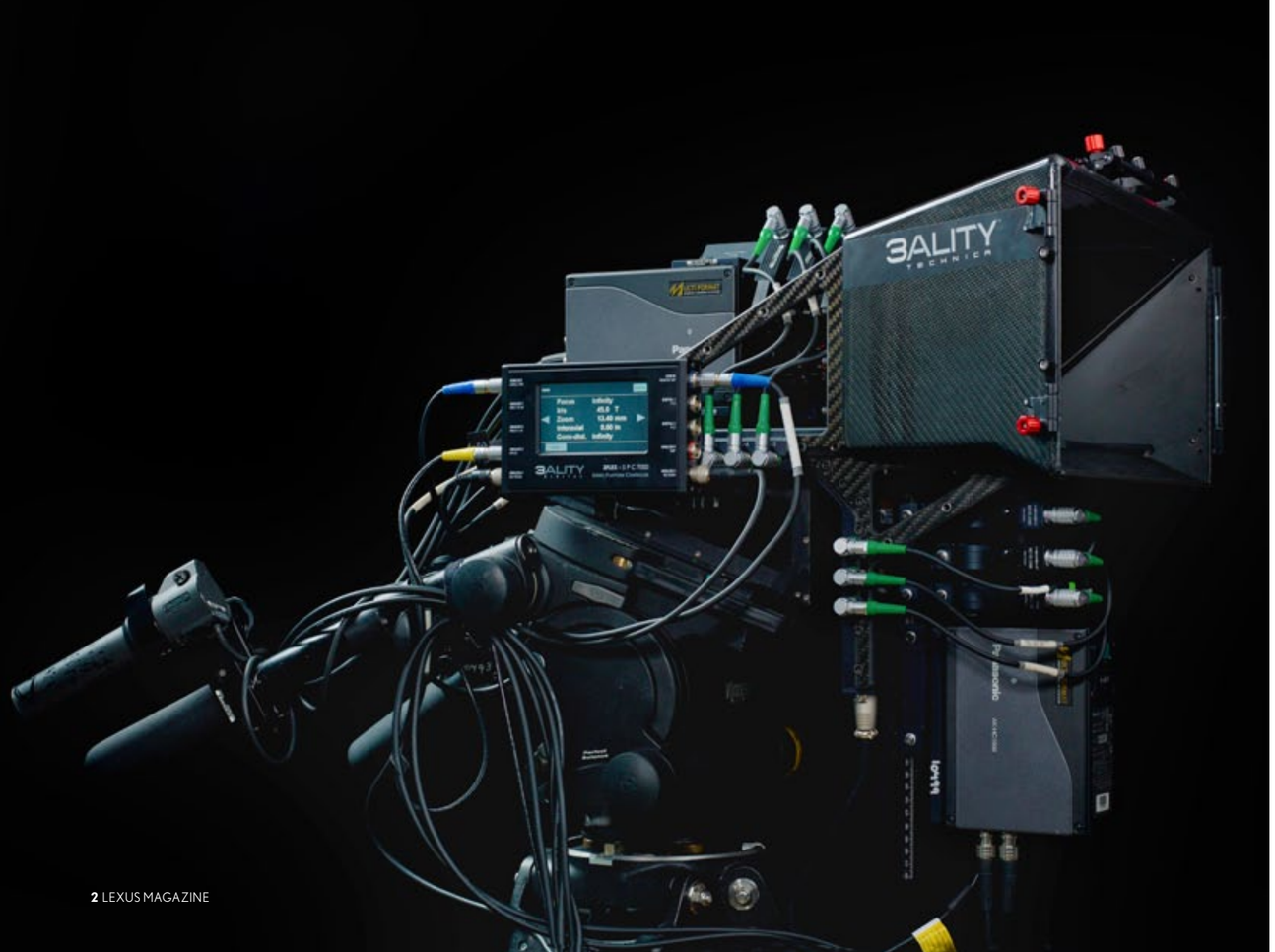
# THE THIRD DIMENSION

Once again, 3D filmmaking is making a bid for audiences' attention and dollars. 3ality Technica may be the outfit that finally puts doubters to rest.

BY ADAM PITLUK | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MISHA GRAVENOR




MOVIEGOERS OF a certain age may remember three-dimensional filmmaking more for its irritations—it actually caused headaches—than for its ambitions. Though Alfred Hitchcock tried to lend 3D respectability with *Dial M for Murder* in 1954, out-of-sync, unaligned camera shots were typical of the "innovation" that was aiming to deliver to audiences increased depth perception and a heightened sensory experience. Of course, the James Cameron ultra-blockbuster *Avatar* became synonymous with 3D's improved state of the art in 2009. But now the technology is poised to make an evolutionary leap, courtesy of the Burbank, Calif.-based 3ality Technica and its gregarious founder and CEO, Steve Schklair (an RX Hybrid owner).

"Whenever I saw a 3D movie, I left with a splitting headache, and there was just no need for that," Schklair says. That's why in 2000, when the 3D medium had been all but relegated to edutainment features shot for IMAX like Brett Leonard's *T-Rex: Back to the Cretaceous*, Schklair made the courageous decision to abandon his studio job and start a company whose entire raison d'être was to revive a dying medium and yank it into the future. "I was a little insane," he jokes now.

Crazy like a fox. Schklair is also deeply erudite about his profession, quick to offer a capsule lesson in cinema history. "Sound had migrated from mono to stereo to surround, and picture hadn't changed in a hundred years," Schklair says. "Resolution had gotten a little better, but that was it. So it was clear that the picture was going to change, and I wanted to do it. I actually just wanted to build some camera systems so I could work in the medium as a director of photography."

What happened instead was that Schklair and 3ality became major players in the rebirth of 3D. First, the company began acquiring sophisticated stereographic 3D cameras and rigs that were designed by Element Technica. Then in August 2011, 3ality acquired Element Technica, becoming 3ality Technica and cementing its role as the preeminent industry leader in 3D production, manufacturing, and technology. (One of its electronic tools, the Stereo Image Processor, or SIP, is an industry standard, widely used outside of 3ality Technica's producing projects; the company also boasts platforms including the TS-4™, pulsar™, atom™, and quasar™.) The company has since contributed to *The Amazing Spider-Man*; *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*; *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*; *Jack the Giant Killer*; *Oz: The Great and Powerful*; *Prometheus*; *The Great Gatsby*; and *Underworld: Awakening*. Also in the lineup is *Stalingrad*, of which Schklair is particularly proud.

"Stalingrad is a Russian-language film," he explains. "Russian director. Russian crew. A few of us Americans are handling the 3D side. The director is a guy named Fyodor Bondarchuk, a famous director in Russia whose father actually directed *War and Peace*, so he's a movie kid. It's one of the best scripts I've ever read."

Director Baz Luhrmann's version of *The Great Gatsby* is also on Schklair's mind, because anything by Luhrmann is going to be widely anticipated—and scrutinized. "Baz embraced the medium," Schklair says. "Baz told me, 'I want to use this depth to tell a story,' and there are some shots where Daisy is looking at both lives—the one she has and the one she could have had—and the life she has is very flat, and Jay Gatsby is in the mirror, representing her alternate life. You see him in the background, and the shot is incredibly deep in the mirror. So we see her very flat existence, while the

The return of 3D, from top: *The Amazing Spider-Man*; *The Great Gatsby*; *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*; and *Prometheus*.

## 3D: A TIMELINE

Various technologies punctuate the uneven popularity and quality of commercial 3D film. The most promising period is *now*.

**1890s** >>
Brit William Friese-Greene files the first patent for a 3D movie process.

**1900** >>
Frederic Eugene Ives files the first patent for a 3D camera. It contained two lenses.

**1922** >>
The first 3D movie is shown to a paying audience. Called *The Power of Love*, the film has been lost.

**1934** >>
Film pioneer Louis Lumiere shows a 3D film version of *L'Arrivée du Train*.

mirror holds a huge amount of depth—the life she could have had. Now that was a very cool shot. That shot told the story."

BUT SCHKLAIR ISN'T merely satisfied with his company's emerging international domination of 3D movies. The company's credits also include live sports events (the World Cup in 2010, Wimbledon in 2011) and live concert events (featuring such acts as U2, The Black Eyed Peas, and country star Kenny Chesney). And 3ality Technica is also about to revolutionize the television industry by expanding on the current 3D-TV craze. A world leader on the television front is BSkyB, which specializes in round-the-clock 3D broadcasts. "They have three units constantly shooting, and that's all our technology and our training, which is fairly cool," Schklair says. "So we're the start of the first big network. Whether we could pat ourselves on the back or not, the technology just works, and it works better than anything else out there on the market."

So how did the former studio worker manage to revitalize a dying art form that had never enjoyed anything more than niche appeal since its paying-audience debut in 1922? Essentially, Schklair took two unwritten rules of movie making, and he did the complete opposite.

For starters, most videographers and directors focus on the rig, or the device that holds the camera, rather than on the audience experience. But 3ality Technica, which manufactures those cameras and that rigging, views the equipment as the means to an end. The cameras and rigging will be the tools to get the shots, but ultimately, technology and image processing are what hold the viewer's attention and creates a more seamless experience. "Our belief is, across all spectrums, your audience needs to pay a price to see a 3D movie," Schklair says. "Certainly a ticket price, but also you're paying a price just by having to wear a pair of glasses in a theater. So what do you get for that price? If it's not any better than the 2D version, then it's just not worth it, so we've maintained the belief that the content really does have to be more compelling in 3D, or you're paying a price and not getting anything in return."

Secondly, 3ality Technica rewrote the business model when it comes to on-set employees. While over 100 people work for the company—a number that is staggeringly high for the 3D business—on set Schklair brings as few people along as possible. "One of the things that separates what we do from all our competitors is we don't need to fill the set with our people," he says. "We train their people and say, 'Go have a good time. Go make your movie.' Directors of photography want to use the crew that they used on the last six movies. To come in as a 3D company and say, 'Ah, that's great, but we're going to shoot this movie for you,' is insane. But that's pretty much how most of our competitors do it."

The twin hearts of essential equipment and a skeletal on-set staff have made 3ality Technica attractive to all the major Hollywood studios. That's why Sony came calling for Schklair's brainchild to shoot *The Amazing Spider-Man*, which was originally intended to be produced in 2D. "Sony was familiar with our gear because the Sony training center used 3ality technologies," Schklair explains. "Sony felt that if anybody could shoot the film on the schedule they had budgeted, which was a 2D schedule, it would be us."

No question that 3ality has mastered the lean economics of filmmaking; the next year will allow it to prove its expertise in the esthetic realm. □

3ality Technica founder Steve Schklair.

**1952–1955** >> The Golden Age of 3D film included the releases of *Kiss Me, Kate* (1953) and *Dial M for Murder* (1954).

**1985** >> IMAX helps usher in a resurgence of 3D. A high point was the animated film *The Polar Express* (2004).

**2009** >> *Avatar* is released and becomes the highest-grossing movie of all time.