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Vilmos Zsigmond on Phedon Papamichael

Eye on the Oscars: The Cinematographer

By

Phedon Papamichael's sensitive cinematography on "The Descendants" is in harmony with the theme of death and dying within the very alive, very lush landscape of Hawaii.

The director takes time to let the story unfold organically as the camera records the weather and the ever-changing light of the islands. There are many scenes shot at the shadowless "magic hour" of dark blue skies fading into darkness; these exterior scenes seem to have been photographed at exactly the right time to enhance the darkening emotional mood of the King family saga.

At the beginning of the film we see the face of a dying woman in a coma and slowly begin to learn about her loved ones and the effect her imminent death will have on her husband and two young daughters. Amidst the beauty of life we are face to face with death, and it's not a pretty picture.

The style is realistic -- an old-school approach to natural, understated interior lighting. In contrast, the scenes of Hawaiian life and the pristine beauty of the ocean beaches and warm water seem almost poetic in their realism. Very seldom today do filmmakers take the time to shoot scenes in harmony with the natural light. This approach adds a human dimension to a tragic story and shows respect for the reality of the natural beauty of the film's locations.

The ASC's Lifetime Achievement honoree in 1999, the Oscar-winning Vilmos Zsigmond most recently shot the jazz-themed "Louis" and "Bolden!"



Zsigmond



Papamichael

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