

Showdown at Shinagawa: Tales of Filming from Bombay to Brazil

Bill Zarchy

Bill Zarchy, Photographer

Maggie Hurley, Designer

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Funny, sweet, and wise, these cinematographer's tales show Zarchy's urbane and lovable character.

Showdown at Shinagawa opens with a delightful story about an American film crew on assignment in Japan, which deftly captures the cultural intricacies that make good travel memoirs so enjoyable. Bill Zarchy, a writer and teacher of cinematography, has traveled the world as a director of photography for documentaries, corporate projects, and one feature film whose tragicomic failure to get off the ground rounds out the nineteen vignettes in this well-written book.

Each piece opens with a collage of photographs taken during the events Zarchy catalogs in the accompanying essay. Seeing the people and places he writes about adds authenticity to the prose, especially when they are uniquely special. For example, a photograph of Zarchy with Bill Clinton introduces a poignant story about the two men mourning the deaths of their beloved dogs. Another photo shows Zarchy with Bono and another crew member and segues into a great piece about filming Steve Jobs showing off the first Apple store, as well as the author's frustrations with the all-white color scheme and his diplomatic handling of Jobs's impossible demands.

The best essays in *Showdown at Shinagawa* convey deeply moving human interest stories about filming advances in technology and medicine that save and improve lives. His love for his work is especially palpable when he tells the stories behind filming the doctor in India who doesn't charge for treating people via telemedicine, the young man in England with cystic fibrosis who has a new lease on life thanks to a portable nebulizer, and the medical student in Uganda who is tirelessly working to help his people.

The book sometimes becomes bogged down by the tedious minutiae of delayed, lost, or damaged equipment; airport and flying hassles; missed appointments and deadlines; terrible meals in rundown restaurants; dated news stories; and other typical aspects of travel. Slogging through the dull travel details to get to the good stuff is mostly worth it, though, because when Zarchy is good, he's really funny, profoundly sweet, and quite wise.

He is funny when he shares the pitfalls and goofiness of being six feet four inches tall in countries where the beds, doorways, and other everyday things and spaces are geared for people a foot shorter. He is sweet when he guilelessly writes about his family and his nostalgia for the food, music, and other trappings of his San Francisco home base. And he is wise in his healthy equanimity about the vagaries of life, which adds a philosophical edge to the pages of *Showdown at Shinagawa* that other early baby boomers will appreciate.

Zarchy's urbane and lovable character really shines in the last and longest piece, where he serendipitously finds himself hired as the director of a feature film financed by a Japanese firm, set in the Philippines, and starring a Canadian supermodel and Dutch fighter. Though in over his head and subject to a constant stream of problems with sets, casting, and finances, Zarchy manages to maintain his equilibrium and sense of humor. These suspenseful and emotionally charged forty-plus pages, which Zarchy titles "The Big Break: Malaise in Manila," make a very satisfying

conclusion to an excellent book.

It is likely that the average reader will linger over the final pages, put down the book, and immediately go to Zarchy's website, showdownatshinagawa.com, to see more photos and his videos. The website adds value to this professionally packaged book, whose target audiences are sixty-plus-year-old baby boomers, photography and behind-the-camera film buffs, and intrepid travelers.

PATTY SUTHERLAND (January 10, 2014)

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