

Screen Time Shakes the Sand Out of *Robinson Crusoe*



BY SEAN MCKEE
COURTESY CMP INFORMATION

ONE OF THE GREATEST rewards of film restoration is renewing interest in a treasured title from years past and making it accessible to a brand-new audience. This is especially true when restoring for DVD, which provides a broad audience but also a few unique challenges for the restoration artist.

Schaumburg, Illinois-based Screen Time Images knows these challenges well. Since its establishment in 1996 by Sean McKee, an aficionado of classic films and TV shows, Screen Time has offered a wide range of post-production services dedicated to their restoration and preservation, including films ranging from the turn of the 20th century to brand-new negatives acciden-

tally scratched by a post house during the cleaning process. The bulk of the studio's work dates from the 1940s to the 1970s, and includes the studio's recent restoration of the original 1950s film *Robinson Crusoe*, now distributed on DVD by VCI Entertainment.

Directed in 1954 by Luis Buñuel, *Robinson Crusoe* was based on the immortal classic by Daniel Defoe and earned Dan O'Herlihy an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor. The film is a testament to the ability of the human spirit to endure insurmountable challenges. Set in 1659, the sole survivor of a shipwreck-*Robinson Crusoe*-is washed ashore on a deserted island and must learn to carve out a life for himself with his bare hands in an unknown and hostile wilderness.

Original *Robinson Crusoe* materials were thought to be permanently

lost when the Cineteca Nacional, the largest film archive in Latin America, burned down on March 24, 1982. The film found new life when a 35mm positive archival print was found in England after VCI acquired the distribution rights from Proda Films, S.A. Though the positive print had many severe problems, Screen Time was able to rely on the unique toolsets of da Vinci's Revival to bring the print back to its original beauty.

Aged films such as *Robinson Crusoe* can exhibit a wide range of physical defects. A partial list of the most common offenders includes dirt and dust, scratches, splice damage, color fading, stains, and warping. Other challenges stemming from the technical limitations of early cinematography include heavy film grain, unstable images and flicker.

Such problems are more than mere distractions. When a film is encoded for DVD distribution, flaws in the image affect the way the encoder sees the difference between consecutive frames. These flaws can become even more pronounced due to the compression algorithms inherent in output for DVD. When an image has been fully restored, there is less difference between frames, resulting in a higher bit count that provides a higher-quality encoding output.

Five years ago, restoration processes were too costly to undertake for the majority of films. By automating many of the most time-intensive corrections, Revival™ from da Vinci Systems overcomes many of these challenges and is now the primary tool that Screen Time uses for restoration.

The biggest challenge in restoring *Robinson Crusoe* was severe dye-fading issues from the positive archival

print, which gave the film a greenish-yellow hue. It also had some scenes with blue flicker in areas that should have been black. Screen Time's colorist, Frank Sparano, used a da Vinci color corrector to restore the tropical island setting's full range of colors.

With settings adjusted on a scene-by-scene basis, McKee followed up Sparano's color restoration by using some of Revival's automation tools for dirt removal and grain reduction. After the automated correction was completed, VCI was given the opportunity to review the film and provide Screen Time with a time-coded list of specific frames and severely damaged scenes that they wanted targeted for more intensive, frame-by-frame restoration. McKee was able to then run these select scenes through Revival's interactive toolset, working manually to fine-tune each frame.

"It was a pleasure to work with VCI to help bring such an important, rare film to DVD," said McKee. "Being a fan of Buñuel's work with Salvador Dali, I was honored to have a part in restoring the work of one of the pioneers of surrealist cinema." McKee is a big fan of da Vinci's restoration tools. "Revival has many features that other systems don't have, such as the ability to paint from reference frames using a single color channel. We love its splice damage, color restoration and optional deWarp™ tools, and we're excited about its new ability to digitally combine color separation reels into a new color composite, with object matching to compensate for stretched or warped film elements. Having worked with all of the restoration systems out there, I've found Revival to be the most complete and powerful solution available."



Sean McKee, founder of Schaumburg, Illinois-based Screen Time Images