

ICG

INTERNATIONAL CINEMATOGRAPHERS GUILD

MAGAZINE

the tv issue featuring
CRAZY EX-GIRLFRIEND
MANIAC / BARRY





Moviemaking has changed a lot since I was in film school. Although video editing was overtaking flatbeds, low-cost, full-frame digital cameras as small as your hand and on-set tools like color management and iPad-controlled lighting were decades away. Film was the capture medium, and even with begging, borrowing (or stealing) stock from Kodak (or Fuji), there was no clear end in sight if your ambitions were ever rising.

In comparison, today's young filmmakers have a rainbow of options, with gear, viewing platforms, and knowledge-base access more plentiful than my generation ever imagined. But the downside to all that easy luxury is a tendency to encourage a shortcut mentality toward learning craft. I say this because the cinematographer highlighted in our September TV-themed issue, Todd A. Dos Reis, ASC, came up through the ranks; his years of dedicated service with more experienced mentors ultimately served him well when opportunity met preparation, i.e., a break came his way.

Dos Reis graduated from USC Film School back in the late 80's, when, as an African-American cinematographer, few doors were open other than shooting low-end music videos (mostly with other young black filmmakers as his crew).

"I became king of the \$80,000-and-below music video for bands no one ever heard of," he told me in this month's cover story on *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* (page 36). "I was a loader, a camera assistant for Russell Carpenter [ASC], a focus puller, and an operator for many years before moving up to DP on *Entourage*, where we had, literally, dozens of locations every episode that you'd walk into with 30 minutes to light – zero prep."

All of which created an ideal template for Dos Reis to thrive on one of TV's most unique and creatively demanding series. *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* showrunners Rachel Bloom and Aline Brosh McKenna shoot two to three music videos every episode, some on stage, some on location, like a Mojave Desert lakebed in July. And yet working with IA crewmembers like 1st AC Eric Dyson, Gaffer Mazi Mitchell, and A-camera Operator/DP Ian Dodd, most of whom Dos Reis met during his halcyon music video days, this up-through-the-ranks DP has more than met the challenge.

Did I also mention that Dos Reis is a two-time Emerging Cinematographer Awards winner, back when the ECA's were humbly dubbed the "ICG Film Showcase"? No doubt so many dues paid sculpted a terrific role model for this year's crop of ECA honorees (page 72), but there's more. Not only did Dos Reis go on to carve out a superb career in television (next up is a TV series from *Moonlight* Oscar winner Tarell McCraney; Dodd will shoot CXG's fourth and final season); but he's also made the effort to hire diverse crews. Dyson, Mitchell, and B-camera 2nd AC Eric Wheeler are all African-American, and his female 2nd AC, Megan Morris, has been running CXG's camera department.

In fact, Dos Reis, along with other ICG cinematographers also featured in this issue – *First Look's* Zoë White (page 26) who alternated on Season Two of the Emmy-winning Hulu series *The Handmaid's Tale*, Paula Huidobro, who shot the first season of HBO's hit comedy *Barry* (page 46), and Darren Lew, who met Emmy-winning showrunner Cary Fukunaga (*Exposure*, page 30) years ago at Sundance, and is now shooting *Maniac* (page 56) – not only represent the best in television, they're standard-bearers for this union. Passion, dedication, creativity, and professionalism, in the face of many challenges, social and otherwise, have underscored the careers of all those noted above.

Crazy Ex-Girlfriend co-creator Rachel Bloom said it best in my article in describing why she loves working with Dos Reis: "There's this joy in Todd when he's being creative, and challenged in the moment. It's just really fun to see."

It is fun, but it's also essential to sustaining a career in this industry. Back in film school, Dos Reis didn't have micro-sized 4K digital cameras, LED lights that can tape onto the wall, or apps that calculate the movement of the sun for an entire shooting day, so the path was more ... traditional – apprentice, shoot anything you can, and treat every job as a learning opportunity.

Apparently, it worked.

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(*Innovate, Initiate, Invigorate*)

"It's fascinating to identify through lines across different DPs' experiences, and even more interesting to see how their specific interests inform their work. It's why I love creating the ECA winner profiles each year – they give us a quick glimpse into how these talented creators make movies."



Michele K. Short
(*Eight Miles High, Stop Motion*)

"I thrive when working on projects of epic visual scope, and *Maniac* is a highlight. Shooting on set was the equivalent of being a kid in a different candy store every day for months. Filming at many practical locations in New York City, Long Island and the Hudson Valley also greatly appealed to my sense of adventure."

CORRECTION

The photo on Page 20 (*ZOOM-IN* Jacqueline Stahl) in last month's August issue was taken by Lisa Rose.



cover photo: Scott Everett White

**GOTTA
SING**





GOTTA DANCE

TWO-TIME
TODD

A.

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REIS,

HONOREE,
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ROOTS
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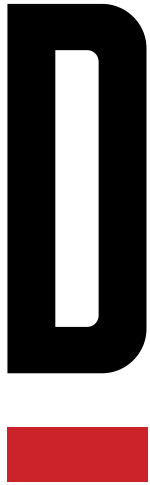
EX-GIRLFRIEND

BY DAVID GEFNER / PHOTOS BY SCOTT EVERETT WHITE



Dos Reis breaks down a shot with CXG co-writer/creator Aline Brosh McKenna

Talk about a trial by fire. When Todd A. Dos Reis, ASC, took over cinematography chores from his friend Charles Papert on the critically acclaimed CW series *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, it was not only in the middle of the season but also in the middle of an episode.



Dos Reis had been shooting additional photography for Papert during that first season. But he'd had no prep when he took over the show, which included one of CXG's notoriously ambitious musical numbers.

"My first day was this party-bus sequence, riding from West Covina to the beach," Dos Reis recounts. "After everyone has gotten off the bus, Rebecca (Rachel Bloom) and Josh (Vincent Rodriguez III) have this intense emotional moment, and then break into song. I only saw the scene once in rehearsal, so my thought was to take all the lights on the party bus down and bring up this warm sunset. The idea was to have a romantic glow where the real world drops away."

Although Dos Reis had had a brief conversation with co-writer/creator Aline Brosh McKenna, who cited the clean, classic photography of *The Devil Wears Prada* as a visual template for the show, nothing had been said about the wide-ranging musical numbers, which number from two to four per episode. "Fortunately, I had seen some of the numbers Charles had done, which were fantastic," he continues. "I could see what was possible, given the budget and time constraints."

Bringing in Dos Reis was also fortuitous for Bloom and Brosh McKenna, because, as the two-time ECA honoree recalls, "all I shot, when I left USC Film School in the early 90's, were music videos. I did more than 100, all in the \$80,000 budget range and below. I was the king of the mid-range music video for bands no one had ever seen," he laughs. "Also having DP'd on *Entourage*, where we shot up to 20 practical locations every episode – restaurants, bars, places you'd get to see for 30 minutes and then have to light – was a great foundation for *Crazy Ex.*"

The foundation of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, now entering its fourth and final season, is the musical theater/comedy sketch world from which Bloom hails. "The scripts always come first," she explains. "And since we script out every song, there are specific ideas for the style, genre and look. I think what makes the musical numbers on this show different from music videos is that everything has to serve the narrative, and then the visuals all have to fall in line with that."

After Bloom has scripted the song, the episode's director works with a storyboard artist. "While I'm approving those boards," Bloom adds, "Todd is brainstorming on the photography, often based on references I've been sending him."

The numbers are produced in controlled stage environments (like a former ice cream factory in North Hollywood, dubbed "the Fosse Stage" for the Fosse-inspired musical number "Strip Away My Conscience," from Season Three) to desolate locations in L.A.'s high desert.

One ambitious number from Season Two, "Love Kernels," was directed by Marc Webb (*The Amazing Spider-Man*, *500 Days of Summer*) and modeled after Beyoncé's long-form music video album, "Lemonade." Bloom, Brosh McKenna and Webb (who is also a co-executive producer on the series) chose locations and a visual style that would pay homage to "Lemonade" while still accurately reflecting Rebecca's starved emotional state for Josh's attention.

CXG's gaffer, Mazi Mitchell, worked on the Lemonade visual album and was able to develop some valuable elements for the aesthetic of "Love Kernels." Mitchell met Dos Reis in the heyday of music videos, and they've retained a creative bond.

"I brought Mazi on as an electric when I started on *Entourage* as an operator," Dos Reis recalls. "Danny Gonzalez, who was gaffing for Charles [Papert], stayed for the rest of Season One before going to *Mindhunter*. Mazi, who is a DP in his own right and still shoots music videos, came in for seasons two and three, and our shared history has been really helpful."

Beyoncé-inspired elements for "Love Kernels" were shot on the Fosse Stage using what Mitchell calls a "Magic Box" and which Dos Reis says gave off an "angelically soft light" for Bloom and the other women in the number. As Mitchell details: "It's a 12-foot-long, four-foot-wide, four-foot-deep Softbox that has Magic Cloth as the diffusion on the front, and six ARRI SkyPanel 60c's inside. We also had eight to ten ARRI LED L7's for backlight and to edge the talent. The L7's produce great color and that sharp, clean look we wanted."

The major practical location for "Love Kernels" was the El Mirage dry lakebed, in the high elevation of the Mojave Desert. Being the first episode of the season, Dos Reis shot in the searing July heat, capturing both color and black-and-white footage and using multiple LUT's.

"It was Day Zero," the DP remembers, "which is the new thing in television, where the prep

“WE USED 18K HMI’S AND A HUGE 20-BY-20-FOOT NATURAL GRAY, WHICH DOESN’T REFLECT INTO PEOPLE’S SKIN LIKE A WHITE SILK.”

Todd A. Dos Reis, ASC

day – Day Zero – actually becomes a shooting day. I needed light on their faces to compete with all that beautiful background sunlight, so we used 18K HMI’s and a huge 20-by-20-foot natural gray, which doesn’t reflect into people’s skin like a white silk. Our former key grip from Season Two, Chuck Smallwood, turned me on to the natural gray, and we’ve been using it ever since.”

Bloom says, “Lemonade was an inspiration [for Love Kernels] because of the general trend of music videos becoming these long, epic artsy parody Beyoncé,” she notes. “So by using our own settings, there was much more freedom to be experimental, visually speaking. All of those beauty shots in that number were basically Marc [Webb] and Todd getting very creative in the desert.”

The transitions into and out of CXG’s musical numbers are also filled with innovation.

For “Let’s Have Intercourse,” where Bloom and McKenna wanted to emulate the Ed Sheeran music video “Thinking Out Loud” (shot by Daniel Pearl, ASC), Rebecca and her shallow attorney boss, Nathaniel (Scott Michael Foster), are stuck in an elevator, when he abruptly decides they should have sex (hence the title of the number). The scene is triggered by a fade to black in the elevator and fade-in to the ballroom at L.A.’s Park Plaza Hotel.

“Those transitions are almost as important as the look of each number,” Dos Reis explains, “because I always need to know: How do we get out of the real world and into these fantasies Rebecca is having? Our dimmer-board operator needs to know what kind of programming we’ll use for ins and outs, and any color transitions.”

In the Ed Sheeran video, Pearl had lighting operators on spotlights following the performers. But, limited by the physical space at the Park Plaza, Dos Reis and Mitchell instead placed two PRG GroundControl Remote Head Bad Boy Spot Luminaires into each corner of the ballroom to follow behind Bloom and Foster as they danced alone together in the room. Lighting operators,



Emmy-winning choreographer Kat Burns says *Dos Reis* “programs as many big sweeping wide shots,” in each music video “as time allows.” ▼

hidden behind stage curtains and working off monitors, remotely controlled each unit.

Choreographer Kathryn Burns, who won an Emmy for the show’s first season musical number, “I’m So Good At Yoga,” “A Boy Band of Four Joshes” and “Settle For Me” has choreographed every episode of the series; *Dos Reis* says having a choreographer who fully understands camera movement “as well as someone who is able to make changes on the spot” has been one of the best partnerships of his career. Likewise for Burns, who describes *Dos Reis* as a choreographer’s dream.

“I know he will prioritize as many beautiful dance frames as time allows,” she says, “like the big sweeping wide shots. The choreography for ‘Let’s Have Intercourse’ was romantic with a touch of raunchy. The lifts were purposefully awkward and difficult and could only be executed a few times, so camera and choreo had to work in tandem.

“Like all of my work on *Crazy Ex*,” Burns continues, “Todd will check in to make sure we are in sync and inspired. I can adjust spacing to make shooting more efficient for lighting, and that way we can spend our precious shooting time, normally half a day for one entire music video, capturing the dance as many times as possible.”

Dos Reis often uses multiple cameras for the musical numbers; for “Intercourse” he employed Steadicam, dolly and a 15-foot Technocrane. Each of the rigs was designed to move in as the other moved out, working in sync with Burns’ choreography.

“My operators – Ian Dodd and Taj Teffaha (on Steadicam) – are so remarkable, we sometimes shoot the rehearsal,” *Dos Reis* exclaims. “With only one DP, you don’t really get prep, so I came up with a system that the tech scout day becomes my prep day with the new director for the musical numbers. Ian then moves up to DP, Taj goes to A-camera, and we bring in another operator to shoot that day, which are practicals/dialogue scenes on stage or location.”

Dodd, who will take over DP chores for Season Four as *Dos Reis* moves on to shoot the new OWN series, *David Makes Man* (created by *Moonlight* Oscar winner Tarell McCraney), describes *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* as a cross of *Arrested Development* meets *Glee*.

“I was actually the A-camera operator on the original *Arrested* series,” Dodd says, “and that delighted Rachel Bloom because [*Arrested Development*] is a big influence on her brand of comedy.”

Dodd and *Dos Reis* met more than 20 years ago when they were both focus-pullers.

“When Todd called me to join *CXG* on Season Two,” Dodd



outlines, “it was with the idea that I would cover him as DP one or two days per episode when he was prepping with the next director. So, for two seasons I’ve been working with Mazi [Mitchell] to keep the show looking the way Todd wants; and if I’ve done my job, nobody can see a difference between the days Todd was lighting and the ones I was covering for him.” Dodd says it’s gratifying there wasn’t “much of a conversation” about who would fill Todd’s shoes for Season Four.

“I know the look, the cast, the crew and most of the directors,” he adds. “Rachel and Aline felt confident in having me take the reins. And I’m excited to have the opportunity.”

Papert’s setup for the first season was to use three to four Angénieux zoom lenses, which helped to keep costs under control. Dos Reis continued that trend for the remainder of Season One, and again for Season Two. “In Season Three, Joseph Kahn came in to direct an episode, and he wanted primes,” Dos Reis says with a broad smile. “I had been asking if I could use Leica primes for awhile, and had always been turned down, so I sensed an opportunity.”

After Joe Kahn’s episode, Dos Reis was successful in having the show change over to prime lenses. “I first used the [Leica primes] on *Entourage*, which was shot entirely on 35mm,” he recounts, “and I could literally see the difference in the viewfinder. They render skin tones so beautifully; it’s almost like having a wrap-around light even when you don’t have a light on the actor’s face.”

First Assistant Eric Dyson says falling behind schedule on a TV show is not an option, so adding an element [like prime lenses] that can increase set-up time left him skeptical, at first.

“The last time Todd was this excited was when the Celtics won the championship,” Dyson laughs. “But we all got on board with the Leica primes

pretty quickly. The cinematic quality of those lenses is outstanding. When the department head has an insatiable zest for cinematography, you’re either with him or against him. I’m happy to say we were all with him.”

The Leica primes are showcased well on a musical number from Season Three, “Strip Away My Conscience,” that seems to harness all of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*’s creative synergy. Inspired by the airplane striptease segment from Bob Fosse’s *All That Jazz*, and more centrally, the “All That Jazz” musical number from *Chicago* (shot by Dion Beebe, ASC, ACS), Dos Reis and Mitchell bathed the Fosse stage in reds, pinks, and Tungsten to pay homage to the famed Broadway musical director’s use of spare scene design punctuated by pools of hard spotlighting.

The scene begins with Rebecca speaking to Nathaniel in his apartment, with the latter backed up to a large king bed. The camera, behind Nathaniel and facing Rebecca, suddenly pivots 180 degrees as the apartment transforms into a Fosse-like stage, with pools of colored light shining down, and the bed alone in the center of the room.

“That was one transition I could not do in-camera,” Dos Reis laughs, “as it had to be a visual effect. The end of the number, however, was all done in-camera, as we are on a static frame on Rachel as she takes off all her clothes. We can’t show that on television, of course, so we had an electrician manually narrow down a spotlight to black. If we had a bigger budget it would have all been digitally programmed, but we didn’t, so it had to all be old school. And it looked great!”

Bloom’s main concern with the number was how the action would be staged to support the writing – Rebecca “stripping away her conscience (and clothes)” to sleep with the shallow corporate shill, Nathaniel. Bloom says an homage blending Fosse with a high-end bordello was key to the number. “I love how it feels like we’re on a stage with the bedroom so stark,” she relates.

Burns says the dance number was one of her favorites to choreograph.

“Fosse’s work is so iconic, so I wanted to honor it,” she describes. “But without stealing, and also making it funny, and keeping it cool like a Jack Cole jazz number. The number was meant to be captured from many angles at once, so communication between departments was key.”

Dodd, who describes camera movement on CXG as a “literal dance” between the operator, focus-puller, dolly grip and the actors, was on the Technocrane for “Strip Away Your Conscience.” He says he and Dolly Grip Dwayne Barr would be working on their own camera choreography – often in real time over the headsets – to enhance the actors’ movements.

“Rather than be fixated on the monitor [while operating the remote head], I love moving with the flow of the music, camera, and actors,” Dodd shares. “Crewmembers who saw my private dance at the wheels

**“WHEN THE DEPARTMENT HEAD HAS AN
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YOU’RE EITHER WITH HIM OR AGAINST HIM.
I’M HAPPY TO SAY WE WERE ALL WITH HIM.”**

First Assistant Eric Dyson



▲
Dos Reis and Gaffer Mazi Mitchell used hard (colored) spotlighting for the Bob Fosse-inspired number, "Strip Away My Conscience."




[on “Strip Away”] said it was almost as entertaining to watch as Kat Burns’ carefully-rehearsed choreography,” he laughs.

What’s also a joy to watch, according to co-showrunner Bloom, is Dos Reis in the throes of a creative moment on set. “Todd cares so much about the work,” she concludes. “I really respect his input, and value so much those conversations we’ve had on set, where he’ll bring an idea that’s not only visually interesting but truly serves the writing. I’m like: ‘Wow, I never would have thought of it.’ Really glad he’s here.”

Dos Reis says such creative energy is a common sight in television these days. “The content coming from the streaming platforms, as well as the creative risks being taken from traditional networks, is unprecedented,” states Dos Reis, who adds that his career path is slightly ironic “given that all I learned at USC Film School was the auteur system of features. When I started in episodic, I was like: ‘Wait, I have a new director every seven days?!’ That’s not how it was when [I began as] a camera assistant [for Russell Carpenter, ASC].”

As for this year’s crop of ECA honorees, he notes that “they have a lot more options in television than I had [after winning] my first ECA [in 1999], as I couldn’t jump from 1st AC to DP at that time. So many producers are looking for fresh eyes these days. I’ve been a judge [for the ECA’s] for a while, and the quality just seems to rise every year.”

Reflecting on his time with *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*, Dos Reis says the best part is having the luxury “to do something amazingly different every single episode. *Entourage* offered a similar kind of freshness, and the musical numbers on *Crazy Ex* allow me to do that three times every week. Also, this show is unique because three amazingly creative women run it – Rachel Bloom, Aline Brosh McKenna and [Executive Producer] Sarah Caplan. I’ve always had diverse crews, going back to my music video days. [A-camera 1st AC] Eric Dyson, [B-Camera 2nd AC] Eric Wheeler, and Mazi Mitchell [Gaffer] are all African-American, and [Second AC] Megan Morris runs my camera department. That range of experience, along with our female showrunners and producers, makes for a very special type of energy on the set. And I love that!” 

LOCAL 600 CREW

SEASONS 2 & 3

Director of Photography
Todd A. Dos Reis, ASC

A-Camera Operator
Additional Dir. of Photography
Ian Dodd

A-Camera 1st AC
Eric Dyson

A-Camera 2nd AC
Megan Morris

B-Camera Operator/Steadicam
Taj Teffaha (Season 2)
Richard Crow, SOC (Season 3)

B-Camera 1st AC
Joel Perkal

B-Camera 2nd AC
Eric Wheeler

Utility
Genna Palermo (Season 2)
Andres Raygoza (Season 3)

Loader
Sam McConville

Still Photographers
Scott E. White
Robert Voets