

wedding video's hottest GARAGE BAND

Some artists seek inspiration in long walks, majestic sunsets, or awe-inspiring works of art. Others, like the crew at wedding and event cinematography studio Starcross'd Creative (formerly Starcross'd Films), "get together over some beer and Rock Band."

Creative director and producer Christoffer P. Dumlao, Jevon and brother John on cameras and scripting, and girlfriend Marilyn on sales and marketing have been rocking the San Diego wedding videography scene since 2006 with their signature satirical concept videos.

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

Departing from the "I just fell into it" scenario that's so often cited as a reason for getting into videography, Dumlao and his siblings "were destined to have creative careers." In the Dumlao household, art was as much a part of childhood as skinned knees and SpaghettiOs. "I grew up in a creative environment having both parents and three siblings who all know how to draw. Art was always around us," Dumlao says. "While my sister explored fashion design, my brothers and I practiced illustration styles—comic book, manga, oil and acrylic painting, and airbrush art."

Their inspiration was their father, "who explored his creativity through photography, video, illustration, and eventually graphic design." Dumlao, the quintessential apple that didn't fall far from the tree, shifted from illustrating to creating art on the computer. He began dabbling in graphic design, web design, and 3D animation.

He was 9 years old when his father brought home his new production computer for his silk-screen printing business, an Apple II. He recalls the day the iconic machine arrived: That day "changed my life forever," he says. "I helped him open the box, and I just immediately fell in love with Apple. There was something about the design of Apple computers that appealed to me."

Back then, Dumlao would watch for long hours as his father created graphic designs on the Mac. At the end of the day, he would jump on to experiment with his own designs.

And then, the Dumlao brothers found Dad's VHS video camera.

STARCROSS'D CREATIVE



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www.starcrossdfilms.com/blog

The camera was yet another vehicle for artistic expression, and the Dumlao boys spent their free time making stop-motion animations and home movies. Their interest in movie-making grew with them. And in their 20s, they took it to the next level. Just as digital videography equipment was starting to become inexpensive and accessible, Dumlao purchased an iMac DV Special Edition 400MHz G3 and landed a job as a cinematographer and editor at a video production company.

But it wasn't until Dumlao and his brother John started attending friends' weddings and watching too many "poorly produced and unimaginative" wedding videos that they had the "I could do that" epiphany. Without hesitating, he says, "We decided to give it a try." Before long, Dumlao and his brother John were shooting their first wedding.

A STARCROSS'D IS BORN

In 2006, it was official. The Dumlaos opened their own videography studio, calling it Starcross'd Films, a nod to Shakespeare's "starcross'd lovers," Romeo and Juliet, and their stop-at-nothing passion.

"Just as Romeo and Juliet had defied their destiny, my brother and I have always insisted on doing things despite any obstacles that came in our way. We grew up in a large family that didn't have enough money to send us to film or art school, yet we wouldn't let that stop us from doing what we loved anyway."

Nor would they be deterred by the fact that they "hadn't the slightest clue as to how to run a business." This caused some hiccups in the beginning. "We were so excited about our first gig, a debutante ball, that we offered to do multiple videos. I believe we charged somewhere around \$400 for two-camera coverage of the event, a photomontage, and a concept video. After calculating the \$33 profit we divided amongst ourselves, I quickly realized that our 'sales and marketing' needed major rethinking."

But what they lacked in business acumen, they more than made up for in talent. "For the creative aspect of



Dumlao directing in the Sin City garage set (Image by Brian Abiva Photography)



Storyboarding Sin City: A Love Story (Image by Brian Abiva Photography)

video production,” Dumlao says, “I was completely confident that we would be able to succeed”—even if this meant winging it a bit when resources were slim.

He explains, “In our industry, we don’t have the luxury of having a producer to supply everything we need, so we have to be our own producers.” They aim for the resourcefulness of one of their key inspirations: filmmaker Robert Rodriguez. “We admire his attitude for never thinking of the things he doesn’t have to create a film but rather how to produce a high-quality film with what he does have.”

FINGERS CROSS'D, TONGUE-IN-CHEEK

And one thing they do have a lot of is humor. “We are a group that likes to have fun. Because we’re brothers and friends, there is a lot of hilarity that happens between us every day.”

This makes them a natural choice for couples who want to create something funny to show at their wedding, such as a satirical concept video. One of their recent concept videos, which debuted in February, “began with the couple telling us that they wanted their video to be fun and hilarious.”

The bride and groom were “goofballs,” Dumlao says, “and we knew that the dialogue style had to be slapstick.” And they also decided to add singing to the mix. The final result was a slapstick “cops and robbers” musical comedy.

“It feels good to laugh. Weddings are full of emotion. Sometimes, what’s missing is humor,” Dumlao says, explaining how he is encouraging spontaneity and improvisation in a current concept video project that he describes as “a Judd Apatow-inspired comedy.”

Making guests laugh out loud is a reward in and of itself. “Not only is it important for us, but it is equally important for the couple because they rely on us to produce a story—loosely based on their history and relationship—that is entertaining for their guests. Sometimes a couple does not have any other entertainment other than a concept video, so we make sure to put on a great show that the guests will remember.”

SIN CITY: A WORKFLOW STORY

In May, EventDV-TV will feature a Robert Rodriguez-style “film school” clip from Starcross’d Creative, concerned in part with the making of *Sin City: A Love Story*, a Starcross’d wedding concept film that has generated a great deal of buzz online for the remarkable way it captures the distinctive graphic-novel look of Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller’s original *Sin City* film.

On VideoUniversity.com, where many of these great and enlightening discussions happen, Chris Dumlao was

asked to describe his workflow on the film. Here’s a little background, directly from Chris:

We spent about 2 weeks in preproduction, which included scripting, storyboarding, developing a shooting script, shot schedule, creating props/wardrobe, etc. We tried to be as prepared as we could be for when principal photography began, because scheduling conflicts with the “talent” restricted us to just one weekend of shooting.

We shot everything in one weekend. Because of the unusual availabilities of our cast, we had to shoot certain people separately. But with the wonders of green screen, it was possible to have scenes with multiple people shot at different times.

Postproduction took a good week and a half. Some backgrounds were done digitally in Photoshop, while the others were grabbed from a video game, Grand Theft Auto—that’s where we got the background plates for the driving scenes. (There was one night where our girlfriends were confused as to why we were playing video games instead of working.)

We had a three-man crew (including myself). We also had a few production assistants that were willing to work for free and a production-stills photographer to take our behind-the-scenes photos.

Our set was in a garage! We used a 12' x 24' green screen set up horizontally, most of the time, and reset vertically for the full-body shots. The only other scene not on a green screen was the opening scene where the “main detective” walks into a crime scene. That was shot in their apartment. An interesting thing is the shot where he enters through a doorway in silhouette with a flashlight. Because of the way his apartment was structured, we didn’t like where his front door was positioned because it was in a cramped corner, so we had him coming out of his bathroom instead. The window was placed on the left to make it seem like it was a front door and then we added the snow falling against the white.

It was a hell of a lot of fun, I’ll tell you that!

FRAMING STARCROSS'D'S FUTURE

Starcross’d is a bit nontraditional in that the company does not operate out of a central workspace. Jevon works from his loft at home surrounded by DVDs, Blu-ray Discs, “and a stack of unpaid bills in the corner,” according to Christoffer Dumlao. John, who has another job as a full-time animator, works from home amid a mess of illustration books and Transformers and Superman collectibles.

Dumlao, a self-described “OCD neat freak,” may have a bit of adjusting to do if plans go through to rent office



A production still
from *A Sin City
Love Story*



Another garage-
shot scene

space for the Starcross'd crew to edit together in the near future. Dumlao says he gets cabin fever editing solo all the time. "Sometimes it can get lonely." But for now, they are able to work together collectively but in different places by relying on internet services such as Apple's iDisk to share files back and forth, video chat for conferencing, and iChat's ability to screen-share.

"I enjoy being able to change along with the digital industry. There are so many different forms of media presentation—HD, iPods, iPhones, smartphones, digital media devices, game consoles, laptops, netbooks," Dumlao says. "It's amazing to be a part of that revolutionary change in the way people view wedding videos."

Speaking of revolutionary change, Dumlao credits Re:Frame with being the "best thing to happen to our company." He's often had reservations about his career as a wedding videographer. But since attending Re:Frame

in New Orleans, "all of that was laid to rest." He's now more excited than ever about what the future holds for Starcross'd. "I saw and heard the successes of our peers—in particular, paragon filmmakers Jason Magbanua and Maurice O'Carroll—and it was assuring. Being able to be part of a community of filmmakers that share the same passion as we do afterward is great."

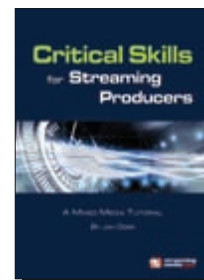
His time spent networking with fellow videographers has made him surer than ever of his approach to success: "Don't settle with doing things the way they've been done in the past." His recommended alternative? To rock the industry, be fresh, be funny, and keep up the air guitar.

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CRITICAL SKILLS for STREAMING PRODUCERS

Questions abound. What's the most compression-friendly background? Should I use flat lighting or three-point? What are the optimal resolution and data rate for streaming audio and video? Which parameters produce the best quality Flash, H.264, or Windows Media Video?

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