

Roger Christian: My friend, Tony Scott

Written by Roger Christian
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Tony Scott and I became friends in the early days of British Cinema. Tony asked me to join RSA to make commercials after I had designed a few for him and Ridley, but I had just got the green light on BLACK ANGEL from George Lucas, so I concentrated on getting that made and a film career. It was a strange time in Britain. Ridley, Alan Parker and Tony, were especially singled out by the “serious” critics as being commercial directors who made TV ads and were thus dismissed as such. Time has shown that these critics were clearly out of touch with the changes coming and cinema, after all, is a commercial industry.

We both got signed to Paramount under Don Simpson and Jeffrey Katzenberg as fledgling directors, and both got our first movies at the same time. We shot our movies back-to-back in Shepperton Studios; Tony on THE HUNGER and myself making THE SENDER.

We both had horrendous baptisms of fire under producers who ripped hell out of us. I'd see Tony as we passed between stages looking as tired as I was, and he'd say how many times you been fired. “One,” I admitted.

“Two me,” he'd grin, and we sped back to work. He got up to three and myself, two.

Tony broke through after that making TOP GUN, and who can deny the impact this movie had on cinema. It was deeply commercial, and who cares? That is what cinema actually excelled at, pleasing mass audiences. His visceral style was as fast as the way Tony lived life, at 200 mph. He chose “Take my Breath Away,” which became a massive number one, and directed the music video in a way that created a new synthesis between pop and cinema. That was Tony. The song won an Academy Award, and Tony should have got one himself for that film, or MAN ON FIRE.

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We'd never drive with Tony. He could have been a Formula One driver. In fact, he was clocked at such a high speed on the M1 motorway in Britain in his Ferrari, they thought it was a low flying aircraft. That was Tony. Bones shattered from Motorbike crashes; he lived life fully.

He always pushed the limits, he loved pop culture and used its influence to further influence cinema style. When he got it right, like MAN ON FIRE, he was untouchable. This film is arguably his best work, alongside TOP GUN, but he should be honored for always trying to make cinema more exciting for young audiences. He experimented with changing shutter speeds to make shots more interesting. I remember talking to him about this, and how he did it to learn.

Cinema needs its revolutionaries and Tony pushed cinema as pop culture. His style was different to Ridley's and always was. His TV ads were unique, and he made some legendary ones. People always compared them, sometimes Tony negatively, but what is the point? Tony had his style and developed it, and made huge worldwide hits. I admire him for sticking to his guns and being himself. After all, that is the success.

Bless you Tony, we will miss you. The world was getting excited about TOP GUN 2, and with cinema's current lack of boundaries of what can be achieved with CGI, it's like a toy box that has been opened, I was impatiently waiting to see what he would bring new to the table this time. A huge loss to life, and cinema.

Roger Christian is a noted art director and filmmaker whose decades spanning work includes 1982's horror classic THE SENDER, which will be profiled in the upcoming FANGORIA #318