



Frames within frames was a motif Morgan and Duvall used for the large ensemble cast of *The Intervention* / Frame Grab courtesy of Polly Morgan

to collaborate with people like Sian, a writer/director who had such an emotional stake in this project. Now, if someone offers me the next Marvel movie, I would certainly say yes. But whatever great story comes along, that is the next place I'm headed. **Heder:** I think Paula follows in a long line of talented DP's from Mexico, who look at filmmaking in a unique way. She's been mentored by some incredible people [Chivo, Rodrigo Prieto], and there's no reason she can't be just as celebrated. **Huidobro:** [Laughs.] That's right: #MexicanDPsMatter

The Intervention: This feature directing debut from veteran Sundance actress Clea DuVall gathers a handful of couples in a Savannah country home, with the conceit being the friends are reuniting to stage an "intervention" for one character's dismal marriage. It was shot by Polly Morgan in lush, warm summer tones that showcase the beautiful location and the soft lighting transitions without being showy.

How did you find each other? **Morgan:** I had worked with [*Intervention* actress] Melanie Lynskey on a film, and she urged me to read this script that turned out to be this brilliant little gem – funny, sad, insightful, all in one location. I was shooting a four-part miniseries in England, probably my biggest job to date, and that didn't end until two days before *The Intervention* started. So Clea and I began Skyping and we hit it off. **Duvall:** Actually, Melanie kept raving about this DP, both how great she was personality-wise and her beautiful work. So I watched the movie they did together and *The Truth About Emmanuel*, another Sundance movie that Polly shot, and just knew she was the one.

You had 18 days, a large ensemble cast, and meager resources: How important is it to "get along" with your DP on a film like this? **Duvall:** It's vital. Polly was my greatest ally and my connection to the crew. I still sort of feel like an actor who directed a movie, and Polly patiently taught me the technical side of things without ever being patronizing. It felt like a very safe environment to be working with her, as I could let go of those insecurities. She also showed me how much I really did know, having been on sets for 20 years. Our relationship got me through the movie.

What was the main visual theme you discussed in the limited

prep time you had? **Duvall:** I told Polly I did not want this to look like an independent movie. I wanted it to be very accessible, despite the super-low budget. I wanted this beautiful location to mirror the natural feeling of all the relationships, without having a thousand establishing shots or forcing the look. I also knew I wanted to shoot two cameras so I wouldn't have to break the rhythm of the scenes by going into coverage. **Morgan:** The only film we watched as reference, mostly due to the lack of prep time, was *The Big Chill*. And we talked about the camera having that same fresh and contemporary feel as that film did at that time. The wide-screen was chosen – we shot 2:40 with Panavision Primos – because with an ensemble cast you need to have that depth in the frame. Like when Ruby and Peter are having their big fight and you can see the other characters reacting in the background, without, as Clea said, having to cut a lot. There was also a way we chose to frame certain scenes that corresponds to the humor in the story. We used excessive headroom, for example, that added a quirky feeling. Clea published a Spotify playlist while we were in the house shooting tests, so her musical choices, like Tegan and Sara, were sort of mirrored in the framing. **Duvall:** I didn't want the camera to make any big dramatic moves; I wanted it to be more of an observer because so much of this story is told by the people who are listening, and not speaking – like when Melanie gets really drunk the first night, and we see that progression on the faces of everyone else without dialogue.

It's a daunting task for a first-time director to work on an ensemble film where so many characters are on-screen at the same time, as in the large dinner scenes, the Charades game, and the actual intervention. **Morgan:** The week Clea and I spent in the house together before shooting was so important, as we were able to walk the location and sort of "pre-block" those scenes you mentioned. And on those specific scenes our method was to light the room and then roam freely with two cameras. We actually shot them really quickly and managed to get a lot of coverage with this approach. Now on many of these indie films, you make a great plan and it all goes out the window. But in this case much of what we talked about in that week was realized on the day. It was doubly challenging for Clea having to be on screen as she had no director to support her as an actress. She relied on me a lot as to how things played, and whether we got what we had talked about. We had a

Frame grab from *The Intervention* / Courtesy of Polly Morgan

great synergy together. **Duvall:** Yes, that time we had together in the house allowed us to make shot lists and be very, very prepared. I knew there were moments I had to have in those scenes with so many characters on-screen. Our script supervisor, Allison [Hughes Stroud], also played a key role. She could see what I couldn't. So the three of us were really a great team.

What camera system did you use? **Morgan:** The Sony F55, which was a new experience for me. I chose Sony because I feel their cameras have great color rendition, not unlike how Fuji's film stocks were with color once upon a time. Also being in Savannah, in summer, we knew color would play a huge role in the emotional arc of the film – day to night, night to day, torchlight and flashlights and lots of natural sunlight being our sources. I also wanted to try something with a different feel from the Alexa, and achieve the painterly quality of a film like *Ex Machina*. We only had 18 days, so there was no time to soften the sun or use big overheads, which meant exposures had to be dead-on so the highlights didn't blow out. I will say that in the DI, I could see that Sony clipped some of the color saturation in the highlights that the Alexa probably would have kept intact. I was delighted when someone came up to me after the Sundance screening and asked if I shot on film, which I feel comes from the more tactile feel that the Sony system provided.

Is there a moment or scene that best combines Polly's photography with Clea's narrative goals? **Duvall:** This may sound weird but it's the dream with Alia and me [where Duvall's character imagines being seduced by her friend's younger girlfriend]. That was going to be done with traditional coverage. Instead we created this beautiful one that had a very surreal feeling, and we didn't need to do any more coverage.

Considering the limitations of time and budget, Polly, what scenes were you most pleased with? **Morgan:** The scenes in the forest, where they go look for Peter with flashlights, came out so much better than I expected! On any other job, you'd have a cherry picker and big lights washing through the woods. But I lit the three of them walking away from the house with a one-by-one Lite Panel, maybe sixteen feet away. And the big dialogue scene with Jack in the woods was lit with just a 2K where we ran power all the way from the house. At the Sundance screening at Eccles, someone else came up and said, "I really loved your moonlight! It was so naturalistic." [Laughs.] We had no generators, nothing. I told the actors to wipe the lens with the flashlights. But that was about it.

You worked with a female director on another Sundance film, *The Truth About Emanuel*. Any differences between the genders? **Morgan:** The main difference is not gender but experience. With first-time directors [like Duvall] there's a bit of showing them the way. And this film was such a minefield – we had constant issues with summer thunderstorms changing our schedule; we had a large cast and small crew; and we had the director acting in the film. It's an intense environment, shooting a low-budget movie for days at a time in the same location, so the real question is not so much about gender as personality, and how you and your director are going to get along. My goal was always to provide Clea with everything she needed to tell this story, despite the many challenges. **Duvall:** As a director, I only know working with Polly, so I can't make any comparisons, gender-wise. I started acting twenty years ago, and it was incredibly rare to see a woman in the camera department in any capacity, even as a loader. Almost our entire camera department on *The Intervention* was female, and the film I'm working now has a large amount of women in camera