



JASON CUDDY

## Marcella: Scandi-noir drama shot in summer London

One of the hit new TV dramas of 2016 was ITV's 'scandi-noir' style detective series *Marcella*. Now the series, which earned Anna Friel a 'Best Actress' Emmy, is back for a second series. With 4K shooting a requirement, as the show transmits on Netflix as well as ITV, plus some tight locations to contend with, Director of Photography **Kate Reid** opted to shoot on the Panasonic VariCam 35.

When award-winning cinematographer Kate Reid was asked to shoot the highly anticipated return of London-based drama *Marcella*, she was presented with a challenge. The first series of the scandi-noir crime drama had been shot largely at night and in the middle of a London winter. As a result, it had a dark, foreboding look befitting the drama. The problem was that, this time, schedules meant the filming had to be done in the summer. Nevertheless, the writer Hans Rosenfeldt and returning first series director, Charles Martin, were keen to maintain a similar look for Series 2.

*Marcella* is executive produced by Rosenfeldt, Nicola Larder and Buccaneer Media's founder, Tony Wood, who created the joint venture production company in partnership with global entertainment company Cineflix Media. The ITV drama, also

shown on Netflix, was a big hit in 2016, attracting more than 9 million viewers at its peak. It follows Anna Friel, as Detective Marcella Backland, in Series 2 investigating the death of a young boy whose body has been discovered several years after his disappearance.

"I knew of the show as I'd seen and enjoyed the first series. It was appealing to shoot a contemporary story. The subject matter is pretty dark, so there is a licence to light in a very dramatic way, and I was happy to follow in the same vein as the first series as I had enjoyed the style," DoP Kate explains.

### About Kate Reid, DoP

Kate Reid may be a relatively new name on the TV drama circuit to some, but her CV is rapidly acquiring an impressive list of credits. Her first mainstream TV show as DoP was *Call*

*the Midwife* (opening episodes of Series 6), then *Uncle and Trust Me* followed, before the *Marcella* shoot last year. At the time of writing, Kate is currently filming the new Mike Bartlett (writer of *Doctor Foster*) six-part drama, *Press*, for Lookout Point Media, due to broadcast on the BBC this autumn.

Kate acquired a BA(Hons) degree in English Literature and Theatre Studies at Leeds University, but even while at university knew that what she was most interested in was camerawork and film-making. An opportunity for an exchange year came up, which she was fortunate enough to spend at University of California, Santa Cruz, studying Photography and Film-Making. The teaching on the film side was pretty basic on a practical level, mostly comprising borrowing gear for the weekend and going out and shooting short films with little or no guidance. However, it was a great way to learn what worked and what didn't, and the students would all support and critique each other's work.

After University, Kate sought out work as a camera trainee, moving up to 2nd AC, and eventually working on some pretty big films, including *Batman Begins*, *Thunderbirds* and *The Brothers Grimm*. Next came an MA in Cinematography at the National Film and Television School (NFTS), where Kate was awarded the Freddie Francis Scholarship Award.

After that it was out into the world as a fledgling DoP, shooting a stream of short films, documentaries and a few indie features, often working alongside people she had met at the NFTS. Like most DoPs, Kate has a regular crew she enjoys working with, several of whom have been alongside her since those 'low budget' days, so she says it's nice to be able to work together on better financed projects now "as a way of saying thank you" for all the favours! These crew members include talented 2nd ACs Daniel Wombwell and Sonia Rodriguez (respective A and B camera assistants on *Marcella*) and Jason Cuddy, who focused B camera for most of the dailies, with Chris Pollitt joining Kate as 1st AC on A camera.

Another important network building opportunity, which Kate embraced wholeheartedly, was the Women in Film and Television (WFTV) mentoring scheme, an excellent initiative where WFTV selects around 20 professionals from different areas of the TV/film industry to form an invaluable support group. Each member of the group has a mentor (in Kate's case, DoP John de Borman – *The Full Monty*, *Made in Dagenham*, *Quartet*), which is obviously a great part of the arrangement, but Kate says equally useful were the regular group meetings and seminars where different members would present sessions on their own areas of expertise. See more about the WFTV mentoring scheme: <https://wftv.org.uk/mentoring>.

### Prepping for Marcella

With *Marcella* being shown on Netflix, 4K was an essential, so Kate set about testing camera options for the series:

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The VariCam 35 had two significant advantages over the Sony F65 for this shoot – it is physically smaller, so would be good for the tight locations... and it generates less data, which would have workflow advantages.



Cast members of *Marcella*, Series 2 in action (l to r) Jack Doolan, Anna Friel and Ray Panthaki

"Shooting in 4K is a requirement for Netflix productions, which led to a shortlist of five cameras I wanted to test, none of which I had any prior experience of, including two REDs, the Sony F65 on which the first series had been shot, as well as the VariCam 35 and VariCam LT."

The choice came down to the VariCam 35 and Sony F65, both of which gave beautiful images, but the VariCam 35 had two significant advantages for this shoot – it is physically smaller, so would be good for the tight locations: "The compact size was one of the deciding factors as we would be shooting in physically small spaces, which would require the camera to be handheld at times." Secondly, the VariCam generates less data, which would have workflow advantages, especially as the director likes to shoot two cameras and we would therefore be generating more footage.

Rental company Panavision UK were fantastically supportive, which enabled the production to carry two cameras for the whole shoot. With a general preference for "old glass" to soften a potentially over-sharp digital image, Kate tested both the Panavision PVintage lenses, which had been used on Series 1, and Canon K35s, which she also loves and uses frequently. The PVintage lenses are rehoused glass from decades-old Ultra Speed lenses and in the end Kate opted for these. Since the camera was going to be a change from Series 1, this would ensure an element of visual continuity. "The director, Charles Martin, was very happy with the way Series 1 looked, so making a camera change

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Kate pushed to shoot 2:1 (an aspect ratio that sits between the more familiar TV 16:9 and full-blown cinema 2.35:1, a frame size becoming increasingly popular for prestige TV dramas since the success of series such as *House of Cards* and *The Crown*).



Contemplating a lighting setup

between series could have been risky, but once he'd seen the test footage he was fine, as were the show's producers, so they supported my decision to change cameras."

One concern had been whether the VariCam would achieve the strong, rich blacks the director really likes – but once he had seen the tests he was convinced that we could accomplish this with the VariCam. Kate was also impressed with the VariCam's dual ISO feature. "When I read about it, I thought it sounded a bit of a gimmick, so I shot some tests which mimicked some scenes in the script, one of which would be set in a park at night where I'd be relying primarily on available light. I was expecting the 5000 ISO to be very noisy, but it was really great to look at the test footage with Molinare's senior colourist, Andrew Daniel (who was also the colourist on Series 1 of *Marcella*), back in the grading suite, and to see how good it really was. This feature turned out to be a real bonus of the camera." The dual ISO feature means the camera actually has two native or optimal ISO settings (800 and 5000), so by changing the mode to shoot at the faster ISO there is no increased gain in the image.

Equally important was how the camera would handle highlights as this was to be a summer shoot: "After shooting the test footage and taking it into the grading suite, it was



Using a strong light source from outside, with little else in the room, allowed for shape and shadows that felt faithful to the season and scripted time of day, but created a moodier morning that reflects the tone of the scene and Marcella's state of mind

really interesting to see how much we could pull back in the highlights, which was reassuring, as I knew that shooting in summer there was a good chance I would have to manage blown-out windows in certain locations where I didn't have much control over them, so this further supported my decision to use the camera."

Getting used to a new camera did take some time though. "Because I'd shot with an ARRI ALEXA for a number of years, of course there were some things that were different, but on the whole I felt confident, and it helps that the menu structures are pretty comparable."

Kate also pushed to shoot 2:1 (an aspect ratio that sits between the more familiar TV 16:9 and full-blown cinema 2.35:1, a frame size becoming increasingly popular for prestige TV dramas since the success of series such as *House of Cards* and *The Crown*). This was a move away from Series 1's 16:9 format: "Series 2 of *Marcella* spends a lot of time in domestic environments and narratively didn't require the scale of some of the locations seen in Series 1. I was conscious of wanting to create a cinematic frame despite the more domestic narrative and settings, and felt moving the aspect ratio to 2:1 helped contribute to this."

### Keeping the look consistent

With the second series shot in summer, the producers faced a challenge in trying to maintain the dark, thriller feel while still utilising a high level of natural light in order to keep the shoot moving at pace. Kate set about exploring some reference ideas: "I re-watched Jane Campion's 2003 thriller *In the Cut* (DoP Dion Beebe ACS, ASC), which is set during a hot New York summer and yet achieves an incredible atmosphere despite (arguably because of) the bright sunshine outside. They managed to capture the feel of the oppressive heat and to play with the very dark shadows inside buildings that result from having such harsh bright sunlight outside. That was a really helpful reference for me in terms of imagining



DMG Lumière's Switch lights

looking like other scandi-noir dramas and to give it a unique London identity. London at night was a strong visual feature of Series 1, with lots of night exteriors, strong sodium colours and street lighting." For Series 2, Kate achieved this by making the colours deep and saturated rather than overt use of colour, although there might, for instance, be colour introduced to the shadows. "I looked to introduce colours in a way that made them feel motivated by the scene and locations they were part of, but moved it beyond the naturalistic, so the colours were more saturated, heightened and dramatic. So, basically running with

a *Marcella* world with the sun out."Of course, sunshine couldn't be guaranteed on a UK shoot though, so this idea was tempered with the reality of needing to match interiors to potentially flat or overcast exteriors and settings, but wherever Kate had control of the environment, this was what led the lighting style.

In fact, shooting in UK weather is nothing if not variable, so to enable fast matching to changing natural light, on *Marcella* Kate favoured the new-generation colour-tuneable LEDs, which can be quickly adjusted whenever daylight conditions change. A particular favourite lamp was the very versatile Switch, from French company DMG Lumière. She likes to use textiles in front of the lamps instead of diffusion gels (a more resource-efficient alternative, although she confesses this choice is more down to the look that can be achieved than an explicit intention to use sustainable materials).

A very important aspect of the look for *Marcella* is the use of colour. "The colours in *Marcella* are very strong and this palette is intrinsic to the show's look. This was part of the remit in order to ensure its identity and move it away from



Director Charles Martin and Kate discuss a shot

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the natural motivation of a lighting source but enhancing the colour – this was easier to justify in night-time scenes, or dark interiors where I could create sources that gave this motivation, as well as push some of the desired colour into the shadows. I really had fun with colour on *Marcella*, playing with a strong palette and working with complementary colours that helped add contrast to the lighting, in scenes where there was the opportunity to do this without it feeling incongruous to the space or story.”

## Slow camera movement for suspense

Another way in which the required mood was achieved was by pushing the ‘thriller’ feel through the style of camera movement. Although the camera had been selected partly because its smaller size would facilitate easier handheld shooting where necessary, in fact not much was actually shot handheld, this being reserved mainly for very tight locations where any other option would be too time-consuming, and for a few plot-driven sequences, such as when *Marcella* is in a ‘fugue’ state (fugue is a dissociative disorder characterised by reversible amnesia, from which *Marcella* suffers). More favoured were long, slow creeping tracks, perhaps along a corridor, to build suspense. In this way, any mood that might have been diluted through shooting in summer was made up for by the increase in tension created through the style of camera movement.

As mentioned, Martin likes to shoot with two cameras whenever possible to capture best performances and give more options in the edit, so there was often a B camera/Steadicam operator out on set. In the police station, which is a key location of the drama, two cameras were in use most of the time. In general, Kate prefers to operate the

To give day interiors a dark and dramatic feel in keeping with Series 1, despite being shot in summer, wherever possible Kate lit to suggest a bright day outside that allowed for the interiors to fall off into shadow. Here the addition of colour to the light sources (paper on the windows and lamp by the bed) allowed for the subtle introduction of colour to the scene

camera herself and, whilst she has no objection to working with an operator (as was the setup on *Call the Midwife*), she is accustomed to lighting and operating together.

## AVC-ULTRA

The idea of shooting RAW was considered but the VariCam also incorporates a newly developed super 35mm MOS image sensor and AVC-ULTRA family of video codecs. “I tested both RAW and the AVC-ULTRA, and whilst I really wanted to shoot RAW as I noticed a significant difference in how the image could be manipulated in the grade, the data consumption was just too great to justify for our production needs when the image we were getting using AVC-ULTRA was still really strong. Plus, the director’s preference to shoot two cameras wherever possible, meant our production anticipated large volumes of data daily, so this precluded shooting RAW from a practical/cost perspective,” explains Kate.

Overall, Kate enjoyed shooting on the VariCam 35: “I have to say I really liked the VariCam 35. The compact size of it was a deciding factor and I was also very impressed with the VariCam’s picture and especially the dual ISO feature.”



## Fact File

**Kate Reid** is a UK DoP working primarily in drama and commercials. Her work has screened in competitions at international festivals including Sundance, Berlin and SXSW. She has shot several independent fiction and documentary features and her TV drama credits include new forthcoming BBC ONE series *Press*, on which she is series DoP, *Marcella* (Series 2), *Trust Me*, *Uncle* and *Call the Midwife*. She studied cinematography at the NFTS, graduating in 2007 having worked as a camera assistant in the UK film industry prior to this.

Kate is represented by Silvia Llaguno at United Agents.