

3D or not to 3D



A while back I posted an article on this blog called "In Praise of Black and White." In it I mentioned that the invention of color film brought about a number of films that focused on color shock effects and explosions rather than focusing on the story. I believe that many of the films made today would not seem as good to us if we were forced to watch them in black and white. Today we have a rise in another new gimmick format called 3D.

This is not the first time that 3D films have been attempted. 3D films have a history going back before the 1950's. I don't want to go into a history of 3D films, but I will say that the 3D technology used today works much better than the 3D of the 50's and 60's. It seems like almost everyone is jumping on the 3D bandwagon and films that were originally planned for 2D release have been re-mastered to give a 3D effect regardless of whether the 3D effect adds to the film or not. I have been told that Peter Jackson has thought about re-mastering the *Lord of the Rings Trilogy* in 3D and that George Lucas has mentioned doing the same thing for his *Star Wars* films. The question I must ask is whether 3D is really worth it? My answer might surprise you. Yes, I believe it is, however, I don't feel that every film needs 3D and in fact might be hampered by it. Some films work great in 3D and as we improve the technology and how directors use it I hope to see some great films produced in 3D.

One of my favorite films is the 1939 film The Wizard of Oz. At the time the film was made, black and white was king. Color filmmaking was expensive. The first two or three times I saw *The Wizard of Oz* I watched it on a black and white TV (yes, I'm that old). There really wasn't a difference between Kansas and the Land of Oz; but the story grabbed me. I came to love the film before I ever saw it in color. When I finally saw the film in color the difference was amazing. Oz became an even more magical place. The use of color enhanced the story, but did not drive the story. The same can be said of today's 3D effects. In a good film, it should enhance the story without distracting from it. Nothing will change the need for a film to have a good story. A bad 3D movie is still just a bad movie.... Or is it?

With today's technology 3D has two dangers that can take a good film and destroy it. The first is a dimming of the brightness and colors of the picture. Cinematographers are going to need to take this into account when filming. The picture needs to be brighter for the effect not to muddy up the picture. The second is distraction. In the 50's and 60's films tried to show off their 3D effects by having things seemingly come out of the screen towards you. Today many films try to do the same thing. Recently, I purchased a 3D TV, not because I wanted 3D, but because I got a good deal on it. To try it out I obtained a copy of the new *Alice in Wonderland* and watched it. I saw this film in 3D in the theaters, but have watched it twice in 2D since. I do like the 3D version better. I did, however, find some of the effects distracting. As I said, 3D is great for making things pop out of the screen, but I found myself watching a dragonfly as it sailed out of screen into my family room when the focus of the story and action was in the frame. There was a nice WOW factor to the dragonfly, but there really wasn't a point to having it fly out into my room. For me 3D

works best when I feel like I'm looking out a window. The window may be sitting still, moving, riding a roller coaster, or soaring over a sky line. I like having the sense of perspective that 3D gives me, just don't throw things in my face all time and don't think 3D will make your movie better. If a film doesn't work in 2D it won't work in 3D and it might just be hampered by it.

Posted by Keith C. on February 7, 2011

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