

High frame rate cinema booed but shows will go on

May 4 2012, by Nancy Owano

Critics' arguments over whether a film's actors, screenplay, or music score are worth the price of the ticket have been overshadowed by controversy over the technology used for making the film. Comments are mixed, from lukewarm to thumbs-down. The movie-making technology in question involves a change from 24 frames per second (fps) to 48 fps. HFR (high frame rate) technology is the "future of film," say proponents, and a controversy was set off at last month's Las Vegas showing of director Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit*. Like the famous director, James Cameron, Jackson believes that HFR films are the next important chapter in cinema.

Unlike movies filmed at an industry standard rate of 24 fps, the use of HFR technology offers less flicker, motion blur and stuttered movement. Attempts to reduce motion blur and flicker found in films can only raise the film experience. The impact on 3-D is especially trumpeted, in resolving the medium's problematic issues that make viewing difficult for some people.

Higher frame rates of 48 FPS and 60 FPS will soon be the norm, say supporters. At last month's brief preview at CinemaCon 2012 of Jackson's new film, however, which was presented in 48fps, some critics voiced harsh reactions. While their words differed, their basic opinion is that the 48 fps technique renders a film that looks phony like TV soap operas. Some more specific observations were that the film lacked enough color contrast and that actors seemed "overlit," according to a report in *Variety*.

As interesting is the response from Jackson to the criticism: He feels that this is new technology that the viewer's eye just needs to get used to. What is more, there is no going back on what he notes is a significant step forward. Shooting and projecting at 48 fps is said to make the film "much easier to watch, especially in 3-D. We've been watching HOBBIT tests and dailies at 48 fps now for several months, and we often sit through two hours worth of footage without getting any eye strain from the 3-D," he wrote in Facebook.

An earlier study from California State University of 400 filmgoers suggested that watching 3-D films raised the risk of eyestrain, headache or trouble with vision.

Proponents of 48 fps believe it is just a matter of viewers adjusting. What critics find as "fake," is verbally recast as "hyper-realism."

Jackson has written that "You get used to this new look very quickly and it becomes a much more lifelike and comfortable viewing experience."

If HFR is the future, then in practical terms that future may require theaters to upgrade their equipment. According to *The Rolling Stone*, some theater owners are skeptical about upgrading their equipment. Writing in *Extreme Tech*, David Cardinal said any moves to upgrade theater projectors to 48 fps, even at a cost of several thousand dollars per screen, though, would be worth it for the operators if it gives theatergoers a "premium" experience. The word "if" hovers over the question of how quickly moviegoers will realize they are in for a better future of watching films with 48 fps. The swing for and against may be influenced, though, by those who are put off by present-day 3-D as a source of eyestrain. Jackson said 48 fps is more gentle on the eyes.

Paul Martinovic in *Den of Geek* says that the [advantage](#) of 48 [fps](#) technology making 3-D more watchable is key. Reducing 3-D eye

irritants will be a step forward. People who have up to this time avoided 3-D can now get back “into the fray” free of the shackles of blurry vision,” he said. That alone would make it an economically smart move for industry adoption, he added.

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