

Reverb: Preparation and The Pursuit of Excellence

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The film industry is no stranger to brother directorial duos. Whether it's the Russos, the Coens, or the Safdies, sometimes the best collaborators are the ones that you've known all your life. That seems to be the case for Matt and John Westmoreland, two film production students from Richmond, Virginia, and the co-directors of the senior thesis film, *Reverb*. *Reverb* is a film about three dancers who have to quickly perfect a dance routine after their coach abruptly gives their parts in the routine to two other people. When asked about the inspiration for the film, the eldest brother, John, expressed a major desire to prioritize sound design throughout the filmmaking process. "I've always wanted to do a project with sound design at the forefront. I really wanted to hit home that the sound in this film was going to be good, and not just good, but a part of the story," Westmoreland stated.

On the topic of collaboration, the brothers always knew that they eventually wanted to work together. However, the process of getting there was not as simple as some may assume. "It's always been in the back of our heads that we've wanted to work together, but John wanted to see what I'd get up to alone before he would sign any contracts with me. So, once I proved that I was going out there and getting involved around campus, that's when he saw that this could be a working relationship," Matt said. The brothers value each other's working styles and ability to keep each other grounded throughout the process. Despite their slight differences in working style, the duo shares the same high-level attention to detail and meticulous approach to technical execution.

Additionally, the core members of the crew have had a major influence on how this film was ideated, which can be seen in the expertise of Brianna Figueroa(producer) and Gabrielle Nellis(editor). "I am good friends with Bri and Gabbie, and I do not dance, and I have never danced, but they do. I didn't want to write a script that only I had an experience with, so I was fine to make the project about dance because it brought in more of the group and their expertise," John said. Figueroa and Nellis's roles stretch far beyond their titles as they serve as the experts when it comes to keeping the film grounded within its dance roots. John also mentioned Lucas Hydock(writer) and his importance in getting the film to a place where the group wanted it to be, cutting the script down from 30 pages to around 12. With the addition of Lucas DeLaney(DP), *Reverb* has a core crew that is well-rounded, talented, and, most importantly, easy to get along with. "You definitely want to have people on your team that you just like to work with. When you boil it down, do you like being around this person? And if you do, you can get through a lot of the things that come up during a film production set," Matt stated.

When it comes to directing a film of this magnitude, both brothers believe that the Yearlong format will benefit them more than anything else. “It feels like we're not going too far out of our wheelhouse. It's just like Rod always says: you get that extra time to make the film even better,” John said. As mentioned previously, Reverb is a film that allows sound to be a driving force within the story and with the amount of time that a yearlong film allows the filmmakers, both brothers are excited for the post-production process. “A lot of our film comes together in the edit. For our films now, and going into the future, you're not going to see the vision until it's in the editing bay,” Matt explained. In our conversation, both brothers expressed a desire for this film to be technically sound in all aspects. While they are aware that this is a student production, they aspire for this film to have an industry-standard level of technicality, which is extremely admirable.

Reverb is a film about the pursuit of excellence, and after talking with the co-directors, you can see how that came to be. Whether it's through dance, filmmaking, or just the desire to improve, every member of this film holds themselves to the highest standard possible, giving the co-directors the utmost confidence in the final outcome of the film. “I would say expect a Hollywood-ready short film for film festivals, something that is industry standard, and expect the Westmoreland brothers' directorial debut,” John said. If you're looking for a film that provides an in-depth look at what it takes to be great, Reverb is the film for you.