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**Documentarian Jennifer Cox First DP**

**to Shoot on ZEISS Nano Prime Lenses**

In Spring 2024 documentary filmmaker Jennifer Cox received a pre-launch set of ZEISS Nano Prime lenses. These first ever high-speed (T1.5 throughout) cine lenses were designed specifically for mirrorless full frame cameras, with documentary filmmaking top of mind. NY based Cox set out to put the new primes through their paces, shooting with them on three diverse documentary film sets. From a Beatles Fan Fest feature film to a short doc for Free Arts and a gala video for PEN America, she achieved unique results with the help of the Nano Primes.

Cox came to filmmaking a roundabout route, starting out in architecture then working as a fabricator and artist. Her education and professional history have given Cox a consciousness of the subject’s relation to the filming environment. This style has led her to film many remarkable projects across the nonfiction and documentary landscape. For Cox, documentary filmmaking is a lived experience, and she embraces tools that serve to help bridge the distance between her and a subject.

Cox first encountered ZEISS’ new Nano Prime lenses on the eve of a scheduled documentary feature film shoot. “I met Jean-Marc Bouchut (Head of Cinema Sales, Americas) from ZEISS literally the day before shooting the Beatles Fan Fest,” Cox explains. “He showed me the Nanos, and I immediately asked about borrowing them.” The first T1.5 cine primes made specifically for mirrorless full frame cameras, compact Nano Primes offer a matched 6-lens set from 18mm, to 100mm that's so convenient for the varied wide-angle to telephoto coverage a documentarian must be ready for.

With no chance to test the Nanos ahead of time, Cox stepped on set, hoping the primes would perform as promised. “I was super nervous,” she confides. Not only would this be Cox’s first time using the Nano Prime lenses, but it was the first time the lenses had been used by *any* DP outside of ZEISS.

Her crew hit the ground running, foraying into the chaotic mix of the 50th Fest for Beatles Fans, the longest running Beatles-centric celebration in the world. Her camera package hadn’t been prepped with this spontaneous lens change in mind, so Cox opted to remove the front rods and follow focus, using her hand instead. “I immediately loved the way the lens felt in my hand and the way it came into focus,” the cinematographer says. “The travel distance for bringing something into focus was comfortable, so I was able to operate fine without a follow focus. The minimum focus allowed me to get really close to the subjects' faces, maintaining a sense of intimacy.”

Impressed by the results, Cox sought another opportunity to use the Nano Primes. She was brought on to film a shortform documentary for Free Arts NYC, a nonprofit dedicated to fostering arts education across the metropolis. “I chose the Nanos again because we were shooting with young people from all over the city, and the lenses have great versatility with different skin tones,” she explains. On this piece, Cox also wanted to test how the Nanos handled light sources. “During that last scene in Times Square, I follow a young woman around while all the crazy different light sources would bokeh or gently flare. The way the lenses reacted to a direct light hit was graceful.”

A third opportunity which seemed ideal for the Nano Primes presented itself shortly after. Cox headed to Atlanta to film for PEN America’s Courage Award. Focused on correcting disinformation, PEN America chose to honor Georgian election workers Ruby Freeman and Shaye Moss, who were targeted by Trump and Giuliani following the 2020 elections. “I wanted a very pure look and feel, that would let who these women are, come to the fore. We created a lighting setup that lent a sense of portraiture, without feeling overly lit. The Nanos helped create a feeling of luminescence, making the subjects appear lit from within.” Beautifully captured in black and white, the two women literally glow on screen.

A documentarian who loves the challenge of verité cinematography and understands the craft of a staged interview, Cox appreciated the way the Nano Primes adapted to both styles. The compact size was conducive to 14 hours of filming on her feet at the Beatles Fan Fest, while the focus fall-off “gracefully” handled close ups and faces. Cox remarks, “The lenses helped serve as a beautiful intermediary between my subjects, the sensor, and me. I was grateful for the results.”

**Read the full interview with Jennifer Cox:** <https://lenspire.zeiss.com/cine/en/article/documentarian-jennifer-cox-becomes-first-dp-to-use-zeiss-nano-prime-lenses>

**Watch ZEISS Conversations with Jennifer Cox:**

<https://youtu.be/DpvHfOX4lh8?si=uxlov3ZeejUbWndp>

**Watch Cox’s Free Arts NY Short Doc** - <https://www.freeartsnyc.org/> | <https://vimeo.com/921814656/686ea8af77>