

SIXTY OF THE BEST

AN INTERVIEW WITH
BRENDAN MAGUIRE

As a feature film first-timer, Brendan Maguire could have been forgiven a few nerves when he started working on *Short Order*. But in spite of this quirky romantic tale marking his big screen debut, 60-year-old Maguire arrived, armed with 40 years experience behind the camera.

"I've got to say I wasn't particularly fazed by any particular aspect of it," he says with a chuckle. "I was just a bit disappointed we didn't get to shoot the movie on anamorphic lenses."

Shot on location in Germany and Dublin, the story – co-starring Emma de Caunes, Jack Dee, John Hurt and Vanessa Redgrave – takes place in both a take-away and the restaurant next door.

Co-production arrangements meant that the exterior street was in Germany as was the inside of the take away, while the interiors of the restaurant were filmed in the studio in Ireland. Selecting the F-500 8572 to shoot on, Maguire was pleased with his choice.

"We decided to use the Fuji stock because it's very amenable to strong colours. I tested it with the 250 and I was actually quite surprised at how well the resolution was maintained between the two stocks. I found it

very difficult on projection to tell one from the other.

"I also liked the way it held from blow-out highlights to the shadow area, it gave me deep shadow. With some of the newer stocks you're starting to get detail in areas where you might not really want too much. A skirting board with a cable taped to it, for example, in the back corner of the room."

Maguire's reputation to date has been built on a busy and highly productive career shooting commercials. There has, in that time, been the occasional drama and the odd pop promo too – U2's early hits for example – but work in the advertising field kept him busy almost to the exclusion of any other projects.

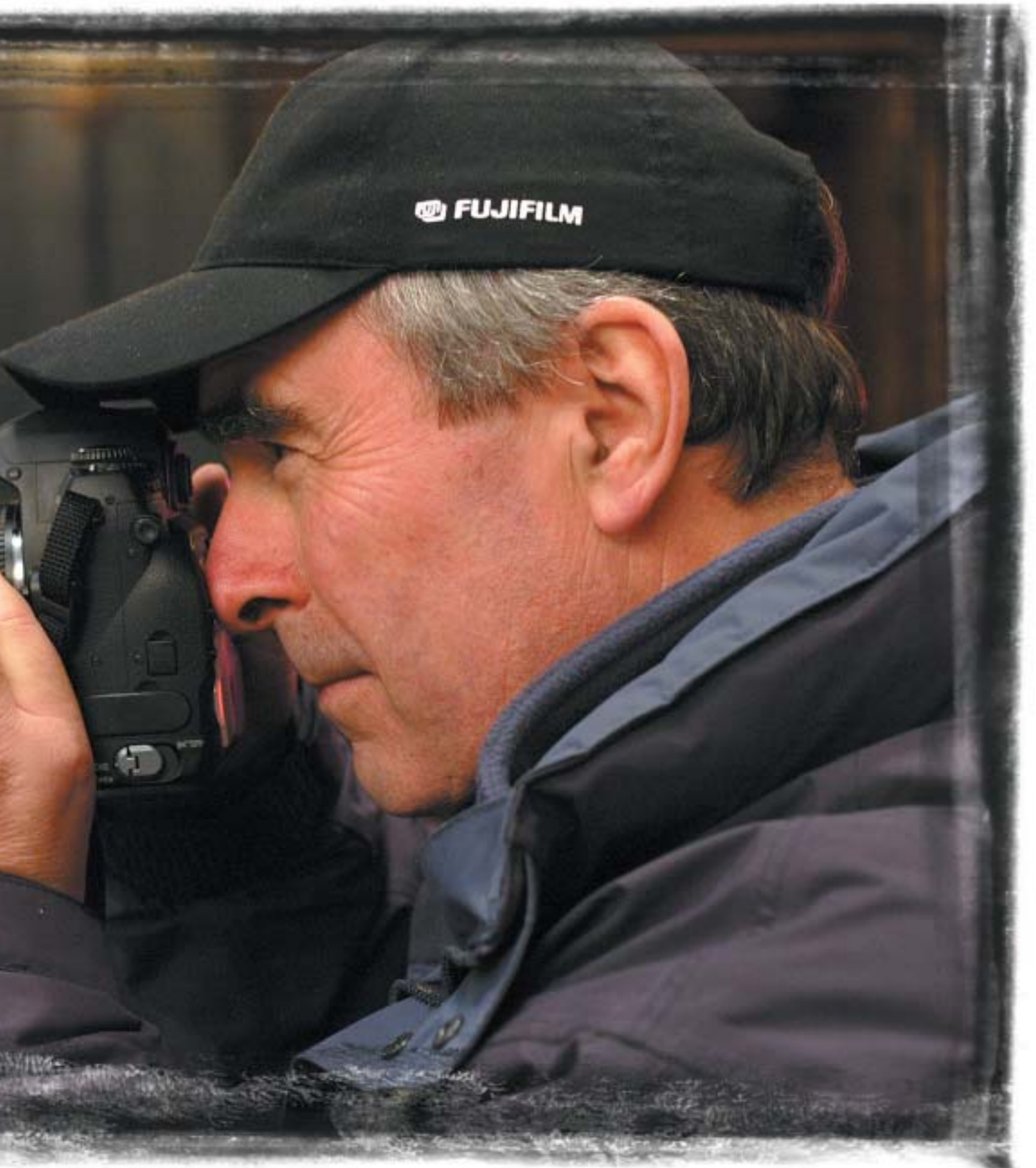
He began his career working at Silver Pine Studios, which was next to Ardmore Studios in his native Dublin.

"Seamus Deasy and I started there," he recalls. "It was a strange place, because they did everything. It had its own laboratory, it did printing, it had sound recording, recorded bands, and had its own studio and workshops. It was a good environment to work in because you got the chance to do absolutely everything."

Contracted initially to RTE, other work flowed in too and Maguire soon

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BRENDAN MAGUIRE

“YOU NAME IT, I’VE SHOT IT... FROM OXO CUBES TO HIGH STREET BANKS”

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found himself gravitating towards the camera.

“My first filming job was on one of the little road safety films they produced. It involved live action and some animation, with little Dinky cars that helped demonstrate the rules of the road. We even drilled through the back and front of the cars and inserted little lamps, so we could have winker lights showing.

“Of course, you could spend maybe eight hours shooting a sequence, and then you might accidentally touch something and move it out of place. You learned very quickly how to edit a sequence, to cut to a new angle and continue the sequence.”

Working his way through the camera department hierarchy from clapper loader to focus puller and, in time, fully fledged DP, Maguire shot commercials in Ireland for British-based agencies from the mid 60s to the mid 70s. There was a successful foray into running his own production company, and an unsatisfactory spell working in a London agency.

“Agency life wasn’t for me,” he adds with a shudder. “I managed to stay in it for about 18 months before I got back behind the camera. Then I was back as a freelance cameraman in 1976. And that’s what I’ve been doing ever since.”

The following year, a dream job dropped in Maguire’s lap when he was invited to South Africa to shoot commercials prior to the start of commercial television in the country.

“It was due to start in 1978, so there were hundreds of commercials to be made,” he continues. “Production companies started to put exclusive contracts on the local tech-



nical talent. I was brought in for a week and found myself still there a month later. I was asked to stay for a six-month period, but in fact I ended up staying there for 18 months.

“That was a very good period, because no agency knew what the competition was doing so directors, producers and DPs had a lot of freedom in what we could do. There were a lot of quite innovative ideas to do basically anything you liked at that time.”

By this time, Maguire was sufficiently known and respected within the industry to be offered feature film opportunities, but he admits that the combination of a good living he was able to sustain on commercials and the responsibilities of a young family held him back. Besides, he was constantly in demand back home. “You name it, I shot it,” he laughs, “from Oxo Cubes to High Street banks.”

With pop promo credits also including hits by UB40 and Clannad it wasn’t like he needed the work. He also got to work with a generation of up-and-coming camera crew members who would go onto other things them-

selves: Declan Quinn, David Johnson, Robin Vidgeon and Peter MacDonald, among them. And yet it is his involvement with rookie filmmaker Anthony Byrne that has provided his belated entrée into the world of film.

“Anthony made this short film called *Che Guevara & The Man From Maybury Hill*,” he explains. “He asked me to light a sequence in an aeroplane, which I did. When I saw the finished thing, I was surprised by its innovation and quality. Then he came back to me some time later with a feature script, and asked if I would consider doing it. I read it and thought it was very interesting.”

Interesting and, it seems, complicated thanks to some musical set pieces, a succession of night shoots and a low, low budget. The construction of a street within the studio allowed a degree of control as well as contributing an evocative look that the DP and his director consciously sought.

“We were aiming for the brightness and the colour of *Singin’ In The Rain*,” he adds. “But we were also inspired by *The Umbrellas Of*

Cherbourg. Another one we referenced was *Punch-Drunk Love*. That was mainly because of the odd framing. It had a quirky quality that I love in many of its shots.”

Inviting an experienced hand like Maguire to make his first feature was undoubtedly a shrewd move on Anthony Byrne’s part. All the attendant pressures were handled unfussily by a man who has been lighting professionally for the better part of half a century. And while he admits that it was a gruelling experience, and is reluctant to leap into another feature straight away, Maguire’s enthusiasm for the job is obvious.

Even in the area of getting his rushes processed satisfactorily, the veteran DP bubbles with the enthusiasm of someone in the first flush of love for the medium.

“One of the difficulties of working in Dublin is that the rushes have to be packed up quite early in the day,” he continues, “and you might not get to see your full day’s rushes until a couple of days later.”

“We were using Soho Images, with whom I have a lot of experience, and I decided to use my Fuji SLR camera to give them specific references. I took shots of the various situations, and printed them as close to what I actually wanted on this little printer on set, sending them with the rushes to Soho Images. And that was very successful.” ■ ANWAR BRETT


 *Short Order* was originated on 35mm F-500 8572 Fujicolor Motion Picture Negative

Photo: Emma de Caunes in a scene from *Short Order*