

Bargain budget for cutting-edge Kiwiana

The first New Zealand feature to be shot without film or videotape has wrapped on Wellington's Kapiti Coast.

For his feature debut, the Kiwiana dramedy *Garage Sale*, director Paul Murphy used a Thomson Viper camera that records an uncompressed 1920 x 1080 resolution image directly to hard disc.

"No tape or film is involved," co-producer Nigel Stanford says. "This is the same equipment used by David Fincher on *Zodiac* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*."

"*Garage Sale* is the first NZ feature to shoot on a Viper and, I would imagine, to be shot without film or videotape."

Stanford became involved with the project through his camera rentals house, Rubber Monkey (which will post-produce *Garage Sale*), and estimates the film-less technology offers stock savings of up to 95%. "That's why a film like this can get made."

By recording in a mode called FilmStream, unique to the camera, the internal electronics (gain, white balance etc) are bypassed, sending a completely unaltered image to the recorder.

"The colour balancing can be done later in post with powerful tools rather than in camera," Stanford says.

"On set, this means that DoP Richard Bluck can treat the shoot with a much more film-like approach."

The camera has 3 CCD 12 bit sensors with 1920 x 4320 resolution. The image is downsampled, and output as 1920 x 1080, 10 bit log. Images are recorded to an S.two recorder.

"The bit rate is 2000 Megabit, which compares favourably to 440 Megabit on HDCAM-SR, 90 Megabit on Digibeta, or 25 Megabit on HDV," Stanford says.

"There is no higher quality recording system available for 10 bit 1080p. We record straight to DPX files."

The recorder also captures six channels of uncompressed 24 bit 96 khz audio.

Footage is recorded onto removable magazines called Dmags; each mag holds 23 minutes.

"Because there is no tape, Paul can jump to any take and has instant playback available at all times," Stanford says. "And there is no danger of recording over your footage. Full-resolution monitors on set show the images pixel-for-pixel. Critical focus can be judged from the monitors if required."

When a Dmag is full, it is taken to editorial to be processed. Footage is backed up onto data tape, and offline files are created.

Custom software from Rubber Monkey processes the DPX frames and creates HD Quicktime files, complete with embedded audio, ready for cutting.

Stanford is producing *Garage Sale* with Murphy's uncle, former exhibition identity Kerry Robins, whose last production, *Utu*, was directed by Murphy's

father, Geoff, 25 years ago.

"Some projects you push uphill but this project has had a really good feel to it," Robins says.

"Everything has been positive and has had a terrific flow. In only a matter of months the film kick-started itself."

He says there's already strong distributor interest and partly attributes that to Nick Ward and Linda Niccol's screenplay, which was inspired by Ward's bargain-hunting mother, Rose.

"*Garage Sale* is a heart-felt drama that draws from the universal family dynamic of a mother wanting the

funding. But Robins says the NZFC route wasn't considered for Niccol's final draft.

"It was a timing issue. We had a script ready to shoot and thought: 'Let's do it and put what we can in the can.'"

The nearly \$1 million budget was raised through private investment and cast-and-crew fee deferrals.

Robins was surprised by how quickly the funding came together, principally from two private investors, and says extraordinary goodwill was extended to the production by the cast and crew, suppliers, people who have worked



Garage band: Cast and crew shooting a climactic scene for *Garage Sale*, which represents a marriage between the Kiwi DIY ethos and advanced digital image-capture technology.

best for her daughter's wedding," says Niccol. "Second-hand doesn't mean second best."

"I've always viewed it as a quality crossover film with a quiet sense of humour," Robins says. "There's nothing in it that will upset people by way of violence or sex or language. It's a story where the performances have to hold it together to ultimately deliver."

The cast includes Geraldine Brophy, Patrick Wilson, Tina Regtien, Holly Shanahan, Ryan O'Kane, Jed Brophy, Ray Henwood, Charlie Bleakley, and, in a cameo, John Rowles.

"John recorded lots on vinyl, which makes him ideal to feature in the garage sale arena - his records are very collectible," Robins says. "It's the 40th anniversary of his hit *Cheryl Moana Marie* and our heroine is named Cheryl. We think it was meant to be."

Ward originally pitched *Garage Sale* to the Film Commission for Headstrong

with Murphy, and the local business community.

First AD Richard Matthews describes the production as "low-budget, back to basics filmmaking. On set there is a terrific spirit - everyone has commented on it. The cast all like each other and have gelled really well - even they are saying it's well cast!"

"And the crew are also enjoying themselves. They are not here for the money - as there isn't any - they are here because they like to make films and this is getting back to what they really like to do, which is often lost on the big-budget numbers."

"There are a few on the crew who have a grumpy reputation and they are showing another side to themselves - they are laughing and enjoying themselves, which adds to the camaraderie that exists, and the cast are feeding off that, and things are really moving along well."