

SOUND & PICTURE Restoration

Post pros lend a hand.

By Christine Dunish

Restoration services are in increasing demand as studios serve up features and classic films for Blu-ray release, iconic titles for landmark anniversaries, and as film archives endeavor to present old and rare footage to new audiences.

A variety of tools make restoration easier, quicker and higher quality than ever before and offers solutions to those who didn't previously have those capabilities within reach.

BLACK LIKE ME

Black Like Me, the 1964 feature based on a true story in which James Whitmore plays a white reporter who darkens his skin to experience life in the segregated south, has long been part of college and film schools' curricula. Jason Weichelt, finishing artist at SonicPool (www.sonicpool.com) in Hollywood, remembers seeing it in film school at the University of Wisconsin some 20 years ago. Little did he know that he'd be working on its restoration one day via Video Service Corp.

SonicPool worked from the film's cut black-and-white negative with finish artist Ricky Hayner supervising the scanning of the six 35mm reels to 2K DPX files on a Golden Eye film scanner and importing them into Blackmagic Revival. "The film was in really good shape except for a couple of shots in the last reel where there were eight or nine frames with 50 percent of the frames pulled off—they were stuck to each other," Weichelt says.

"We were able to use Revival to repair that. In the past we'd have had to use compositing or 3D for those kind of fixes. But we were able to keep everything inside Revival, cloning elements from previous frames and interpolating the look from beginning to end."

Black Like Me had the usual dirt and dust of a nearly 50-year-old film, he notes. "Even a film in good shape that's been around that long requires three or four passes to clean it up."

While Hayner and Weichelt manned Revival systems, Adam Greenberg began the color grading. "Adam had never done anything in black and white, so it was a lesson in gamma," Weichelt says. "It's rare to see black and white these days unless you're doing restoration."

A prepass set the levels and then with their systems linked, Hayner and Weichelt in their grading/editing bays replaced Greenberg's DPX files with their own finished files so the colorist could open the files back up in his DaVinci Resolve suite and further tweak the grading.

"For about three weeks straight Ricky and I were tag-teaming," says Weichelt. "You go through shots three or four times because you still miss certain things!" Revival's Auto Tools proved "fantastic" for scratch removal and adding grain back in, he reports. Hayner and Weichelt moved to SonicPool's THX-approved DI suite for the final pass.

True to its name, SonicPool also performed the audio restoration on *Black Like Me*. "The original mag tracks were transferred and had a lot of clicking and popping in them," says Weichelt. "The client wanted a 5.1 mix made out of mono so we went into Pro Tools to clean things up and then generate



Black Like Me: SonicPool used Revival and Resolve for the clean up.

the 5.1 by splitting the track apart using proprietary tools. It was surprising how well it worked."

SonicPool delivered a 16x9 HD master a full center-cut version and 2K DPX files if the client wants to strike a new negative or use digital cinema projection. The restored *Black Like Me* will go back into rotation for educational viewing and is planned to hit broadcasts in early 2013 during Black History Month.

Weichelt says *Black Like Me* marks SonicPool's "gateway into restoration work. Our staff has film experience, we do Blu-ray