

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ninja and Samurai at the ready for NAB

Atomos has announced two new recorders, which will be demonstrated at next month's NAB. Making its worldwide release, Ninja is a portable touchscreen HD recorder, monitor and playback device that captures video direct to Apple ProRes from any camera with an HDMI output onto low-cost, removable 2 1/2-inch hard disks. Inside Ninja's compact design is a hardware implementation of the Apples ProRes codec. "We've worked with Apple to perfect our implementation of Apple ProRes, and using it is like storing a fine painting by gently rolling it up, instead of screwing it into a ball and throwing good data away, which is what the in-camera codecs do, said Jeromy Young, CEO, Atomos." The second new product to be released is the HD-SDI-equipped Samurai, a portable device that records, monitors, and instantly plays back ready-to-edit, visually-lossless Apple Pro Res files. www.atomos.com

Pandora reveals three new products

Pandora International will introduce three new products at NAB. PSI is a hardware upgrade for Spirit Classic and Shadow telecines that gives users 2K and HD scanning capabilities. PLUTO is a display colour management system, and PILOT is a controller for telecines, VTRs and image processors. "The new products flesh out the Pandora colour management workflow," said Adam Welsh, sales manager for Pandora. "Pandora's Revolution colour corrector is the choice of the high-end post facilities such as the Mill. The Revolution, with its YoYo data management software, is the most efficient multi-format workflow available," he added. www.pandora-int.com



Umbilical cord: The nanoFlash recorder was connected via HD-SDI, but in a belt pack where Lloyd-Davies couldn't easily view its remaining capacity

AF101 in broadcast first

David Fox learns how Studio 9 Films used Panasonic's AG-AF101 large-sensor camera to capture vivid documentary imagery set in the Great Lakes region of Africa in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Doc Production

A production for Al Jazeera's *Witness* strand is believed to be the first to use Panasonic's AG-AF101 large-sensor camera for broadcast work. It is being used for a documentary set in the Great Lakes region of Africa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, about how women raped and abused during the conflict are rebuilding their lives.

The production required a robust, agile camera that could capture the beauty of the environment, and the AF101 was chosen because of its lightweight,



Depth of field: Lloyd-Davies loved the quality she got with the prime lenses

large sensor size and solid-state storage, according to Fiona Lloyd-Davies of Studio 9 Films. "With no tape mechanism and no moving parts, the camera worked faultlessly in all conditions, delivering excellent results," says the award-winning producer/director. "This is a beautiful part of the world and I wanted a camera that could do it justice. Not only did the 101 bring out the vivid colours of the people and their

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She wanted to step up from the Sony Z1 or Z5 type of camera, but didn't want a larger camcorder, particularly as she is shooting by herself. She does have a fixer working with her, but he's not a camera assistant or sound recordist. "So I had to find something I could work with on my own," in a very difficult place to work.

It was also "very important to use a format that would be visually very strong and would give great pictures," she explains. "Some people suggested using the Canon 5D, but as far as I understand it doesn't handle movement very well and doesn't have XLR [audio inputs] or handle sound very well."

As she was preparing to leave for Africa for the first part of her shoot, the London-based hire company she was using, VMI, received its first AF101. "They have been absolutely magnificent. They gave me a huge amount of technical assistance."

Working in the Congo there was no chance of getting something fixed if it went wrong, so it was important that everything was reliable (especially as she didn't have the budget for a second camera body, which she would have liked to be able to bring) — fortunately it was.

nanoFlash rig

The main downside with the AF101 is that it doesn't record at 50Mbps in the camera (it records AVCHD at 24Mbps to two SD card slots, which doesn't meet Al Jazeera's technical requirements), so VMI added a Convergent Design nanoFlash rig to the camera, which can record MXF or QuickTime files to Compact Flash cards. Before

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she left, she did some tests with the AF101 for Al Jazeera, which they were happy with. The nanoFlash was attached to the camera's HD-SDI connector, and the resulting 50Mbps broadcast-compliant files were downloaded daily onto two separate rugged drives.

She also recorded simultaneously to the SD cards, which gave the security of a high resolution back-up and ensured that the nanoFlash was in sync with the camera, being set up to record when the timecode changed on the HD-SDI output. When the camera recorded, Lloyd-Davies could be confident that the nanoFlash was recording.

Having an external recorder wasn't a perfect solution. "There were occasions where I started shooting and realised it wasn't connected and had to start again." It was also hard to tell how much time she had remaining on the cards when she was concentrating on operating the camera.

The nanoFlash was powered by the main Anton/Bauer camera battery pack rather than a discreet power supply to ensure that she could not start shooting only to discover later that the nanoFlash had run out of power.

"This is a new camcorder with a third party recording device. With limited technical support available in Eastern Congo, we needed to know that it would be fool proof. VMI carried out full testing before we hired the unit and gave us an excellent grounding in operating the equipment and getting the workflow right," she says.

A further problem was having enough electricity to charge the batteries and download all the cards to disk each evening. She was staying at a priest's house that only had a small generator on for a few hours each night, luckily it was just about possible to view and back-up everything in that time. She also had to clean all the kit each night, as the conditions were so dusty.

She needed to remain mobile, so needed to limit the amount of equipment she took. She was also on a tiny budget, "which is why I'm self-shooting and doing everything myself."

It is her first time working with solid-state and she took two 500GB FireWire drives, backing up to both each night. She had wanted to take larger drives but they didn't arrive in time. The nanoFlash can record at much higher bit rates, but "if I had recorded on more than 50Mbps I would have run out of space." She is shooting a lot of footage, hoping to capture some great moments, and took five 32GB Compact Flash cards, for the nanoFlash, although the most she recorded to on one day was four.

Each card took about 25-35 minutes to back up. She also

downloaded the video from the SD cards each evening too. She used prime lenses, which meant she had to think more about what type of shot she wanted and why. However, "the quality of the prime lenses is fantastic," although she was very mindful of how critical the focus was, especially in such bright sunlight,

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where the LCD screen was hard to see.

Nevertheless, "it was a really nice camera to work with," she said. "The pictures looked great. I

felt I was working with a much higher calibre camera than the Z1 or Z5."

She has also been shooting a project for the BBC in the Congo

over the last 18 months, but not in HD. "I'd love to use the camera again. I think it's a great camera and the quality is fantastic, but it depends on the broadcaster as well," she adds. Lloyd-Davies will be returning to the Congo for a second shoot in May, together with an AF101, to finish the film, and then edit it in June on Final Cut Pro. www.studio9films.co.uk