

2003 WEVA Creative Excellence Competition Entries Reveal Successful New Trends Emerging

By Lee Rickwood

The growing list of WEVA International's Creative Excellence Awards Competition winners reflects the expanding reach and impact of professional video production. During the WEVA EXPO 2003 Opening Night Gala, held at Bally's Las Vegas, dozens of videographers from four different countries were honored for their outstanding wedding and event creativity.

In fact, 50 separate WEVA Creative Excellence Awards were presented in this year's 13th annual competition. WEVA Gold, Silver, Bronze and Finalist Awards were bestowed in 12 different wedding and event video categories (see the complete list of category winners elsewhere in this issue).

Several winners this year were first-time entrants, indicating that new creative production styles and techniques are being more rapidly introduced into the marketplace, and that more wedding and event videographers are continuing to push the boundaries of creative, engaging, and effective production.

The judging process, coordinated by veteran videographer and former CEA judge Steve Wernick, was completed over a one month period by five competition judges, all long-time professional wedding and event videographers who have also attended WEVA EXPO on a regular basis and seen how competition entries have progressed each year.

For the first time, the WEVA CEA presentation was held on the opening night of WEVA EXPO, immediately following the festive dinner reception hosted by Sony, instead of later in the convention. "The change," said WEVA International Chairman Roy Chapman, "reflected input from WEVA International members who suggested that among other things, it would allow more time for



The 2003 Creative Excellence Award judges all say they would be happy to participate in the competition again, even after viewing hundreds and hundreds of videotapes. All tapes are stripped of any identification before judging. Pictured behind a stack of videos that made it through the first round of judging to the finals are (L to R): Al Ritondo, Henry Mares, Kris Malandrucolo, Alan Fitch and Claudia Walters.

networking and discussion with all WEVA Award winners, including the CEA recipients, WEVA Special Award honorees and the WEVA Wedding & Event Videography Hall

of Fame inductees," all of whom were honored on opening night (see the related story elsewhere in this issue).

As Master of Ceremonies for the WEVA CEA Presentation, Wernick introduced each member of the 2003 CEA Panel of the Judges, which included Alan Fitch, Kris Malandrucolo, Henry Mares, Al Ritondo, and Claudia Walters.



Chris McGinness of Pulse Cinema receives the 2003 WEVA Creative Excellence Gold Award for Social Event Production from CEA competition judge Al Ritondo.

The Judging Process

Ritondo, a two-time CEA winner himself, and who with his wife Kathy, owns Personal Touch Video (NJ), described the judging process as a demanding commitment, but one that he and all of the 2003 judges would return to in the blink of an eye!

"It's an exciting and invaluable experience. You really learn a lot about the tremendous range of current creativity by the end of the process," Ritondo describes.

Entries are judged on Dramatic Impact, Video Creativity, Originality, Shooting and Editing Style, Audio and overall produc-

tion Content and Pacing. An Olympic scoring method is used to award points in each of these categories and their respective sub-categories. The top three top scoring “best of category” entries are awarded WEVA Gold, Silver, and Bronze distinctions. The CEA Panel of Judges has the discretion of presenting Finalist Awards as well.

Several creative devices were identified (such as “audio presence,” “time-shifting” and evolving storytelling techniques) by this year’s judges as evidence that an increasing number of videographers are going well-beyond a traditional “cinema verite” approach in producing weddings and events.

For example, Ritondo noted that enhanced use of audio creativity (“audio presence”) was a production technique that struck all of the judges. “It’s not something totally new, of course; some WEVA members have been using audio creatively for a while, but we saw some very good uses of it in multiple categories this year,” he said.



Creative Excellence Awards competition judge Alan Fitch (right) presents the 2003 WEVA Best of Category Gold Award for Wedding Ceremony Coverage to Gordon Silver of Silver Screen Video Productions.

Creative Audio Elements

“The addition of extra audio elements, such as a voice-over of Mom or Dad talking, adds another dimension to video. When a piece has some audio presence added, beyond the normal or expected audio elements, it can take the video into a totally new dimension. You can learn a lot more about the subject matter. It increases viewer interest.”

Kris Malandrucolo of Elegant Videos by Kris (IL) agreed that use of creative audio was important, noting, “a video that just had a straight music dub may not have scored as high as others that had nice sound bytes dropped in, because they help you feel more emotionally involved.”

For instance, “Instead of showing straight, on-camera interviews of guests sitting at a reception table,” she said, “there might be a clip of the father talking about his daughter that is dropped in as a voice-over during the



Randy Stubbs (left) of Silver Star Enterprises receives the 2003 WEVA Creative Excellence Gold Award for Wedding Pre-Ceremony Production from CEA competition judge Henry Mares.

processional. In my own work, I now intend to include the whole interview as an extra on DVD, so the bride can see the entire interview uninterrupted, as well as getting the voice over edited in the final video for additional emotional impact.”

Suggested techniques for acquiring the extra audio material for creative mixing include the use of wireless mikes (feeding separate audio tracks) on key presenters, such as the celebrant, friends and family members who may do church readings, bridal party introductions, and toasts during the reception.

Mini-discs and other external audio recording gear can also be used to supplement feeds to the camera. Dual microphone holders can be used when the church or banquet hall is already supplying a handheld unit, so that a videographer’s mike can be added easily and unobtrusively.

As well, the judges noted that on-camera interviews with the bridal couple or other family members do not have to be used entirely as on-camera segments. Audio-only clips (voice overs) from such interviews can also be used elsewhere in the wedding video to great effect, the judges agreed.

Non-sequential Editing

The use of audio in this way is directly linked to another popular and well-received video technique, that of “time-shifting” or non-sequential editing. But merely rear-

ranging the events of the day will not garner the same emotional impact (or a judge’s high scores) as a carefully conceived nonlinear storyline that still has emotional peaks and valleys, as competition judge Alan Fitch of Alan Fitch Video Productions (CA) noted.

“There were several time-shifted entries that were exquisitely produced,” he described, noting one Reception Production category winner that was “marvelously well-balanced, with well-timed audio split-edits, effective cutaways and flashbacks all assembled into an entertaining, well-paced production that held the viewer’s interest.”

Fitch noted that the time-shift approach was a commonly-used device in the submissions to the new CEA category of Short-Form Wedding Production, although he noted that many of this year’s entries were “essentially long-form weddings with sections hacked out” to get under the time limit.

“Effective short-form weddings (and any video that uses the time-shift technique to its greatest impact) pay very close attention to telling the story of the day and eliminate less important parts,” he said. “It should distill the whole day down to its essence, not just give it a haircut. Ideally, there is no image and no audio within the finished product that does not carry some emotion with it. The impact comes from telling a tightly-organized story, that has the momentum to carry it forward. It takes work to learn how to select and interweave the scenes for maximum effect.”



Steve Wernick and Henry Mares.

Ritondo added, “When it’s done right, time-shifting can make the video much more exciting to watch.” Paying close attention to interviewee comments, dividing the wedding day up into manageable, bite-sized pieces, all the while using a narrative logic to rearrange



Mike and Tiffany Nelson of Remember When Videos receives the 2003 WEVA Creative Excellence Silver Award for Concept Video Production from CEA competition judge Kris Malandrucolo (far right).



Brett Culp, Monica Arellano and JT Fannin of Creative Video Productions accept the 2003 WEVA Best of Category Gold Award for Wedding Post-Ceremony Coverage from CEA competition judge Claudia Walters.

the day are among the techniques he feels are necessary to hone. "Videographers are improving on this approach, but it can be very time-consuming," he cautioned.

Also voicing concern about time-shifting was competition judge Henry Mares of Henry Mares Video (CO) who noted that ineffective use of time-shifting can result in total confusion for the viewer. "I just didn't know what was going on," he said of one such CEA entry. "The video jumped around, back and forth, with no real reason for it; I was lost."

But, he said, those videos that managed to tell a story and not just rearrange time were well-received by the judges. Storytelling, whether linear or not, still must have peaks and valleys, must build to a climax, and offer a resolution. "We already know at the end of the day, the couple is going to be married," Mares says. "The videos that use time-shifting to obscure that fact while delivering a complimentary storyline can catch and hold interest. Judges are looking at what the music, the camera, the edits, are all doing when a climax is reached, or when some conflict is needed," he says.

"The use of fresh camera angles and compositions, a change in the pace of edits, the introduction of audio elements running contrary to the visuals are among the elements that can be used to introduce tension and resolution," he explains.

Regarding audio, the judges related that many entries received low scores in this area (resulting in a lower total score) because of poor audio transitions or poor sound quality. The CEA judges, who listen for smooth, natural audio transitions, noted a predominance of jarring, hard cuts and mismatched audio sources among this year's entries.

An audio transition between the natur-

al sounds of say, the celebrant's microphone during the ceremony, and some CD-sourced music added in post, can give the video an unnatural feel that can be distracting, they said. The judges also cited the misuse of CD music (as a substitute for ambient music or audio) as being problematic for some entries.

In evaluating sound quality, the judges award points in seven sub-sections of Audio. Among the criteria are Overall Quality, Evenness of Sound, Audio Transitions and Sound Presence. Even more tellingly, Audio also includes scores for Creativity/Originality.

CEA competition judge Claudia Walters of Copycat Video (IN) identified one of the Social Event Production category submissions, the Gold Award winner, as one of the best-received videos of the entire competition. The production documented a funeral, and while it was charged with emotion, the video was able to capture the proceedings without undue sadness or morbidity, she described.

"The camerawork was outstanding, creative but sensitive," she said. The camera moved along with the casket, never ahead of it, never full frame, and the sequence helped the viewer move along with the procession in a gentle manner. Various camera angles were used, and some rack focus (or pull focus) techniques were used to guide the viewer's eye to and from important scenes and visual elements.

The soundtrack contributed greatly to its overall impact, and its top total score. Judges noted that they couldn't identify the main music. "And perhaps that is good," said Walters. "Some music gets used all the time, but not with this production. It had movement and motion to it, and the editing kept pace nice-

ly, and so it was not overly sad. Then, the editor added the sound of a bugle playing "Taps." That extra touch on the audio, along with the exceptional video work, helped set this particular production apart as a best-of-category winner, she said.

In discussing the recently added Wedding DVD Authoring category, the judges noted that basic video coverage techniques are not part of the evaluation criteria for this particular category. "It's not the actual content that's judged. The focus is on the authoring—the menu navigation, the buttons, and the creative use of DVD features such as motion menus and viewer interactivity, accurate chapter stops, alternate endings, subtitles or the appropriate use of 'bonus' materials," explained Ritondo. Evaluated, too, is the programming that determines what the DVD does at first play and at the end of the program.

As such, technical functions of a DVD are important, but what allows an entry in this category to rise above the rest is its unique creativity, such as the idea of separating the disc into "Bride" and "Groom" areas, with content and design targeted specifically at the individuals, rather than just the couple.

In one DVD entry, the clever use of the bride and groom's voice on disc, as if answering a telephone and welcoming the viewer to their "side" of the DVD, scored highly for its creative use of interactivity and DVD features. Another creative entry used a type of game show format, quizzing the viewer about information contained in other segments of the DVD content.

Room for Improvement

Despite the amazing and sometimes breathtaking creativity the judges saw, all

The 2003 WEVA Creative Excellence Award Winners

WEDDING LOVE STORY	WEDDING PRE-CEREMONY PRODUCTION	WEDDING CEREMONY COVERAGE	WEDDING POST-CEREMONY COVERAGE	WEDDING RECEPTION COVERAGE	WEDDING POST-RECEPTION PRODUCTION
<p>GOLD <i>FurlaVision Video Productions</i> Bannockburn, IL Christie Wedding</p> <p>SILVER <i>Creative Video Productions</i> Tampa, FL Johnson Wedding</p> <p>BRONZE <i>Family Video Treasures</i> Powell, OH Salladay Wedding</p> <p>FINALIST <i>Klein Video Services</i> Northbrook, IL Kiersky Wedding</p> <p><i>Picture This Productions</i> Broken Arrow, OK Brata Wedding</p>	<p>GOLD <i>Silver Star Enterprises</i> San Diego, CA Howeth Wedding</p> <p>SILVER <i>Tropical Communications Corp.</i> Kahului, HI Warfield Wedding</p> <p>BRONZE VIDEOEXPERTS Enfield, CT Crawford Wedding</p> <p>FINALISTS <i>Blue Skies Video</i> Corona, CA Leontas Wedding</p> <p><i>bluecore media</i> Vancouver, BC Dixon Wedding</p>	<p>GOLD <i>Silver Screen Video Productions</i> Lutz, FL Kalish Wedding</p> <p>SILVER <i>Summit Productions</i> Albuquerque, NM Keeble Wedding</p> <p>BRONZE <i>bluecore media</i> Vancouver, BC Bosa Wedding</p>	<p>GOLD <i>Creative Video Productions</i> Tampa, FL Menna Wedding</p> <p>SILVER VIDEOEXPERTS Enfield, CT Ruggiero Wedding</p> <p>BRONZE <i>DMS Video Productions</i> Great Neck, NY Camoia Wedding</p> <p>FINALISTS <i>Stealth Productions</i> San Diego, CA Carvini Wedding</p> <p><i>Everlasting Moments</i> Richmond Hill, ON Liana Wedding</p> <p><i>Silver Star Enterprises</i> San Diego, CA Bolton Wedding</p>	<p>GOLD <i>Silver Star Enterprises</i> San Diego, CA Perlman Wedding</p> <p>SILVER <i>bluecore media</i> Vancouver, BC Kent Wedding</p> <p>BRONZE <i>Creative Video Productions</i> Tampa, FL Spiegel Wedding</p>	<p>GOLD <i>Dream Post</i> Los Angeles, CA Scott Wedding</p> <p>SILVER <i>Dynamo Productions</i> Fort Worth, TX Singh Wedding</p> <p>BRONZE <i>Sayson Video Productions</i> Richmond, BC Lee Wedding</p> <p>FINALISTS <i>Blue Skies Video</i> Corona, CA Mlinarevic Wedding</p> <p><i>Vantage Point Productions</i> San Dimas, CA Onopa Wedding</p>
SHORT-FORM WEDDING PRODUCTION	SOCIAL EVENT PRODUCTION	CONCEPT VIDEO PRODUCTION	CORPORATE EVENT COVERAGE	WEDDING DVD AUTHORIZING	WEDDING DEMO PRODUCTION
<p>GOLD VIDEOEXPERTS Enfield, CT San Juan Wedding</p> <p>SILVER <i>Life Video</i> Victoria, Australia Tania Wedding</p> <p>BRONZE <i>bluecore media</i> Vancouver, BC Jackson Wedding</p> <p>FINALIST <i>Creative Video Productions</i> Tampa, FL Reiche Wedding</p>	<p>GOLD <i>Pulse Cinema, Inc.</i> Annapolis, MD Jeshinski Funeral</p> <p>SILVER <i>Creative Video Productions</i> Tampa, FL Kwitko Bar Mitzvah</p> <p>BRONZE <i>Kornfeld Studios</i> Rockville Centre, NY Silverman Bar Mitzvah</p>	<p>GOLD <i>Video Active</i> Chicago, IL Julie & Eric Patterson</p> <p>SILVER <i>Remember When Videos</i> Salt Lake City, UT Desiree Leblanc</p> <p><i>Pointe Blanc Digital</i> Encinitas, CA Danny Roth</p> <p>BRONZE <i>The Graham Fenton Experience</i> Lancashire, England Charley Walsh</p> <p><i>FurlaVision Video Productions</i> Bannockburn, IL Sonia Cetina</p> <p>FINALIST <i>Will Work For Film</i> Los Angeles, CA Chalke Finkel</p>	<p>GOLD <i>Lafayette Hill Studios</i> Lafayette Hill, PA Ortho-McNeil Pharmaceutical</p> <p>SILVER <i>Silver Star Enterprises</i> San Diego, CA Jack In The Box</p> <p>BRONZE VIDEOEXPERTS Enfield, CT OCHOA For Hair</p>	<p>GOLD <i>bluecore media</i> Vancouver, BC Deltaan Wedding</p> <p>SILVER <i>Creative Video Productions</i> Tampa, FL Baswell Wedding</p> <p>BRONZE <i>Fox Video Productions</i> Staten Island, NY Schivavino Wedding</p>	<p>GOLD <i>Pulse Cinema, Inc.</i> Annapolis, MD</p> <p>SILVER <i>Vantage Point Productions</i> San Dimas, CA</p> <p>BRONZE <i>Shepherd Video Productions</i> San Jose, CA</p> <p>FINALIST <i>Advanced Video Productions</i> Chattanooga, TN</p>

nevertheless identified some weak production elements in actual wedding coverage submitted, perhaps surprisingly as ceremony and reception coverage is the wedding videographer's meat-and-potatoes.

The fact that several videos used multiple cameras that clearly did not match, in terms of color or other image set-ups, is not a good sign, said the judges. Shaky camerawork, when obviously not needed or intended is another turn-off, for a judge or a viewer. The use of tripods was highly recommended by the judges. Image steadiness is one of the judging criteria for evaluating "Shooting" quality. Along with it comes basics such as White Balance, Focus and Exposure. Shooting is also evaluated on more creative aspects, such as Use of Light, Artistry, and Originality.

Points were lost by videos which showed scenes of the bride walking down the aisle in her processional with another camera obvious in the background with its light on. "It's one thing to walk by the shot," the judges agreed, "but keeping another camera in a continuous line of sight is distracting."

Suggestions for reducing this problem ran from careful advance planning and the use of established camera blocking techniques, such as the alternate use of high and low angle camera shots, and the placement of one camera at a 45-degree angle to another.

Interestingly, many videos did exhibit the creative use of supplementary, or accent, lighting in many submissions, especially in Love Story interviews. Rather than the standard talking head shot lit by an on-camera light, the higher-scoring entries showed creative use of supplemental lighting—even outdoors—to add warmth or highlights to a head shot, or accents to a portion of clothing. Even a splash of color on an otherwise blank interior wall can be effective.

The good use of outdoor reflectors was noticed, and cited as a way to further control lighting and its overall impact on a video, while on indoor shoots, scrims, gobos, colored gels and other tools were used effectively.

Lighting has more than just a functional, technical role in video production. It is not just because of a camera's lux level that we add lights, the judges noted, but also to add visual impact, to emphasize a certain aspect of a personality or a location, or to underscore emotional impact.

The careful use of complimentary colors in a lighting set-up also showed a degree of pre-planning and preparation that the judges felt added to a video production's overall creative excellence.

In evaluating Editing, the judges considered Pacing, Scene Transitions, Shot Selection, Use of Effects and other aspects. As wedding videos have to stand the test of time, the judges felt that some effects can really "date" a production.

Many brides today do like the use and look of black and white, it was acknowledged, but they probably also like the color of the bridesmaid's gowns they picked, and the flower arrangements they carry, so the judges urged the careful use of this effect.

What is the message or purpose of a B&W shot in the midst of a color sequence, or the sudden use of sepia tone? Is it for a nostalgic effect, or a way to advance the story? Is it emphasizing an aspect of character? If not, it may be seen as more of a distraction than a creative element.

Last but not least is the impact that basic production values can have on the judging process—think of seeing mismatched cameras in the videos you are watching. Perhaps the bride might not object, or even notice, but to the experienced eyes of videographers who are viewing videos continuously, errors stand out.

As Malandrucolo noted, "I re-read [the *WEV*] articles about past year's judging and have to say that about 90% of the recommendations then would still apply now. It's very true what's been said by previous judges about camera matching and audio presence, but for some reason, some entrants aren't paying attention."

Winning a WEVA Creative Excellence Award is a hallmark of achievement because producing great video is difficult—even when a producer has control over the shooting environment. Many of this year's entries "had moments of brilliance," said Fitch, "but were dragged down by mediocrity in some other part of the production. It's hard for a piece to fly when weighed down by an anchor. The best videos were consistent in quality throughout their presentation. They had excellent shot selection and were paced so that interest was maintained."

As Mares related, the top scoring entries exhibited solid production values, and then built on that foundation by adding something unique of their own. And Fitch said of the amazing creativity that does make it through to become a CEA winner, "I've seen the bar raised every year since my first EXPO in 1993, and this year was no exception!" ☺

Lee Rickwood is the Managing Editor of *Wedding & Event Videography*.

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