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Interview: The Future of 3-D Is Coming, and 3ality Technica's Ted Kenney Is At The Forefront

Posted 3 hours ago by Alex Zalben in Tech

Sorry, 3D detractors: the format is here to stay, and in a big way. From movies, to TV, to gaming, 3D is part of the entertainment landscape, and will continue to move to the forefront - possibly even someday dwarfing traditional 2D entertainment. At the head of that movement is 3ality Technica, a company that not only shot films like **Prometheus**, **Amazing Spider-Man**, and **The Hobbit**; but also loan out 3-D equipment to other companies and teaches filmmakers how to shoot in 3-D, so the tech can get more heavily used, and the technology stretched even further.



A key man in that company? Ted Kenney, the former Real World producer who went on to produce and direct concert films like U23D, Black Eyed Peas 3D, and **Katy Perry: Part of Me 3D**, which hits theaters on July 5th.

Though he's now become a major part of 3ality, and a major proponent of 3D, there was a time when using 3D wasn't even on his radar. Talking to Kenney on the phone, he told us that he was asked to shoot "a band" in 3D in South America... It wasn't until he agreed to the job that he was told it was U2, and he'd be shooting in four cities with only a few weeks of prep time.

"It was really on the first night in Mexico City, when we got to see dailies... We had this little projector called the DepthCube that we projected on the wall," said Kenney, reflecting on seeing U2 footage in 3D for the first time. "I saw U2 projected on the wall, and I said, this is where I want to be. This is the future. There was this specific image where he reached out, and it felt like he came right into your lap."

And that was the start of 3ality, based on the success filming U2. Kenney joined up almost immediately - he was the fifth person hired by the company - but that didn't mean there weren't challenges ahead. Specficially, 3-D productions, he found, were infinitely more complicated than their 2-D counterparts. The easiest way around that? The Boy Scouts Motto: Be Prepared.

"Pre-production is the most important thing you do," said Kenney. "That's true in 2-D, and it's true in 3-D. It's important to let the 3-D breathe a little bit... You don't need 27 cameras to cover a concert... 6 or 7 shots are often the best, so understanding what you want to get out of the 3-D is important."

Beyond that, there is the issue of larger cameras and rigs for shooting 3-D, but otherwise, it's the same equipment as 2-D. However, the shooting angles themselves do need to

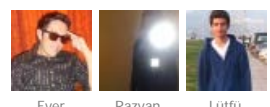
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change: "You do want to be closer, you want to rely on cameras that are closer to stage, rather than a back of the house camera," said Kenney. "The closer you are, the more immersive it is."

And things have changed significantly over time, from when Kenney first worked on U2, to the upcoming Katy Perry release. Kenney cited lighter 3-D cameras, to lenses that work more closely with said cameras, to even the proliferation of 3-D televisions and phones. "In the old days, you were trying to match two images, in two lenses, in two cameras... And things could be off," noted Kenney. "But now we can put cameras and lenses anywhere on our rig, and software is looking at the image and correcting for any imperfections. Vertical alignment, color matching... So when you go into post, you can focus on creative. If I did the U2 shoot now, I'd three fourths of the crew would be gone. It's easy now to grab a 3-D camera and go out and shoot with a couple of people."

So with things becoming cheaper and easier to shoot, are the days of 3-D television shows almost upon us? Kenney thinks it may come down to quality - and in fact, being comfortable with differing degrees of quality of shooting. If you're willing to forgo the crispest image possible, regular, cheap 3-D shooting may in fact be possible; and in fact, Kenney says as a Producer and Director, he likes having different, "textures, different feels," to what he's shooting.

Still, the major thing holding back 3DTV is a sort of Catch-22: more 3DTV's will be sold if there's more content, making them cheaper to buy; but 3DTVs won't sell until there's more content, and the content creators have no impetus to shoot 3-D if people don't own 3DTVs. It's all coming, says Kenney, but the march is slow.

Next, since Kenney did produce some of the most successful seasons of MTV's The Real World, we asked him what it would take to shoot that show in 3-D. "You could do it," said Kenney. "But on those shows, we had five crews, and there's some shots that might not work in 3-D that well. You go into a club, there's a lot of people, and a lot of people cross your lens. In 3-D, if someone crosses your lens too close, it can hurt your eye because you have to set the depth."

Continuing, Kenney said, "It would be a little harder... You're being reactionary on something like the Real World, nothing is set up; so there's a limitation on what you're going to get, and what you're going to be able to use. It's going to take a couple of years to get the cameras in a little better shape, and smaller."

3ality is helping things along in this direction, by teaching filmmakers how to use their rigs, and providing software that embeds metadata in the footage - allowing visual effects supervisors to know exactly where the depth of focus, and other important filmmaking stats were set in each shot. "Before they have to do it, we've already giving them the information they need," said Kenney.

Beyond the tech though, Kenney feels the real power of 3-D is the emotion it can bring to the audience, particularly where music and concert films are concerned. "One of Bono's comments at Sundance was, 'It's actually the first time I've seen U2 live.' He felt like it was live to him," said Kenney. "Music is a very big driving force for 3-D, as well as sports."

But is there one but thing, one movie that will be the next big leap for 3-D? Kenney mentioned the Hobbit, but thinks Baz Luhrmann's 'The Great Gatsby' is where it's at. "This is a movie that's not heavy in visual effects, and we've been saying for years: it doesn't have to be a horror, it doesn't have to be scifi... Everything works in 3-D."

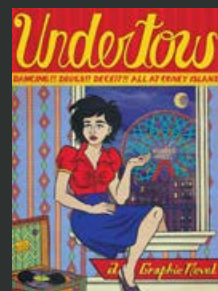
Continuing on this bent, Kenney went back to TV, saying, "When we see a show like Modern Family, or True Blood, or Mad Men go 3-D? That's going to help drive the 3-D industry in a big way. As a family you sit down every week and watch a show... When those shows go 3-D, it's going to be a tipping point."

And the other big tipping point, of course, will be glasses-less 3DTV, which is coming... And soon. Said Kenney, "That's going to be the biggest push ever."

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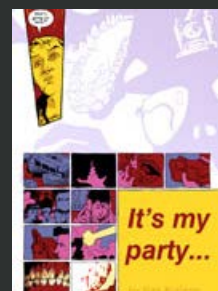
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