

JENNIFER WOLFE

PAST AND PRESENT INTERTWINE IN *LADY DYNAMITE*

Cinematographer Heimo Ritzinger Develops the Show's Look

Lady Dynamite, Maria Bamford's semi-autobiographical comedy series for Netflix, is as weird as it is wonderful. Created and executive produced by *Arrested Development*'s Mitch Hurwitz and *South Park*'s Pam Brady, *Lady Dynamite* has a knockout supporting cast, led by Bridget Everett and Lennon Parham as Bamford's besties, Fred Melamed as her longtime agent Bruce Ben-Bacharach, and *SNL*'s Ana Gasteyer as a cut-throat agent, set against a backdrop filled with a slew of guest stars including Sarah Silverman, Patton Oswalt, Tig Notaro, Jon Cryer, Mira Sorvino and, in a recurring role as Bamford's life coach, the

fantastic Jenny Slate.

The central plot, which tracks Bamford's attempts to create a balanced life for herself in Hollywood following a period of hospitalization for bipolar II disorder, interweaves three separate timelines: "Past," the neon-bright era before her breakdown that saw her working as the television spokesperson for a national chain of big-box stores; "Duluth," the hazy, unfocused time in the hospital and her parents' Midwestern home after her mental collapse; and "Present," in which a medicated Bamford gamely tries to restart her career while struggling not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Austrian-born, Park City, Utah-based cinematographer Heimo Ritzinger shot all 12 episodes of the first season of *Lady Dynamite*, creating separate looks for each of the three timelines in order to help viewers keep track of the story as it loops and winds towards Bamford's present-day existence as a stand-up comedian in Los Angeles.

The series was shot over the course of five months primarily using three Sony F55 CineAlta 4K cameras outfitted with two sets of Zeiss Compact Prime Super Speed lenses. With the exception of the material shot for the Duluth sequences, all three cameras were employed simultaneously for each



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Most of the show takes place in the present day, as Maria learns to balance her healthy zest for life with a grab bag of everyday anxieties. Maria Bamford (played by Maria Bamford) is shown above with longtime agent Bruce Ben-Bacharach (Fred Melamed).



The color palette changes significantly between the show's time periods. Scenes that take place in the "past" (pre-breakdown, below) are much brighter and more colorful than the cold, blue-hued Duluth sequences (above).





A dolly-mounted Sony F55 films a special effects sequence with Bamford. Also pictured is special effects coordinator Jonathan Kombrink.



Maria with friends Dagmar (Bridget Everett) and Larissa (Lennon Parham)



Shooting a Duluth scene in Minneapolis.



From left, Maria's mom Marilyn Bamford (Mary Kay Place), Maria, her dad Joel Bamford (Ed Begley Jr.) and Maria's childhood friend Susan (Mo Collins)

scene, making lighting setups particularly tricky.

Lighting was “fast and furious,” according to Ritzinger. “In the beginning, the production was all over me,” he relates. “Women of a certain age like to look pretty, obviously, and everybody expects a certain look, but we didn’t have time for the lighting setups that can entail. In the end, we put together a specific package that we could set up quickly, and stuck with that.”

For the Duluth sequences, Ritzinger and his team employed two Sony PXW-FS7 camcorders. “All of the Minnesota footage was shot on the FS7, which is actually an exception for Netflix because it’s not a 4K raw camera, which they usually require,” Ritzinger recounts. “We went UHD for just those sequences, which provided a slightly lower-quality look compared to everything else. We wanted to make the whole thing look a little bit cold and colorless. It wasn’t a happy time in her life, so we didn’t want to make it look pretty.”

While setting the initial look for the Duluth sequences, Ritzinger became enamored with the look of the raw footage from the FS7, which the production used as a reference for the final look. “Why don’t we just leave it raw?” he asked, rhetorically. “It looks sad, it looks flat, it looks

depressing, and that’s what we’re trying to show for that time period. All of that was in the raw image. I was really excited about the idea, but in the end they did color it a little bit.”

For the “past” sequences, Ritzinger developed a color palette dominated by strong reds to help highlight the frenetic pace of Bamford’s successful career. While the camera remained locked during the blue-toned Duluth sequences, Ritzinger employed smooth dolly and Steadicam moves for the “past” sections, neatly matched by the lighting and Bamford’s professional-grade hair and makeup. In contrast, the “present” features handheld cameras and more prosaic production values.

Postproduction was handled by Encore



The very unusual three-camera setup

Hollywood, with colorist Laura Janz-Fazio tackling color correction. “Laura does *House of Cards* and everything, so she was incredible. I was very excited when she came on,” Ritzinger says. “I worked with her 15 years ago when I first started working in commercials, and she color graded all my commercials on celluloid film.”

Dailies were delivered via PIX, combining custom LUTs Ritzinger created in collaboration with digital imaging technician Josh Jupiter with the day’s footage. “We sent them our looks and colors together with a daily drop, and it was a nice workflow because it allowed you to really catch up between the long shooting days and the weekends. We would sit together, look over all the dailies, and then make a transmit from there.”

As Ritzinger’s first television series, *Lady Dynamite* was quite a departure from the cinematographer’s commercial and documentary work. “The freedom of workflow we had was just incredible,” he says. “The producers couldn’t believe it. We would have meetings, and they would look over and ask, ‘Could we do that?’ And Netflix would say, ‘Yeah, just go ahead. Do whatever you want.’ They were stunned. They were like, ‘Wow. We can get things done.’” **dv**