



The Essential Home Theatre Resource™ Widescreen Review

ISSUE 130
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NEWSLETTER

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HOME Industry News DVD HD Equipment Community Advertisers WSR In Print

WELCOME!

Here it is, March already, and business is anything but usual in Home Theatre Land. With the announcement of the high-definition war finally over, everything looks rosy for the future of Blu-ray™. In light of this, we've decided to include one of the first articles we ever printed about the two competing formats as the first of two archive articles (from Issue 66, November 2002); the second archive article is all about CinemaScope® (from Issue 26, December 1997). Also included is "The Studio Scoop," products that are "Coming Soon..." and some of the recent news that is available on our Web site. News is now updated daily, so be sure and visit www.WidescreenReview.com often to be one of the first to know what's new in the world of Home Theatre.

If you haven't ordered your FREE DTS® 2008 High-Definition Audio Demonstration Disc in Blu-ray or HD DVD yet, be sure and



Gary Reber
Editor-In-Chief, *Widescreen Review*

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Issue 130, April 2008 of *Widescreen Review*:

- "2008 International CES Part 1" By John Kotches
- "Sharp AQUOS™ LC-52D64U 52-inch 1080p LCD HDTV" Review By Mike Marks
- "Panasonic DMP-BD30 Blu-ray Disc® Player" Review By Bill Cushman
- "Yamaha RX-V3800 The Swiss Army Knife Of A/V Receivers" Review By Gary Altunian
- "LG Super Blu BH200 Blu-ray Disc And HD DVD Player" Review By Danny Richelieu
- "Sharp AQUOS BD-HP20U Blu-ray Disc Player" Review By Doug Blackburn
- "The Mi Casa Magicians: An Interview With The Team Behind 7.1" By Gary Reber & Danny Richelieu
- Plus the new department "Connecting Dots..." By Amir Majidimehr, "Your Letters," "One Installer's Opinion" and over 40 Blu-ray Disc®, HD DVD, and DVD picture and sound quality reviews and more...

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Recent News

Here are some of the recent headlines that have made it to the News section of WidescreenReview.com, which is now updated daily, as our Web staff finds worthy home theatre-related stories and press releases. Visit WidescreenReview.com throughout the day to find out what's going on in the world of Home Theatre.

Microsoft "Moving On" After HD DVD Breakup (BusinessWeek)

"Just a few weeks after the Blu-ray Disc® Association unequivocally won the high-definition video format war, and Microsoft canceled production of its HD DVD drive for the Xbox 360, Microsoft says it's already trying to figure out the best way to align itself with Blu-ray..."

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One Fifth Of U.S. Households Will Spend Stimulus Package Funds On Consumer Electronics, CEA Survey Finds

"One out of every five U.S. households will spend at least a portion of their economic stimulus rebate check on consumer electronics, totaling some \$5 billion, according to new research by the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA)®. Before plans for the stimulus package were announced, CEA predicted wholesale revenues of \$171.6 billion for the consumer electronics industry in 2008..."

[Click Here To Continue Reading](#)

3-D touted as the format of the future (The Los Angeles Times)

"The marquee topic was 3-D on Tuesday at the movie industry's ShoWest conference, as DreamWorks Animation SKG Inc. Chief Executive Jeffrey Katzenberg teased exhibitors with footage from next year's *Monsters vs. Aliens*, and four studios announced deals that could enable 10,000 more theatres to show films in the format..."

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Global Market For OLED Displays To Exceed U.S. \$4.5 Billion By 2010, According To New Report By Global Industry Analysts

"The global Organic Light-Emitting Diode (OLED) display industry is anticipated to experience stupendous growth in the coming five years, according to a new report by Global Industry Analysts, Inc. Major OLED manufacturers are upgrading their production techniques to offer quality products, so as to stay ahead in the highly intense competitive environment..."

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Samsung Cancels Second-Gen Combo Blu-ray™ and HD DVD Player (PC World)

"Samsung's statement today that it would no longer proceed with its BD-UP5500 player doesn't come as a surprise given Toshiba's withdrawal from the HD DVD format. The player was announced at the 2008 International Consumer Electronics Show in January..."

[Click Here To Continue Reading](#)

CDSA President Reminds Industry Blu-ray™ Won Battle, But War Is Not Yet Over

"Although Blu-ray may have won the battle against rival format HD-DVD, the war for ultimate consumer acceptance of the format has really only just begun, Charles Van Horn, President of the Content Delivery and Storage Association, told attendees at the 38th Annual Content Delivery and Storage Forum in La Quinta, California on March 7, 2008..."

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Coming Soon... To A Retailer Near You

Tricia Spears



Elite Screens, Inc. HOME2

The easy-to-install, non-tensioned, electric retractable **HOME2** projection screens from **Elite Screens, Inc.** offer a wide viewing diffusion angle of 160 degrees. The Maxwhite projection surface is a matte white, multi-layered, woven screen material with 1.1 gain. The textured material helps eliminate distracting moiré

patterns and hotspots, and the fiberglass-reinforced material has black backing to prevent light penetration. With an interchangeable three-way wall switch or extended infrared "eye" sensor, the screens also include a built-in 12-volt trigger that can synchronize screen drop and rise with a projector's power cycle. The screens are currently available for prices between \$782 and \$1,412, depending on size and optional features.

Elite Screens 877 511 1211 www.elitescreens.com

Stewart Filmscreen's Generation 3 (G3) FireHawk, GrayHawk, and StudioTek 130 screens have been redesigned with a smoother screen surface, for more detail of 1080p images on larger screen sizes. Stewart's re-optimization of the screens' optical coating improves pixel density to ensure the best possible imaging or resolution transparency of 1080p and higher resolution images. Formulated with reduced surface texture and smoother to the touch than the earlier models, the development of the G3 designs was a collaborative effort between Stewart Filmscreen and Joe Kane Productions. The G3 is available and shipping now.



Stewart Filmscreen G3 FireHawk on CineCurve frame

Stewart Filmscreen 310 784 5300 www.stewartfilmscreen.com

Sling Media, Inc. has introduced its next-generation **Slingbox™ PRO-HD**, which is capable of streaming HD content from a home television source to a laptop or desktop computer. And when paired with the new



Slingbox PRO-HD

SlingCatcher, the Slingbox PRO-HD will transmit the HD signal to another television in the house. The included SlingStream 2.0 allows the Slingbox PRO-HD to adaptively stream high-quality television content across virtually any network connection. With 4:3 and 16:9 video support and featuring multiple integrated sets of audio/video inputs and outputs, the Slingbox PRO-HD transforms PCs, laptops, Macs, and a variety of smartphones into personal, portable televisions, giving consumers the freedom of viewing anywhere they can access the Internet. The Slingbox PRO-HD will be available in the third quarter of 2008 for a suggested retail price of \$399.99.

Sling Media 877 467 5464 www.slingmedia.com

The **Palladium™ P-39F** floorstanding loudspeakers from **Klipsch®** offer a clean, contemporary look that enhances any living space. Melding classic Klipsch audio with the latest in home furniture trends, the "boat-tail" design is finished in a furniture-grade stained zebrawood veneer. Two magnetically attached speaker grilles are designed to subtly reveal the classic Klipsch horn at the top and the hybrid drivers below. The P-39F's metallic-finish side-firing ports mirror the horn and driver trim rings, and the adjustable brushed-aluminum floating base supports the cabinet at four points. Sold as matched left-right pairs for \$15,000 a pair, the loudspeakers began shipping in January 2008.



Klipsch P-39F

Klipsch 800 554 7724 www.klipsch.com



Mitsubishi Diamond Series

Mitsubishi has added **3-D** capabilities to its 73-inch 1080p DLP® Diamond Series HDTVs. The inherent speed advantages of DLP technology make it capable of displaying 3-D content in full 1080 resolution on DLP HDTVs. Now available on all Mitsubishi Diamond series 1080p DLP HDTVs, the 3-D feature will soon be incorporated into more of the company's DLP models.

Mitsubishi 800 332 2119 www.mitsubishi-tv.com

VIZIO has introduced eight new plasma HDTVs that offer increased contrast ratio and longer life. The **VP504F** 50-inch (\$1,699) and **VP605F** 60-inch (\$2,899) high-definition 1080p models feature Silicon Optix HQV processing, use an integrated DTV-compliant HD/QAM tuner, and boast a contrast ratio of up to 30,000:1. VIZIO is the first manufacturer to include a six-foot HDMI cable in lieu of composite video and audio cables with its televisions. The VP504F and VP605F are expected to be available in June of 2008. The **VP500** (\$1,799, June) and **VP501** (price and availability TBD) are 50-inch plasmas. The VP500 is available with 720p resolution, while the VP501 offers full 1080p performance. Both models include picture-in-picture, picture-on-picture, three HDMI, two component video, and one RF input. The **VP324** 32-inch (\$689) is a 1024 x 720 set with 15,000:1 contrast ratio, while the **VP422** and **VP423** 42-inch (\$999) plasmas feature 1024 x 768 with 20,000:1 contrast ratio. The **VP503** 50-inch (1,399) delivers a native resolution of 1365 x 768, compatible with 1080p content, and displays 30,000:1 contrast ratio. The VP324, VP422, VP423, and VP503 are expected to be available in May or June 2008.



VIZIO VP504F

VIZIO 888 VIZIOCE www.VIZIO.com

Toshiba America Consumer Products, L.L.C. has added 20 new LCD televisions to its Spring 2008 lineup.

The 720p HD **AV500** Series includes TVs ranging from 19 inches to 42 inches and are priced between \$430 and \$1,300. All feature Dynalight™ dynamic backlight control for deep black levels, built-in ATSC/QAM digital tuning, HDMI™ digital inputs, and a PC input. The **REGZA CV510** Series is a step-up 720p HD line featuring 32-inch (\$899.99) and 37-inch (\$1,099.99) sizes and are available with Toshiba's PixelPure 4G™ 14-bit internal digital video processor and a new 1.5-inch ThinLine Bezel design with the thin SoundStrip® loudspeaker system. The **REGZA RV530** Series features 1080p full high-definition resolution in the new two-tone "Surface Tension" design with high-gloss black bezel. The 32-inch, 37-inch, 42-inch, 46-inch, and 52-inch models offer a 15,000:1 dynamic contrast and include four HDMI inputs and a new High-Res PC input. They are priced from \$1,099.99 to \$2,699.99. The **REGZA XV540** Series includes 42-inch (\$1,699.99), 46-inch (\$2,199.99), and 52-inch (\$2,899.99) models in 1080p resolution. Toshiba's improved ClearFrame 120 Hz with Film Stabilization, new 5:5 Pull-Down, and 14-Bit PixelPure 4G internal digital video processing with 10-bit LCD panels for 16,384 levels of gradation are all included in the line. And the **Cinema Series REGZA XF550** line offers a super-narrow 0.9-inch bezel design, ClearFrame, and a thinner SoundStrip 2 loudspeaker system. The "virtually all-screen" 40-inch (\$1,999.99), 46-inch (\$2,499.99), and 52-inch (\$3,199.99) models offer 1080p full-HD resolution and include DynaLight SuperContrast for superior black levels.



Toshiba XV540 Series

Toshiba 800 631 3811 www.tacp.toshiba.com

Tributaries® Cable's HXC5 HDMI over Cat5

system is a genuine problem solver for today's modern home theatre systems. Able to send an HDMI signal over distances of up to 164 feet virtually loss-free, the HXC5 employs balanced/unbalanced signal processing, ensuring full high-definition signal integrity for all video formats. Packaged as a complete, ready-to-connect system, including a compact "balun" transmitter (source-end) and receiver (destination-end), installation is as simple as plugging and playing. Tributaries' HXC5 HDMI over Cat5 system is available now for \$600.



Tributaries HXC5 HDMI over Cat5

Tributaries 800 521 1596 www.tributariescable.com



JVC LT-47X899

JVC's Precision LCD TVs are a new line of LCD televisions powered by a JVC-developed next-generation high-definition engine, Clear Motion Drive III. The three 1080p models—the 42-inch **LT-42X899**, 47-inch **LT-47X899**, and 52-inch **LT-52X899**—will be available in late spring/early summer. Included in the televisions are 36-bit (12 bit x 3) image processing, real bit driver bit extension technology, i-Clear motion noise reduction, intelligent HD processing, and x.v.Color-enabled signal processing. Also included is a frame rate of 120 frames per second and full HD 24/30p. There are nine video aspect modes included, an ATSC/QAM tuning system with a Quick Start-up mode, an illuminated universal remote with direct input access, and a re-designed onscreen display. With three HDMI (1.3) inputs, two S-video inputs, S/PDIF input, AV output, PC input, RS-232C interface, and an IR interface, the televisions also include a USB PhotoViewer for viewing of JPEG photos stored on USB memory. Pricing for JVC's Precision LCD televisions have not yet been announced.

JVC 800 526 5308 www.jvc.com



Pioneer VSX-1018TXH-K

New from **Pioneer** are four advanced A/V receivers that deliver dynamic high-definition video and audio formats for next-generation home theatre performance. The **VSX-518-K** (\$199, April), **VXS-818V-K** (\$249, April), **VSX-918V-K** (\$349, April), and **VSX-1018TXH-K** (\$599, June) receivers incorporate new proprietary amplifier technologies that ensure maximum power from multi-channel sound formats while maintaining clean audio with impressive THD specifications. Pioneer is incorporating its newly developed Pioneer Hybrid Amplifier Technology (P.H.A.T.) power module that improves fundamental audio to a more powerful and accurate performance. The P.H.A.T. amplifiers are engineered with hand-selected parts and critical listening sound tuning to ensure the entire range of audio from music and soundtracks is delivered. The receivers feature temperature compensation technology that prevents temperature fluctuations from affecting output that can distort surround sound performance. Also included is Pioneer's digital sound processing (DSP) capabilities that maximize surround sound performance. With multi-channel acoustic calibration, sound retriever technology, front stage surround advance, phase control bass management, auto level control, and multi-zone audio, each receiver offers full sound processing of Dolby®, DTS®, and Windows Media Audio 9 Professional™ formats. Furthermore, Pioneer's top three models offer robust high-definition connectivity options for nearly every home theatre component, and they make available dedicated connectivity ports for both XM Connect & Play™ and SiriusConnect™ antennas. They also provide immediate "plug and play" enjoyment of iPod® music content via a front panel digital USB port.

Pioneer Electronics 800 421 1404 www.pioneerelectronics.com

The Studio Scoop

Rumors, Reports, & Ramblings

Stacey Pendry

I Am Legend DVD Giveaway

Be sure to enter our *I Am Legend* DVD giveaway contest. You still have a few days left for your entries to be valid, so don't put it off, enter today (just click here)! All entries must be received no later than March 17, 2008 at midnight Pacific Daylight Time. We will draw the winners' names the following week, with the prizes to be mailed before the end of March.

Disney

Morocco has been chosen as the main shooting location for Disney's project *The Prince Of Persia*. Now in the preproduction stage, with filming due to begin mid March, this epic undertaking is a live action feature based on the video game franchise by the same name.

British Director Mike Newell is set to lens the action adventure film with Jerry Bruckheimer producing. No premiere date has been announced, but it is reported to be in theatres sometime in late 2008 or early 2009.

Disney is set to make animated films in Japan, teaming with Toei Animation to tap talent and computer graphics technology.

Moving its core production outside of the United States for the first time, the move is said to create projects that will appeal to Asian tastes.

A short animated film about a robot has already been made with partner Toei and is due to be aired in May. It is reported that two projects are in the works, but no window for release has been confirmed.

Execs at Disney were called on by shareholders to defend their decision not to release the ABC miniseries, *The Path To 911*, on DVD at their annual meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Aired in 2006, the miniseries was so critical of President Clinton's handling of terrorist threats that it prompted some leading Democrats to request the series not be broadcast. After making edits, Disney ran it commercial free.

Fund manager, Tom Borelli accused Disney CEO Robert Iger of protecting Hillary

Clinton's presidential campaign at the expense of his shareholders. Pointing to the fact that Iger was a steady supporter of Clinton well before she was elected to the Senate, Borelli stated it was high time to release the title on DVD, in an attempt to recoup some of the \$40 million Disney spent on the project.

Iger, who was somewhat taken aback by the comment, assured shareholders that his decision was based purely on business considerations, not political favor.

Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, AnnaSophia Robb, Alexander Ludwig, and Cirian Hinds are due to star in *Race To Witch Mountain*, Disney's reimagining of its 1975 family adventure, *Escape To Witch Mountain*. Andy Fickman is set to direct, with Andrew Gunn producing, via his Gunns Films banner.

The adaptation revolves around a set of paranormal-powered siblings (Ludwig and Robb) who are on the run from an evil group of men who wish to exploit their abilities. With the help of a Las Vegas taxicab driver (Johnson), the brother and sister are forced to go on the run to evade the evil henchmen.

Universal

Social networking site Facebook has banned a page posted on its site promoting Universal's new cyber-crime thriller, *Untraceable*. The page entitled "Kill With Me" offered bloodthirsty online voyeurs a sneak peek of a gruesome torture scene from the film.

Taking the lead from the pic's story line in which a serial killer creates an untraceable Web site where he tortures victims to death live on the Internet, the rate at which the unfortunate victim is tortured to death is determined by how many visitors are viewing the Web site at the time. As for the Facebook page, the more fans it attracted, the longer the grizzly clip was played.

Facebook removed the page before the whole scene was revealed.

In last month's newsletter I reported that Ellen Page was set to star in Sam Raimi's new horror film, *Drag Me To Hell*. The *Juno*

star pulled out of the project after a scheduling conflict was created by a protracted preproduction period for Raimi's film.

Alison Lohman (*Things We Lost In The Fire*, *Matchstick Men*) has been signed to fill the role vacated by Ms. Page.

Universal's new comedy *Baby Mama* is set to open the Tribeca Film Festival and will be in wide release two days later. The film stars Tina Fey and Amy Poehler, with Michael McCullers, formerly a scribe for *Saturday Night Live*, slated as the writer/director.

Filmed in New York City, the story follows a single career woman (Fey), who finds a surrogate mother (Poehler) to carry her child. The situation gets a bit sticky, though, when class, cultures, and expectations collide.

Coen Brothers' fans will not have to wait long for the duo's next offering.

Burn After Reading, a dark comedy about the spy business, is set to have its domestic premiere on September 12.

Starring in the Oscar® award-winning team's newest project is an all-star cast, including George Clooney, John Malkovich, Frances McDormand, Brad Pitt, and Tilda Swinton.

Adam Sandler, Seth Rogen, and Leslie Mann are set to star in Judd Apatow's next film.

The untitled project is to be written and directed by Apatow, with Universal Pictures and Sony Pictures Entertainment co-producing. Production is to begin late this summer, with Universal contracted to distribute the film worldwide.

Apatow, who is the sole scribe on the project, is keeping the plot under wraps. Judd continues to work with familiar faces—he worked with Sandler when he co-wrote the upcoming Columbia Pictures release *Don't Mess With Zohan* with Robert Smigel. Rogen and Mann both had roles in Apatow's first two feature directorial efforts, *The 40-Year Old Virgin* and *Knocked Up*. Apatow is also married to Mann.



Sony

Jill Culton, director of *Open Season*, is slated to helm Sony Pictures Animation's *Hotel Transylvania* with Michelle Murdocca producing. Writers for the project have not been announced.

The plot centers on Simon Van Helsing, the youngest in a long line of monster hunters, who falls in love with Dracula's daughter, Mavis. When it is discovered the two are natural enemies, the couple begin a mission to bring peace between humans and monsters.

Hotel Transylvania will be released after SPA's next project, *Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs*, which is due to open in March of 2009.

Animals, by first-time writer and former criminal attorney Mike Sobel, has been picked up by Columbia Pictures.

The disaster flick chronicles what would happen if the animals of the world turned on humans in a bid to reclaim their planet.

Just a year ago, Sobel left his law practice in New York and moved to Los Angeles to pursue his writing career.

Slated to star in the upcoming thriller *Obsessed* is Beyonce Knowles, Idris Elba, and Ali Larter.

In *Obsessed* Elba plays a successful businessman with a trophy wife (Knowles), who is stalked by a temp office worker (Larter).

Steve Shill is due to direct the pic, with Beyonce and her dad, Mathew Knowles, as executive producers.

Warner Bros./New Line

New Line's 40-year run as an independent studio ended this month when Time Warner announced it will fold the company into the studio's parent, Warner Bros. The move cost New Line most of its 600 staffers, including founding Studio Head Bob Shaye and Studio Topper Michael Lynne.

New Line will continue to have development, marketing, and business affairs, but any new projects will be released under the Warner Bros. banner, as was the case for *Semi-Pro*, which released this past weekend.

The fate of Time Warner's specialty film division, Picture House, was not discussed in the press conference on February 28. But, with New Line distributing Picture House projects, it would seem likely that they too will be consolidated into the Warner Bros. folds.

Go, Go, Go! Baby boomers, Astro Boy is here! That is, Warner is due to release a 3-D animated feature of the classic comic book in 2009.

The \$50 million adaptation will star Freddie Highmore (*The Spiderwick Chronicles*) as the voice for the lead character and will be directed by David Bowers.

The lonely robot tale was originally created by revered Manga artistic director and pioneer, Osamu Tezuka, and is currently in production with Hong Kong-based Imagi Studios.

Warner has purchased the rights to Jeff Smith's comic book series *Bone*. The comic book's roots date back to 1991, when Smith began self-publishing the series. In 2005 *Scholastic* began issuing the saga, with over a million copies of the comic sold even

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I Want To Know **The Studio Scoop**

before the last two installments of the nine-part series has been published.

Dan Lin, a former production exec for Warner, is due to produce under his "shingle," Lin Pictures.

Seth Rogen (*Superbad*, *Knocked Up*) has signed on to star in *Observe And Report*, an adult comedy about a self-important head of mall security who squares off in a turf war with local police.

Rogen met the writer/producer of *Observe*, Jody Hill, at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival at the premiere of Hill's film, *The Foot Fist Way*. Hill was invited to the set of *Knocked Up*, where he and Rogen struck up a friendship. Hill subsequently played a small role in *Superbad*.

20th Century Fox

Mila Kunis (*That 70's Show*, *Moving McAllister*) is set to star alongside Mark Wahlberg in the John Moore-directed adaptation of the Rockstar videogame, *Max Payne*.

Kunis will play an assassin who teams up with the title character to avenge her sister's death. *Max Payne*, played by Wahlberg, is a cop haunted by the loss of his family who gets caught up in a conspiracy while investigating a series of murders.

Jim Carrey has signed on to star in *Pierre*, *Pierre*, which Fox Atomic acquired for a cool million bucks from scribes Edwin Cannistraci and Frederick Seton. Jason Reitman is slated to serve as director and producer via his banner Hard C. The speculation of a Reitman/Carrey collaboration sparked a heated bidding war between Universal, Mandate, and Fox Atomic.

The politically incorrect comedy centers on a French nihilist who transports stolen works of art from Paris to London. The budget is set for \$13 million.

Reitman, who earned an Oscar nomination for *Juno*, is next set to produce a cheerleader-from-hell comedy thriller, *Jennifer's Body*. Carrey next lends his voice to Fox's *Horton Hears A Who* and then goes on to star in Warner Bros. comedy *Yes Man*.

After nearly a year of searching, Fox has found an actor to fill Notorious B.I.G.'s shoes.

Rapper Gravy, a.k.a. Jamal Woolard, has been chosen to portray the slain hip-hop artist Christopher Wallace, a.k.a. Notorious B.I.G. Derek Luke, Angela Bassett, and Anthony Mackie will also star in the biopic. The film centers on the life of Wallace, beginning when he was a Brooklyn crack dealer to his rise to the top of the hip-hop scene and his subsequent murder, which has never been solved.

Filming is set to begin in New York's five
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boroughs on March 24 and is due to be released by Fox Searchlight on January 16, 2009.

Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs, who was in the car when Notorious was murdered, is set to executive produce.

Paramount

Mindful of a crowded release schedule for 3-D animated movies late in 2009, DreamWorks has delayed their 3-D offering, *How To Train Your Dragon*, from November 2009 to March 2010, in a move meant to separate their release from the other studio's animated films.

With the delay, DreamWorks has only one title set to be released in 2009, entitled *Monsters Vs. Aliens*, stacking the schedule to three releases for the studio in 2010.

Along with *Dragons*, 2010 will bring another installment in the ogre franchise when *Shrek Goes Fourth* is released in May 2010. The

third offering is *Master Mind*, due to premiere the following November.

Had *Dragon* kept to its original release date of November 20, 2009, the film would be sandwiched between two other 3-D animated films from rival studios, *A Christmas Carol* and *Avatar*.

The long-awaited fourth installment to the Indiana Jones' franchise is due to premiere at the Cannes Film Festival on May 18 with the worldwide release set for four days later, on May 22.

So confident of the film's headliner draw, Paramount execs have told the stars of the upcoming sequel to pack their black ties and tuxedos, even though the festival has to confirm its official feature lineup.

Sadly, though, it has been confirmed there are no plans to release the first three films in the Indiana Jones franchise on hi-definition disc at this time. **WSR**

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Drawing The HD-DVD Battle Lines

PAUL SWEETING

In a brief report from its June meeting posted on its Web site, the standards setting body for DVD specifications known as the DVD Forum noted that one of the "key issues" confronting the future development of a high-definition optical disc system is "avoiding format battles that will lead to consumer confusion."

That's as sure a sign as any that an HD-DVD format war is already well underway.

In fact, between the two incompatible blue laser-based systems being developed by different groups of companies, the red laser-based system backed by powerful Hollywood interests, and an entirely new system of unknown hue reportedly emerging from China and Taiwan, the race to develop an optical disc response to JVC's D-VHS® D-Theater™ system is beginning to resemble one of those colorful light saber duels featured in *Star Wars* movies. The hard part is sorting out the Darth Vaders from the Jedi Knights.

Although all parties involved in the HD-DVD scramble deny it, the intense effort being lavished on coming up with a viable format was undoubtedly prompted by the introduction of JVC's D-Theater system and its embrace by four Hollywood studios—Artisan, 20th Century Fox, Universal, and DreamWorks.

In the case of Warner Bros., in fact, the push to find the fastest possible way to market with a viable HD disc format can be traced directly—if unofficially—to a desire to head off the success of any HD format that could pose a threat to the success of the DVD platform, from which Warner, as one of the principal architects of the optical disc format, derives significant patent royalty revenue. So, don't expect to see Warner Bros. movies on D-Theater anytime soon.

That very sense of urgency, however, has led, paradoxically, to the current mess of conflicting proposals and the prospect of a knock-down drag-out fight over future patent royalties.

Although the idea of using a smaller wavelength blue laser to pack more data onto a DVD had been kicking around the DVD Forum for some time, the first substantive announcement regarding a blue-light format came from outside the standards setting body.

A group of nine companies (Hitachi, LG,

Matsushita, Pioneer, Philips, Samsung, Sharp, Sony, and Thomson) announced in February that they had "established the basic specifications" for something they called the Blu-ray Disc, with a capacity of 27 GB per disc.

Although all nine companies are members of the DVD Forum, they made it clear that development of the Blu-ray technology would happen outside of the jurisdiction of the standards body. The announcement said the nine companies would begin licensing Blu-ray technology "as soon as specifications are completed." In other words, the patent licenses would not be pooled under the DVD Forum, as they are for current-generation DVD players, but would be handled separately by the individual companies.

Another problem, from Hollywood's point of view, is that Blu-ray had been developed essentially as a home recording format, with little thought given to how suitable it would be for prerecorded HD programming.

As it turns out, it isn't very suitable at all, because it would require an entirely new manufacturing process, rendering all existing DVD pressing plants around the world obsolete. On its own, moreover, Blu-ray technology is not backward compatible with existing red-laser-based DVDs, so it would also render consumers' current DVD libraries obsolete.

Due to Sony's ownership of Columbia Pictures, however, the Blu-ray disc attracted at least the implicit support of one major Hollywood studio and the interest of several others, who chafe at paying royalties to Warner Bros. every time they press a DVD.

Warner answered next, with a proposal to extend the existing red laser technology through the use of higher compression ratios (e.g., MPEG-4), and a lower bit-rate to get more capacity out of existing disc technology.

While the Warner proposal could be implemented more quickly than Blu-ray, and would be backward compatible with current-generation discs and manufacturing plants (including Warner's own large facility), it drew immediate fire from some quarters as less than "true HD" quality. It would also be playback-only.

In an interview with *Video Business* magazine, however, Warner's Senior Vice President of New Media, Lewis Ostrover, bristled at the accusations that its proposal meant less than HD quality. "Warner Bros. has no interest in anything but the highest quality level," Ostrover told *VB*.

According to Warner execs, HD-DVD-9, as they're now calling the format, is capable of 1920 x 1080 resolution, in accordance with the ATSC standard for HDTV broadcast. Even Warner admits, however, that HD/DVD-9 can pack only about 135 minutes of HD programming onto a single disc, making it unsuitable for many movies. Instead, Warner sees the format as a platform for short form programming, such as television shows, children's programming, and other non-movie fare.

While Warner's proposal drew some support from Fox—which has built a large business in marketing its TV shows on DVD—others in Hollywood balked, again, in part, because it would mean continued patent payments to Warner.

Warner may have been rescued by its old partner in developing current DVD technology, however, when Toshiba, along with NEC, announced their own blue laser-based system, which they say is not compatible with Blu-ray, but would be compatible with existing DVD authoring and manufacturing capacity (with perhaps a bit of tweaking). It would also be cheap enough, the companies said, to allow hardware makers to build hybrid players incorporating Warner's HD/DVD-9 technology for shorter programs and backward compatibility with current-generation DVDs, along with the blue laser system for true HD movies.

Moreover, as a co-developer of both the red laser format and a blue laser format, moreover, Toshiba would stand to profit handsomely from the patent royalties.

Contending formats are nothing new with DVD, of course. The last time around it took a great deal of arm-twisting and table pounding within the DVD Forum, mostly by Warner, to force the companies behind two competing proposals to agree on a single format. This time, with more companies and more proposals, that table may need reinforcing.

The only people smiling over the current mess are the folks at JVC, who now look to have a good two to three years of selling D-VHS before they need to worry about a serious optical disc competitor. ■

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CinemaScope®

The "Poor Man's Cinerama®"

SCOTT MARSHALL

*How
CinemaScope®,
The "Poor Man's
Cinerama,"
Became Known
As Panavision®
And Changed
Movies Forever*

The next time you walk into a movie theatre and notice that the screen is more than twice as wide as it is high, or pick up a LaserDisc or DVD movie and read on the label that it is in the "2.35:1 theatrical aspect ratio," you can proclaim, to the certain befuddlement of those who hear you, that the movie is in "The Poor Man's Cinerama." Here's why:

In the late 1940s the growing popularity of television was cooking Hollywood like the proverbial frog in the slowly-heating pot of water. The promoters of Cinerama had invited executives of every major studio to work with them on their incredible virtual-reality technology, but without success. The studios were astounded by the demonstration films, but afraid to take the risk and jump into this strange new medium. Ultimately, Lowell Thomas and Michael Todd, both brilliant and successful showmen, were able to bring Cinerama to its spectacular premier on September 30th, 1952.

One cannot exaggerate how astonishing Cinerama was to audiences at the time. Up until then, movie screens were the same shape as television screens, and soundtracks were in limited-range mono. Overnight, Cinerama



Figure 1: A frame of 35mm silent film in the 4:3 (1.33:1) aspect ratio format invented in Edison's Lab in 1889, which dictated the shape of motion picture screens until Cinerama premiered in 1952 (television still conforms to this screen shape).



Figure 2: A frame of 35mm sound film from *Gone With The Wind* (1939) showing how the addition of the mono optical sound track required shifting the image to the side and reducing its size to maintain the same basic shape as the silent screen.



Figure 3: Three frames of Cinerama that blended together to fill a screen with a curving aspect ratio of 1.88:1 and included 7-track discrete full-range stereophonic sound from a separate strip of magnetic film.

presented the world with its alternative. The screen was almost three times wide as it was high (75 feet by 26 feet, giving an aspect ratio of 2.88:1), and because it curved around the audience, was equivalent to a 6:1 aspect ratio flat screen. The audio covered the full range of human hearing, approaching the 20 Hz to 20,000 Hz we're accustomed to today, and from six (later seven) discrete channels recorded and played from microphones and speakers arranged nominally in a 180 degree arc. Even today, no commercial filmmaking system comes close to Cinerama's ambitious specifications.

The premier of Cinerama instantly propelled the big studios into a widescreen leapfrogging contest that lasted a decade. 20th Century-Fox responded with the first, most lasting and efficient imitation of Cinerama: "The Poor Man's Cinerama" (a.k.a. CinemaScope, and now, Panavision).

Fox's technical department was arguably the best of the early Hollywood studios. To respond to Cinerama as quickly as possible, Fox reached back into the past and signed Frenchman Henri Crétien to supply them with his 20-year-old anamorphic lens technology (Crétien's widescreen process was reportedly inspired by the three-projector Cinerama-like 1927 "Polyvision" of fellow Frenchman Abel Gance).

The basic idea of the anamorphic process is simple: Shoot pictures with an ordinary camera through the appropriate anamorphic lens, and the camera will take a picture twice as wide as normal. Things will end up looking skinny on the film, but when the film is projected through a similar lens, it results in an image almost as wide as Cinerama's and for just the price of a few slabs of glass. Fox could then reduce the three-film Cinerama system to a single strip of 35mm film. This was the first piece of Fox's "Poor Man's Cinerama." The next piece was the sound.

A big picture needs big sound. Cinerama recorded six (later seven) tracks of sound on a strip of 35mm magnetic film stock completely separate from the picture. Fox wanted a single system, with both picture and sound on one strip. They discarded the old limited-range mono optical sound track and chemically applied magnetic sound tracks to the same piece of film that carried the picture, making it double as both photographic film and audio tape. They created a system with three screen channels (center, left, and right, no doubt inspired by the 1940 "Fantasound" system of Disney's *Fantasia*) plus one surround channel. This configuration of three screen channels and one surround channel is still popular after 44 years. It's been the most commonly used multi-channel cinema sound configuration up until the advent of split surrounds with the new digital formats—Dolby® Digital, DTS® Digital Surround and Sony Dynamic



Figure 4: Frame of Fox's "Poor Man's Cinerama" (CinemaScope) with a widescreen image squeezed by the camera lens. Reducing the size of the sprocket holes allowed room for the four magnetic sound tracks. This example also shows the standard mono optical sound track, half of which is under a mag track, the other half still available for playback in mono.

Digital Sound (SDDS).

To fit these new soundtracks on a single piece of 35mm film, the sprocket holes were narrowed from their former rectangular shapes to become nearly square (these undersized sprocket holes were nicknamed "Fox holes").

The final piece of Fox's widescreen process was the screen. Cinerama's screen was both deeply curved and expensively louvered to keep light reflected from one side of the screen from washing out the image on the other side. Fox came up with what they called their "Miracle Mirror" screen. It was very wide, slightly curved to the radius of the projection distance, and imprinted with tiny concave reflective mirrors that directed most of the light to the audience.

Unlike Cinerama, which was initially used only for travelogues, Fox's "Poor Man's Cinerama" (immediately dubbed CinemaScope) was applied to the usual Hollywood fare: comedies, dramas, musicals and westerns. Fox even made the bold promise that every one of its future productions would be filmed in CinemaScope.

The first release was a religious epic, *The Robe* (1953), and it was a huge success. Audiences gasped when the curtains widened to the full 2.55:1 aspect ratio width. Fox had succeeded in imitating a few aspects of Cinerama. The aspect ratio was nearly as wide; the screen was curved (the curve varied according to projection distance and was much less than Cinerama's 146 degrees.) There was a "spread" of multiple track magnetic sound (but fewer channels and not quite as much frequency response and dynamic range). The picture clarity was less than a fifth of Cinerama's. Most importantly, CinemaScope's camera lens could not pick up the same wide angle view as Cinerama's, so there was hardly any of the 3D immersive quality that made Cinerama jump to life for audiences. Still,

CinemaScope became a dynamic and powerful storytelling tool that allowed filmmakers to compose pictures with many elements spread across the screen and with wide, epic vistas to set their stories in.

By this time, normal movies were referred to as "flat" because Cinerama and CinemaScope were considered "3D you can see without glasses." (The 3D films that required glasses were successful for about a year during the same era.) Also in 1953, Hollywood decided that "flat" movies would henceforth be projected enlarged and cropped onto screens masked to an aspect ratio of 1.85:1 (sometimes 1.75:1, or 1.66:1 in Europe). This practice is sometimes called "ersatz widescreen." Although movies made and exhibited this way were not as wide as CinemaScope, they nevertheless had some of the sensation of the anamorphic widescreen experience.

One of CinemaScope's most important features was in how it differentiated itself from television and became a new medium of art and entertainment in its own right. Its impact, even though it was a "poor man's Cinerama," was tremendous, but there was a fly in Fox's ointment that slowly eroded their advantage. The "Poor Man's Cinerama" was just not poor enough. To install the complete CinemaScope exhibition system required projector changes, lens changes, a magnetic stereo sound system and the miracle mirror screen. For an existing movie theatre, that could cost between \$10,000 and \$25,000. Because many exhibitors balked at Fox's insistence on installing



Figure 6: Diagram showing CinemaScope theater design, using one projector and three screen channels (the curvature of the screen in this drawing was absurdly exaggerated by Fox's publicity department to make it look like Cinerama's).

the complete package, other companies were able to jump in and take advantage of the situation. Most important of these was Panavision, Incorporated.

In 1954, Panavision marketed an anamorphic projector attachment for show-



Figure 5: Frame of Panavision anamorphic film, a minor adaptation of the CinemaScope format. The normal shape of the sprocket holes have been restored, and the magnetic sound tracks have been eliminated. The optical track could be monaural, as pictured, or the matrix surround 4-track configuration commonly used from the late 1970s and still used today to back up the new digital formats.

ing CinemaScope and CinemaScope-compatible films. It was less expensive, eliminated the distortions inherent in the Crétien lens designs, and had a variable compression ratio from 1:1 to 2:1 to handle other anamorphic formats that were being developed. Panavision's "Super Panatar" lenses sold well. Theatres began to install wide screens from vendors other than Fox, and began playing CinemaScope films in the new "magoptical" format which had a mono optical track added to prints carrying the magnetic soundtracks. Soon, the theatres could show CinemaScope films without any equipment supplied by Fox. (Addition of the half-size mono optical track to CinemaScope prints narrowed the frame from the original 2.55:1 proportions to 2.35:1, a shape that survives virtually unchanged to this day.)

MGM saw Panavision's success with projection lenses and asked them to supply lenses for their new large format widescreen system. Mike Todd had left Cinerama to develop his own "Cinerama out of one hole" which he dubbed "Todd-AO," but MGM felt the screen needed to be wider than Todd-AO's 2.21:1 aspect ratio. Using the same 65/70mm film format as Todd, and adding Panavision's newly developed anamorphic camera prisms, "MGM Camera 65" was born (later renamed Ultra Panavision 70). The aspect ratio of Camera 65 ended up at 2.76:1, still short of Cinerama's 2.88:1.

Many film studios objected to renting CinemaScope camera equipment from competitor Fox. Panavision stepped in to that market as well by building and offering for rent anamorphic lenses for CinemaScope-compatible 35mm filming, then later adapting and building complete camera systems for any studio to rent. By the end of the 1960s, Fox's CinemaScope was dead. Other firms marketed anamor-

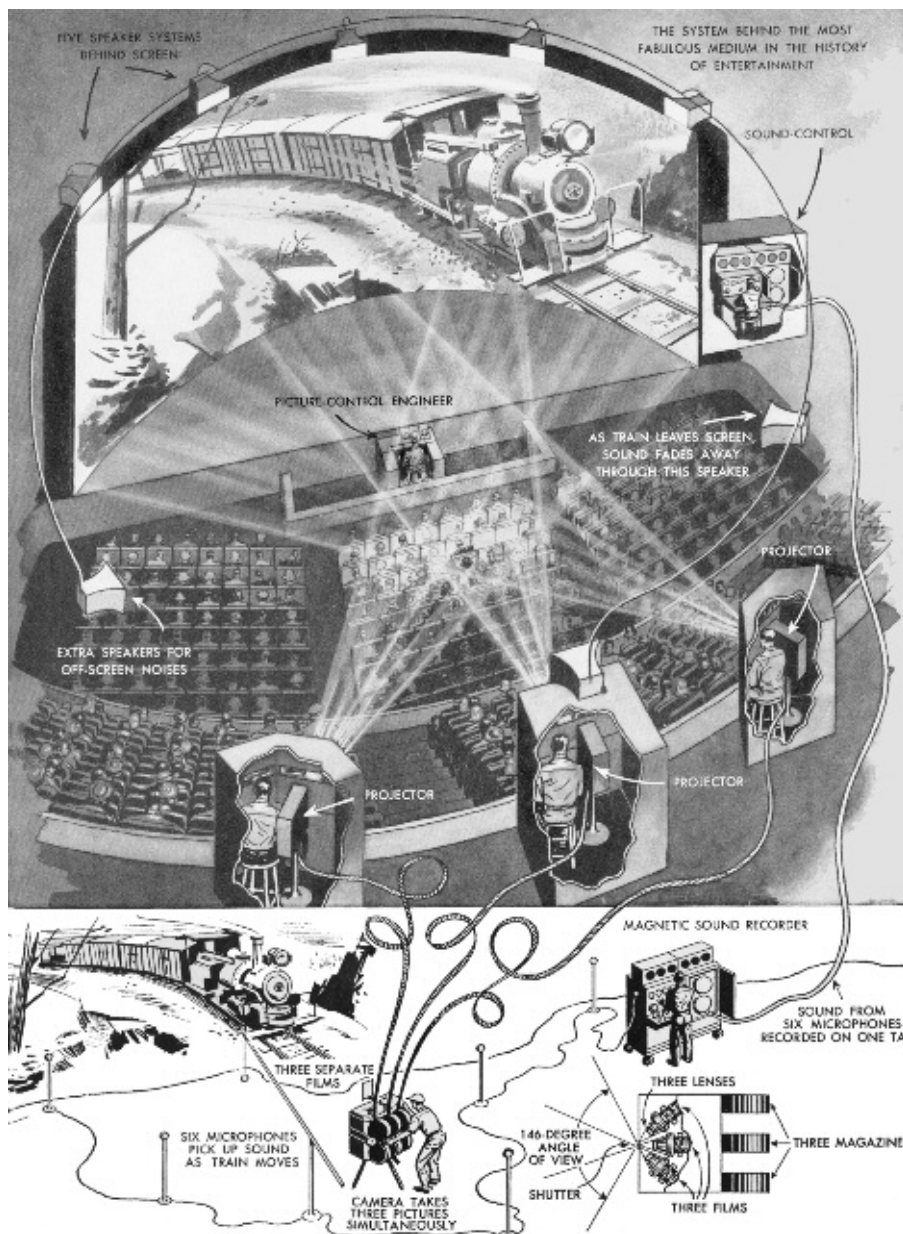


Figure 7: Drawing showing Cinerama theatre design and how the three projectors, five screen speakers and surround speakers are arranged (an extra surround speaker directly behind the audience is sometimes switched in for special effects).

phic photographic systems (most notably "J-D-C Scope" by Joe Dunton Cameras and "Todd-AO 35"), but after 1967, nearly all anamorphic 35mm widescreen films have been "Filmed In Panavision," a process that still is, in essence, "The Poor Man's Cinerama."

Widescreen theatrical releases went through a downward trend in the 1980s. There was a prevailing belief that its use would become obsolete. Then in 1995, when there was progress in establishing high definition television, and widescreen

sets appeared, the proportion of anamorphic theatrical releases began to increase dramatically from a low of 9 percent in 1991 up to 30 percent in 1996, and this year the proportion of new films released in scope will likely be ahead again of the previous year's. Sources at the Panavision company, in fact, are reporting that they have had to build more anamorphic photographic lenses to meet recent unprecedented demand.

So, when you pop a widescreen disc into your home theatre, and see the 2.35:1

aspect ratio frame, and hear the three channels in the front and the surround channels, you can tell your friends that they'll be watching a film made in "The Poor Man's Cinerama." They'll probably ask "What is Cinerama?" and you can tell them how it all started, that it was the "ground zero" of the widescreen explosion, and how it inspired the truly wonderful cinema technologies that still transport us to other lands and tell stories of thrilling action and tremendous heart. ■

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