that's tough to do in New York. One of the things that makes New York New York is that it's a constantly changing, plastic city -- everything in New York changes all the time, so with the exception of the occasional building facade, cornice, detail of wrought iron, close-up of gas lamps, it's very hard to find those places in New York that look like they looked 100 years ago. Everything about New York changes. You might have a beautiful 19th century building, but chances are there's air conditioners in the window, and it's next door to a 1950s glass tower. So you're always struggling, fighting that modernity.

Light is also very tricky in New York. Again, in the historical films that I've shot over the years, a lot of times we rely on beautiful light, often early-morning, end-of-day light to highlight a place, to bring some extra quality of light. But much of the time in New York, you've got these huge canyons created by all the buildings around you, you often can't rely on that soft, beautiful early or late light to eliminate things because often it's blocked; you have this collection of tall buildings in a grid structure that only allows light to come to certain specific structures at certain very specific moments. Certain times of the day, sometimes certain times of the year. If you're looking for natural light on a particular piece, it might be that that light only shines on that spot in the dead of winter when there's a particular alignment between the movement of the sun and the layout of the grid that allows light to come to that place at that time, so it's a struggle in that way.

It's got a thousand challenges, but those challenges and those limitations also make it an incredibly wonderful place, because it throws up so much opportunity as well. You've got some of the greatest architecture in the world in New York, you've got such incredible diversity of people on the street, of places. As much as the light can be frustrating when you're working within the canyons of Manhattan in particular, the fact that Manhattan is an island and that you can in fact get away from it and then allow that great play of light to happen across the entire tableau of New York City provides opportunities to really work with lighting. So one can go out to piers in New Jersey and look back towards the World Trade Center and lower Manhattan and have this fabulous play of light and shadow and cloud and weather all working itself out against the shimmering Twin Towers and the whole downtown skyline. And the same way you can go to Brooklyn and have the shapes of the city organized for you by the grace of the Brooklyn Bridge, and be in Brooklyn Heights and feel that tremendous sweep of the city as it goes around and really work your way around Manhattan in that fashion. It's a great opportunity and you add to that the continued presence of this great physical form -- everything from the Brooklyn Bridge to the Empire State Building, the

Woolworth Building, Rockefeller Center, and you've got this, in some ways, static physical tableau, but set against that is all the motion of the city, all the light of the city. If one is in Brooklyn and looking back toward Manhattan, in addition to all these great bridges and great buildings and great structures, you've got the flow of boat traffic on the river, you've got the flow of pedestrian traffic moving across the Brooklyn Bridge, there's this ever-changing -- to quote from the film -- this ever-changing sense of possibility in New York, and things are always changing and that provides just great, great opportunities and you just have to be aware of them and in a situation where you can take advantage of them.

New York never stands still. How do you capture the dynamism on film?

It's a little bit of a mystery, because that dynamism is present all over the place in New York, New York is a

constantly dynamic city, but again that is being shown every time somebody turns a news camera on in New York. But our challenge was to elevate that to some more metaphoric level and in some way get beyond just a cliched version of the "hustle and bustle" of New York. We approached that energy in many, many ways. One of the ways that we tried to take New York out of a sense of the ordinary was to play with time a lot. We do a lot of work that's done with literal changes in the time in which one sees the imagery. What I mean by that is, instead of showing things in their real time, we often would do things in slow motion. In the introduction of the film, one is just watching New York in all of its normal day-to-dayness, but a great deal of it is slowed down two or three or even four times its normal speed, in a way that focuses your attention on images of people moving through the city, and yet allows you to take in what E.L. Doctorow is telling you about the private moments, the inner silent mind of people as they're moving against this ever-changing tableau, and the slow motion really has an impact on that. On the other hand, we often speed things up a great deal. There's a technique known as pixelation, which simply means doing one frame at a time; it's rather the same as one would do in a cartoon, except instead of changing the cel painting underneath the camera, you're just allowing reality to change. So if one sets up the camera at Grand Central Station and looks down on the floor, if you take one frame every three seconds, you will see this whole shifting pattern of the flow of humanity through Grand Central Station -- maybe an hour compressed to 15 seconds.



Set-up for shooting time-lapse images on top of the RCA building, November 1998.

So that's how you get those sped-up images -- the time lapse?

Well there's time lapse and there's pixelation, and they're the same

thing, but they're a little bit different. Technically they are the same thing, they're doing one frame per second, per two seconds, per three seconds, whatever rate one decides to shoot at, but when you're looking at people in motion it has this jittery, very sped-up look. On the other hand, if you do it, let's say one is shooting an image of the Brooklyn Bridge and set so you have an exposure that's maybe a four-second-long exposure that happens every 10 seconds, you end up with this sense of . . . The bridge doesn't move, so the bridge stays static in frame, and yet you've got this streaming flow of lights, headlights, taillights, moving across the bridge, in streams of red and white. And you've got the river traffic streaming down, and it all has this very smooth, glowing, glistening, shiny feel to it, and it's another way of removing it a little bit from the day-to-day ordinariness. And we did a lot of that type of work. One of the things about the film is that we just had the opportunity to be in amazing places for amazing times. We spent one very long, very wonderful night on top of the Empire State Building sort of hanging out and basically in the footsteps of King Kong, underneath the tops of the towers looking down into the city, doing these extended exposure time-lapses, feeling the flow of the traffic and the changing light patterns over the city. We did a 36-hour-long time-lapse setup from the top of Rockefeller Center, just watching the light moving all around the island, and it's thrilling to be in these places and to have the opportunity to see the city in this way.

Did you stay up there for 36 hours straight?

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No, we worked in shifts. It was way too cold and too exhausting. We actually had a couple of different cameras going, and I came and set things in motion, and was there a great deal of the time, but another cameraman named Stephen McCarthy came and traded off with me to keep things running. And we also had a couple of camera assistants and a couple of production assistants and producers and people flowing back and forth, all making our way through the Rainbow Room to get to the top of Rock Center.

One of the most striking features in NEW YORK are the gorgeous aerial shots of the city. Is it tougher to shoot aerials in New York?

I don't know that it's tougher in New York. Again, it's just different. In some ways, it's a little easier to shoot aerials in New York than some other places because of the sheer fact that you've got helicopters stationed right there, you've got all sorts of equipment there, and you can wait and pick your light and pick the day that you go a bit more easily than you can if you're working out in the middle of Utah where you have to bring everything in. But that said, there are many challenges to shooting aerials in New York, including just the physical restrictions. In the city you're not allowed to fly as low and as close to things as one would out in the Great Plains where there are no people. You always have to be careful about staying legal in terms of height and not endangering anybody. But that said, much of what New York has to offer from an aerial view is a nighttime perspective, because New York is a place that particularly shines at night. And technically dealing with that, working that deep into the darkness of night, is a real technical challenge. Just finding a way to really see these buildings and again, give an organization to it all, and elevate it beyond something that one is overly familiar with, is a tricky thing, it's a very tricky thing. Also, working within the various and sundry budget limitations that we do -- we don't quite have all the tools that feature-film makers have available to them, and the time to wait and to pick one's moment.

In a way, I think what's fabulous about shooting aerials in New York is how much there is to play with in an aerial. New York is a wonderful place to look at from the air. When you're on top of it, when you're in it, when you're in the midst of it, when you're down in the canyons of it, you lose some sense of the organization of it, of this overall beauty and symmetry that ties it together. When you're up in the air and you can see the whole of Manhattan laid out before you, the brilliance of its organization really stands out in a wonderful way and the uniqueness, within that fairly regular grid, the uniqueness of so many of the places also pops through, so that you really see and feel the Chrysler Building, you see and feel the Empire State Building, you see their relationship to the city. You've got these great pieces around the harbor, you've got the Statue of Liberty and all of her glory, sitting there putting a human face, welcoming you into the heart of this great harbor, and as a gateway to the city. You've got the grace of the Brooklyn Bridge. Being in a helicopter and being able to move and change the perspective and the relationship to these gorgeous objects, I mean, you're talking about, within this architecture and these buildings, some of the finest human creations on earth. The ability to examine them and move around in them, look at the changing relationship between these incredible works of art and the city that surrounds them, is just a tremendous opportunity. It's a real joy to be able to see the world from that perspective. It's a great, great thing.

What kind of cameras and film stock did you use? Is everything shot on film or is there any video?

Everything that we shot as new material for the film was shot in 16mm. It was all or mostly shot with Aaton cameras and Kodak film stock. It's important to acknowledge that Allen Moore had a great deal to do with



essence, the energy and excitement of the city as something that transcends a particular moment in time. They were able to therefore utilize imagery that was clearly from the 1990s, in part, in telling stories from the 1890s, without being discordant. Because the connection is that pace, is that energy, is that sense of possibility, the dynamism and the frenetic-ness of New York that has been consistent in its energy over the last couple of hundred years even though the physical manifestation of it is different. And I think that in really allowing us to embrace those sorts of things, it helped to liberate the film in many ways. If you saw people that were dressed in 1990s garb, there was no attempt to mask that. And really being able to play with the modern city, to look at Times Square, to look at the Stock Exchange, to look at Grand Central, to be in the neighborhoods, to be with people on the street, to be with Chinese women and Hasidic men, and young kids, and just to feel all of the intensity that is New York today and let that be part of a film that's mostly about New York of yesterday. But there is this connectedness, this connective tissue of the energy, excitement, possibility and potential of New York that connects it all.



Set-up for a shoot of a photograph of Fernando Wood, Mayor of New York City during the Civil War era.

How did you shoot the archival photos? Do you shoot them by hand, or use an animation stand?

Most of the archival photos are shot in the same way that

myself and Ric and Ken have been shooting archival films for the last 20 years, which is a very simple process of putting usually a photograph, sometimes a drawing or a painting, up on a magnetic board in front of the camera, putting a camera on tripod, and filming it. And it's a very simple, direct, human process. Now there is some work which is done later on in the process involving animation stands that do more complicated zoom moves and things like that, that are done to order if you will, for or by the editors. But the great bulk of the work is done by looking through a camera and photographing the image that's before you and really trying to live within the image that's presented. Ken has said for many years, and I think we all agree with him, that we treat archives as if they were live. It's a window into a world of the past. We look at that world as if it

were alive today, and so in a technical sense nothing has changed in that regard in 20 years. But on the other hand, Lisa, in particular, did just an amazing job of orchestrating the collection of phenomenal imagery which has never really seen the light of day before. Ric and Lisa together worked to find more and more ways to bring that imagery alive, so while technically it's the same process we've been doing for a long time, esthetically Ric and Lisa have brought their own stamp to the way that they're using that material.

So, does it make sense to have a cameraperson shoot stills as opposed to doing it digitally?

Absolutely. An image changes when you put a frame around it, and there is something about looking at the image through the lens of the camera, setting the camera on the tripod, and letting the human eye and mind respond to it as it unfolds in real time. That is what happens when I shoot an archival image or Allen Moore shoots an archival image. What you're getting is our interpretation in response to that image, delivered directly to the viewer. It's a subtly but importantly different process than marking frames and sending it off to an animation stand. I suppose it would be like the difference between a dancer dancing and a robot dancing; there's a subtlety of movement and a subtlety of interpretation, so even if you program in all the things that you're supposed to do, it's just not the same. So I certainly do think that there's a value in shooting archival imagery with a human eye and a human motor muscle coordination behind it, and I think there's a difference.

You did a few large-scale "reenactments" for this film, most notably the Draft Riots of 1863. Talk about how that shoot was done, what kinds of shots you were trying to get, and what the results were.

The draft riots shoot was probably the largest bit of recreation, although I don't quite like that term, the largest set-up that we've ever done for a film like this. It was very exciting, and it was a huge challenge and I think a great risk and inspiration that Ric and Lisa took. They didn't feel like they had imagery available archivally that would give strong enough, energetic, impressionistic imagery for the draft riots. They just were feeling frustrated that it wasn't there in the archival material,

and this was a very important, tragic, exciting, dynamic piece in New York 's history that they sort of wanted to evoke. There was not enough evocative imagery to tell the story of the draft riots in all of its terror and importance, so they decided to essentially create this tableau impression of the draft riots that would then allow me to search for imagery that would be telling and evocative.

When I say I don't want to use the word recreation, it's because the last thing that we're trying to do is be Hollywood -- we don't try to create situations where there are actors, where you're watching the face of an actor trying to portray someone or something. It's just a whole different type of filmmaking; it's what Hollywood does really beautifully, and we don't stand a chance trying to do that on the types of budgets and the limitations that we're working with. It's not really what I'm interested in doing, and it's not what Ric and Lisa wanted to have happen.

The idea was not to literally illustrate the draft riots, but to try to create a set of evocative images that would tell the story, so in the service of that, we really brought a huge amount of creative energy to bear. We managed to block off East 4th Street with the cooperation of the city and the Fire Department and God knows whatever other people had to agree to this. We set up a bonfire on East 4th Street, in front of the Merchants House, which is a beautiful old 19th-century structure, and worked with the cooperation of the city to build this massive bonfire in front of the city. And then we brought in even more pyrotechnics: we brought in fire bars and flame bars and did a huge lighting set-up, and we did bring in a group of about 20 actors to in some ways act out a sense of the draft riots. We brought in props and chairs and books and all the sorts of objects that might have been present. And then we set this whole thing in motion, but not with an eye towards showing it in any sort of way that one would look at it and go, "Oh, OK there are the draft riots." Instead we looked at it in extreme close-ups and in images through flames, and images that just gave a hint, a suggestion, of what might have gone on in this night of terror, in the 19th century.

And it was really creating a very large scene to then pluck out very specific, detailed images of flame and motion and shadow and the energy that might be present in a riot, and to try to create evocative images of that kind of terror and imagery, to bring it home, to bring the energy of that situation home to an audience. So it was a big set-up in order to try to get these very small, specific pieces of energy -- what happens when you've just got a bit of flame and a slow motion piece of a hand cutting through that flame, and a broken shard of china lying on a step, and a doll burning, or a book on fire, or any of these smaller specific images that tell a much larger tale.

Tell me about a typical day on the set of this film. What kinds of places did you choose to shoot and who makes the decision?

There are a huge number of different days in shooting NEW YORK. Most shoot days had some specific intent, and that intent was dictated by Lisa or by Ric of a particular place that we were going to, a particular type of imagery that we were going for. So each day would have a set purpose to it, and everything else would flow from that, would flow from what Lisa and Ric wanted to accomplish on that day. Usually one of them was present, though not always, and there were times that either Steve Rivo or Ray Segal would be in charge of the day, and a rotating sense of who the responsible person from the production end of things would be. But many if not all of our days tended to start before dawn, and we would decide where we would want to be to take advantage of the earliest light of day. It could be anything from being over on top of the Citicorp building in Queens, looking back towards Manhattan and being ready for the first light of day to hit the tops of the skyline. Or conversely, being over in Jersey to have the silhouetted imagery, the silhouette of New York against the dawn sky, as dawn is breaking over Jersey. One often has to have a huge amount of attention to detail, we might spend dawn in Gramercy Park waiting for the first light of day to come down an east-west street and illuminate the iron railing on a building next to a gas lamp.

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The essence of a day is that you start very, very early and you go till quite often an hour after sunset. Days are very long, and one would often either avoid shooting into the middle of the day, or schedule an interview or an archive shoot to take up the middle of the day when light isn't particularly interesting.

Did you find making the film allowed you access to places you'd always wanted to get into?

One of the great things about this project, and one of the great things about making films in general, is you have this excuse to get into these amazing spots. I mean, who else gets to hang out on the top of the Empire State Building, not on the observation deck but way, way up above that, until long after midnight? It's a great treat to be able to be in these places, to be on top of Rockefeller Center, to be on top of the Chrysler Building and to have the whole city to yourself. You know, what a treat to have the doors unlocked, to be able to go wherever you want to go.

What were some of your favorite shoots?

There were so many shoots that were a tremendous amount of fun. Certainly, spending a night on top of the Empire State Building was a great treat. Doing our long time-lapse on top of Rockefeller Center was great. The draft riots were a huge challenge and a lot of fun to do.

We did all kinds of wacky things that were particularly fun. We played around with essentially a type of hand-held pixelation -- we took a trip that started at the escalator above the main floor of Grand Central, and with just a shoulder-mounted camera at one frame a second, did an entire trip from Grand Central way out into Brooklyn. Spending time in Times Square, watching the flow of the city moving around, being at the New York Stock Exchange for a day and playing with that imagery, and the aerals. Aerials are always a tough thing because they're expensive and they're fraught with the possibilities of failure at every corner; they're one of the least guaranteed things you can do. And yet there's no better place to be than spinning tight circles around the Chrysler Building on a beautiful twilight evening in New York, or flying over the Empire State building as those very last golden, red rays of sunlight are hitting off the top of the building. New York is really one of the greatest man-made places on earth, and to have the opportunity to be at the places where that creative human energy is expressed most strongly and most uniquely is just a great thing.

Do you shoot exclusively for documentaries?

About 90 percent of my work is documentary work: I love doing documentary work. I do the occasional commercial work when it comes my way, and I've done a small amount of dramatic work, all of which I will continue to do because I love variety and I love essentially translating the things I've gotten from documentary to other forms. It's a lot of fun, but my first love is documentary work.

Do you like historical documentaries better than other kinds?

I love documentary work and I can't say that I have a favorite child, I love all my children. I love doing what's known as cinema verite work, which is dealing with contemporary topics in the moment and dealing with human drama as it unfolds in front of you. It's a great, almost athletic response to the world that I really enjoy, and at the same time, the thoughtfulness and the perspective that one brings to bear when dealing with historical work is very, very satisfying as well.

How did you get involved in this type of work? Did you go to film school?

I actually went to Hampshire College in Amherst, MA which is not a film school; it's an experimental liberal arts college. I worked there, I joined in a partnership with Ken Burns, Ric's brother, and a man named Roger Sherman, and we started making films about 20 years ago. I had a number of great teachers at college; the most significant one is Jerome Liebling, a great still photographer, who was a member of the Photo League back in the 1940s.

What other works have you done?

What other works have you done:

I've done a huge amount of documentary work -- maybe 75 or 100 films over the years. I've shot every film that Ric has made, and he and I produced CONEY ISLAND together, which he directed and I shot, and I shot THE DONNER PARTY, and I shot THE WAY WEST, all of which are Ric's films. And I've shot almost all of Ken's films over the last 20 years, and I do a lot of work for many other people. A lot of it for PBS, some of it for HBO, National Geographic -- anything from a film about Jane Goodall and her work with chimpanzees in Africa, to a biography of the Dalai Lama, a film about a young girl going through a heart and lung transplant, to a film that I produced

and directed myself about the work of Robert Coles, which is called LISTENING TO CHILDREN, and his work on the moral lives of American children. Really, just a tremendous range of material which I am delighted to have been involved with.

You are also a director and producer. What films have you made in that capacity, and do you plan to direct anything soon?

I've done a fair amount of work as a producer. I produced STATUE OF LIBERTY with Ken. Ken and I share the producer credit and the Academy Award nomination for STATUE OF LIBERTY. I produced CONEY ISLAND with Ric, and there are a number of other, smaller films that I've either produced or directed with other people. I'm not currently directing anything, but I'm developing some work and I'm looking to do some more directing. As much as I love shooting, I like having the responsibility of being totally in charge as well. So I am developing some projects as well as looking for some projects to direct.

Can you work on something and direct at the same time?

I'm usually shooting  
anywhere from five  
to 10 projects at  
once, because some

of these projects are huge. NEW YORK we've been shooting off and on for the last three or four years, and in that time, I have certainly done a number of other major projects. I did a lot of the camerawork for Ken's upcoming series on the history of jazz. There'll be a film out this fall on the dual biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, there was just a film that I shot for CNN, about some Colombian children who were nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize; this is just a broad range of work. The great thing about shooting films is that you can do many of them at one time, whereas if you're producing and directing, you can only do one or two at a time



Can you share any anecdotes? What was the absolute worst or best day on the shoot?

. . . I suppose the worst day may have been a day that actually turned out very well. We needed some imagery for 19th-century New York, and we went up to Troy, NY, where there was an extensive series of streets with cobblestones, but what they really are is Belgian paving stones. We arranged to get a beautiful team of horses, and a 19th-century carriage, and brought in dolly track, and brought in a big lighting set-up to really do some very evocative, nighttime smoky imagery of horses and wagons and carriages. It was a huge set-up and I drove in from my home in Massachusetts on a very cold winter day. There had been an ice storm the day before, and I had the flu and I felt absolutely horrible, and we were standing outside for about 12 hours dealing with such things as there was still ice covering this cobblestone street. And the city

about 12 hours, dealing with such things as there was still ice covering this cobblestone street. And the city of Troy was being tremendously helpful in terms of trying to get rid of the ice for us, but that involved laying down salt and trying to get the salt to melt the ice, but then there was a white glaze left over. Trying to get the fire department to come and hose the street off for us and trying to get the street dried off before it froze up again. Just one series of difficulties after another, trying to get the street to look the way it should look. There were "No Parking" signs that had been on metal posts when we got there, and the city of Troy was so cooperative that they just sent somebody out with an acetylene torch to cut the signs down and get them out of our way. They did all these things to help us out.

At the same time, I was physically barely able to stand up the entire day, and yet we went through and did the shoot, and it's gorgeous imagery, and it worked like a charm. So in way, there's a separation between the physical reality of doing the shoot, fraught with every kind of difficulty one could imagine, including just being physically ill, and just this gorgeous, luscious, nighttime imagery of these beautiful beasts with steam coming out of their noses, their feet along the cobblestones, and the wheels of the wagon and the whole evocation of 19th-century carriage culture that came out of that.

Will you be able to watch the scene and not think about how hard it was to shoot?

For the most part, if a scene is working when I'm watching it, then I'm just taken into the imagery of the moment. Sure everything has a memory touchstone of where you are and what you were doing, but if the scene is working and the film is working . . . After all, these films are much more than just the images that I provide, they're the whole other world of process, the elaborate world of creating a script, and recording historical voices, and bringing the actors in to record those voices, and editing. If I provide one layer with the images, there's another five layers, 10 layers, that come on throughout the process. So what I'm watching is the product of all those people's energies brought together for this one moment, and it's not just about my work at all. My work is just a piece of it.

Does shooting a film like this require some kind of visual philosophy or theory? What kind of philosophy did you bring to this project?

I don't approach things that academically at all. I don't know that I have a visual philosophy other than to pay attention. As I mentioned earlier, it's about paying attention, and about being open to the reality as it presents itself and being present with that reality. Really, all anyone can do is to say, "Look, this is what I see, can you see it?" It's that simple. It's what any visual artist is trying to do -- to just show you their view of the world. So in its purest form, it's not a struggle at all, it's not an effort; it's just saying, "Here's what I see." And hopefully, the viewer responds to that in some way that says, "Yes, I do see what you see."