

JENNIFER WOLFE

GIRLS ON THE GO

Broad City Requires Fast, Flexible Camera Work



PHOTO BY LINDA-KALLERUS

Ilana Glazer (left) and Abbi Jacobson in *Broad City*

Comedy Central's weekly half-hour scripted series *Broad City*, executive produced by Amy Poehler, stars Upright Citizens Brigade alums Abbi Jacobson and Ilana Glazer as a pair of endearing, cash-strapped twentysomethings trying to survive in New York City.

Produced in New York by Paper Kite Productions, 3 Arts Entertainment and Jax Media, *Broad City* began as a web series in late 2009 and made the transition to television in January.

Featuring cameos by the likes of Fred Armisen,

Janeane Garofalo and Amy Sedaris, the show's charm is derived from its struggling heroines and some of the miscreants who populate their world. The cast is rounded out by Hannibal Buress, Arturo Castro, Paul Downs, John Gemberling, Chris Gethard and Stephen Schneider.

Cinematographer Steve Calitri employed two ARRI Alexa Plus cameras outfitted with Angenieux Optimo zoom and Cooke S4 prime lenses to capture footage for the series. "It was more about speed than anything—speed and the camera's

latitude for rendering skin tones," Calitri says of the decision to go with the Alexa over the RED, which, given the show's budget, would have been the other option.

"Basically, it's closer to shooting on film," he continues. "I can get away with more [with Alexa]. The RED is a little more finicky on a lot of levels, so even with natural light you usually end up putting more work into shots, which doesn't allow you to move as quickly. With its speed and latitude, I thought the Alexa was the best camera for the job."

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Calitri relies on his background in lighting to help him make rapid choices while filming. “It’s all about making quick decisions, not really re-lighting or anything like that. It’s just making sure that whatever we decide gives the talent more time,” he says. “The realism of the show’s design, with its comedy-slash-documentary feel, allows us to move more quickly as well.”

Striving for a cinematic look for *Broad City*, Calitri seeks to capture filmic moments whenever he can.

“I wanted to get away from always having a sitcom look,” he explains. “There were a lot of great moments with the sun coming through a window and being beautiful and maybe being a little more contrasty or cinematic than what’s expected for a comedy show, but we really savored allowing beautiful to things to happen, as opposed to making it slap all the time.

“That’s what we’re hoping for, trying to get shots with longer lenses and trying to occasionally have moments where shallow depth of field could work without getting in the way of the comedy,” Calitri continues. “One of the bigger things I’m always asking is, when do I need to stop down and make sure everything’s in focus, and when can I stay in a shallower plane so I can keep things more interesting looking and have a more vivid image?”

New York City serves not only as a backdrop for the series but as a separate character the production employs—both to help set the tone for the show and boost the overall comedic effect. “Since we’re in a low-budget world where you can’t really block off too much, there are moments when we’ll run into a crowded area filled with real people,” Calitri relates. “I’ll use a long lens to capture that close, congested feel, and then a wide lens to show the space they’re in, like a comedic reveal. There’s a lot of footage of them saying strange things and being awkward and then [us] showing the space, showing that they’re in public. We like to do these wider reveals because it works both ways: it showcases the city and it brings home the joke.”

“You’ll notice more raw New York City moments that feel real in *Broad City* than in any other show shot in New York,” Calitri maintains. “It’s about trying to blend the areas we control with the areas we don’t control. Because of the style in which it’s shot, it looks like we’re sneaking in everywhere, getting there just as [the action] happens. Even when we’re creating the crowd, we want it to have the same sense of chaos as when we’re grabbing footage on the street.” **dv**