



## **COLOR IN FABLE WAY**

Latin America TV series have been successful and still are booming. Such success is reflected in the considerable quantity of productions filmed. From the soap operas to TV series, the same changes happen around the world: TV treatments are changing into more cinematographic ways. This is the case of the TV series produced by 11:11 films to RCN TV in Colombia about the mythical boxer Antonio Cervantes, Kid Pambelé. The DoP Alfonso Parra AEC, ADFC, photographed it and we have had a talk with him and his closer team.

**Adriana Bernal:** How did you get involved in this project? Which was the first contact related with this series?

**Alfonso Parra:** The production team got in contact with me because, as you already told, they were searching for a more cinematographic look for the series; they considered that I could be the appropriate person to do it. We had the first meeting with the directors Sergio Osorio and Juancho Cardona who had seen my work through my website. We understood each other immediately and we began to work together.

**A.B.** Which was the photographic approach to the series?

**A.P.** The Kid Palembé boxer's history is a dramatic history; it is about a life coming from the most absolute poverty until reaching the highest and later fall down among drugs, alcohol and waste of money. After reading the overview, the step outline and the first thirty chapters, we could define the photographic frame. Sergio told me that he did not want to portray poverty in a realistic way, hurtful, and this is why it came to my mind to recreate Palembé's life as a visual fable, with a natural processing from the light point of view, but at all realistic.

**A.B.** What do you mean exactly by a natural processing but not realistic?

**A.P.** I mean that we use natural light sources; we imitate them and in such way respect their directions. However, the final outcome, after the color processing, that is, its appearance, does not lead to a realistic approach, but a certain coloring invention.

**A.B.** Could you please explain a bit more the idea?

**A.P.** I think that it is essential to conceptualize the photography from the very beginning of the production, for this reason I like to show to the Heads of the Department, directors and producers the photography framework I prefer.



*Alfonso Parra AEC, ADFC. Cinematographer*

Such proposal included three different color gamut related to the three different periods of the Kid Pambelé's life: the first one regarding to his childhood during the fifties, the second during the sixties and the beginning of the seventies until winning the World Title in 1972, and finally the post world championship triumph time. The color gamut ranges from least to greatest, from the childhood until the success period and the following decline. The alteration of color with regard to the two first periods not only refers to the spectator to the past, what allows to establish a close relationship with the character, but also shows the character's own vision about his past, which despite of being surrounded by poverty it was also marked by strength, courage and struggle. Thus, the alteration of color joints both targets together, which contrasts with the last part of the series, where a very cinematographic colorimetry, a digital precise reproduction of the Kodak Vision positive emulsion shows to the spectators a different present time: they can see the success in addition to decline of our main character.

With such procedures I tried to immerse spectators in the Pambelé's emotional environment: It was always made from the recognition of one hero in a dramatic Greek-style, one hero who again and again challenges both reality and himself and always is defeated.

I have to tell you that the procedure of color was thought to the skin tones too which were basically obscure, with all kind of hues and lightings.

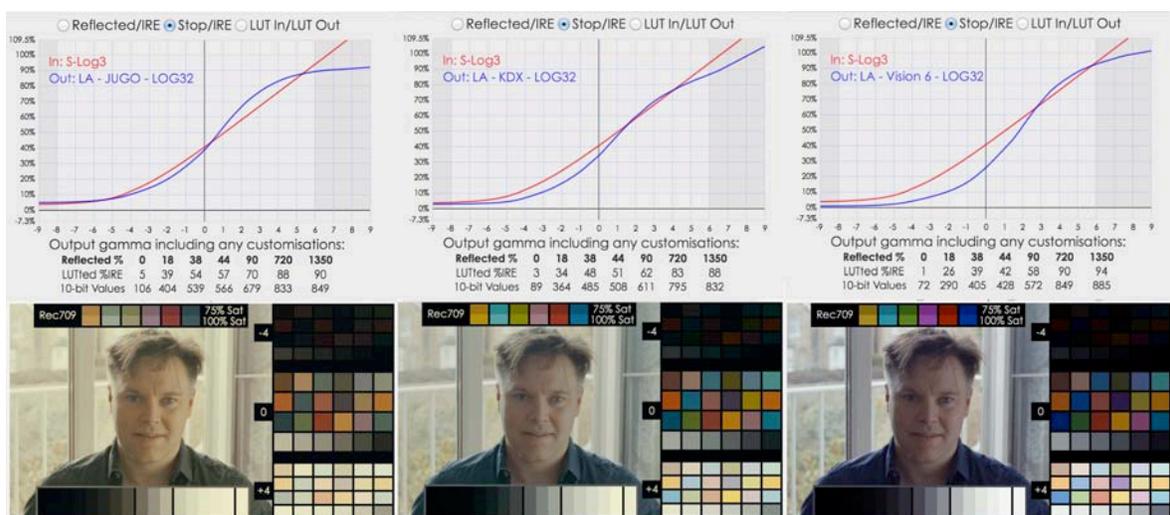
**A.B.** How did you express technically such approach? Which tools did you use?

**A.P.** We have used the Sony F5 recording at HD with the XAVC-I codec to 29.97 fps and the S-Gamut color space, the largest provided by these cameras; in addition we have finally colorized with Base Light at REC 709. As a DoP I like to establish a complete view of the image processing at both production and postproduction phases, therefore it is essential for me to make some tests. In this case, I decided to use for the color processing the Color Grading Osiris LUTs. (<http://www.colorgradingcentral.com/>). I already used once these LUTs and liked very much. I chose three of them, one for each life period: Jugo, KDX and finally Vision6. These LUTs gave me the chromatic scale, which I wanted to develop in each period: the shortest range to his childhood, a bit more large to his training

to become a boxer, and a range much larger and colder to his proclamation as World Champion and decline. I worked on a chromatic scale to which I applied the LUTs and together with the Art Director Diana Trujillo studied how colors changed and how we have to manage them, and then I analyzed the LUTs and changed through LUTcalc (<http://cameramanben.github.io/LUTCalc/>) to see the different results. With such conclusions, we shot the samples and finally, with the colorist Sergio Palacios, tuned up at RCN BaseLight. We show our results to both production and the people in charge of the television network and they finally agreed to the proposal.

The LUTs have created not only the series “look” but also the texture regarding the noise. I like how LUTs “colorize” the camera noise; they give to the image a texture less sharp and closer to the analogical emulsions.

**A.B.** We have with us some images that you have kindly given up us. Could you please comment on them a bit?



**A.P.** Of course, I could. On the top image, we can see the effect of the Osiris LUTs on the Slog3 curve of the F5 camera. As you can see the Jugo LUT gives a warm feeling with a moderate contrast, green tones vanish to significant extent, turning skin tones into yellow-like and creating a feeling of old-fashioned image. The LUT follow what the Antonio’s flashback regarding his childhood. The second LUT, the KDX, shows larger tone gamut, however turns still slightly into yellow-like at highlight. It changes both red and yellow into orange-like. During the test I saw that dark skin tones changed to a warm one which seemed to me suitable. The third LUT, the Vision 6, has the largest chromatic gamut, with a lot of contrast and colder tone. The last LUT is related to the rise period of the boxer and his following decline. If you pay attention to the values that tables show you can see the contrast amongst the different LUTs in addition three curves put in comparison. The Vision6 gives higher contrast with very deep black. In this time, we had to change black because it was too dark for TV broadcasting. As we have already said, this change easily could be done with the LUTcalc, thus we can customize the LUT for our own needs.

As you can see I have built a direct relationship between the warm tones and the Pambelé's past, warm because, on the one hand the texture of the image refers to other time in the spectator's mind, on the other hand refers to the idealistic picture that the character has about his own past. On the contrary, a larger contrast and a colder image place to the spectator in a present time less comfortable caused by the character's decline.

We can check on the next images how the LUTs capture the Pambelé's dramatic story. The first image belongs to his childhood; as we can see the chromatic gamut is short, green vanishes and the general tone is above all warm. The second image belongs to the Antonio Cervantes' clandestine crossing border to Venezuela before becoming famous. The last image shows Aurora, the Pambelé's lover, in a New York hotel; cold tones with deep black and strong blue prevail much more.



*Alfonso Parra together with Sergio Osorio planning a Steadycam shot.*



*LUT Jugo\_log Osiris*



LUT KDX\_Log



LUT Vision6\_log

Due to the changes that LUTs make over colors I had to change the color temperature of my devices. I have usually cooled or heated them with either  $1/8$  CTB or  $1/4$  CTO; it depended on both color temperature of the light sources and the selected temperature in the camera, which in the most of the time have been  $4300^{\circ}\text{K}$ . The reason was to get nice skin tones and in the same time to create suitable atmosphere regarding each situation. Of course, such appearances have been used in order to create a kind of lighting very specific as it is to work deeply the dim light what I like very much. To me, shaping with dim light is

relating to the Italian Quattrocento, to Piero de la Francesca, to the light which seems to be everywhere and emanate from the own characters.

**A.B.** It is clear, but in this case colors are very soft, typical of the fresco; however in Pambelé colors are stronger.

**A.P.** It is true and I am very interested in the mixture of a soft light and bright colors. In fact, the choice for the Sony camera is related to it.

**A.B.** Could you please explain it to us? Why the F5?

**A.P.** Each camera shows the color in a different way. We can say that there are cameras that build colors close to video-like, and there are another, for example the Alexa, which are closer to the analogical emulsions. I am telling this with all the caution because it is a generalization; nevertheless, I believe that it is no far from the reality. The Sony cameras belong to the first one. Through S-Gamut space of colors, they are able to carry the RBG colors to a broad representation of colors, which are deep, with strong saturations but under control, in addition, gave us broad possibilities to work in colorization. The F5 give us such results shooting at HD.

For example, look at the frame from a close-up of Indira Serrano, the actress who plays the role of Pambelé's mother. She is in her house in the Chambacú neighborhood and the natural light source is coming from candles. Tone is pretty warm whereas the background, which faces outside is pretty cyan: it is pointing out the fable feeling that I have already spoken about, above all regarding the part of the story focused on the period that Pambelé is looking for his future. The S-gamut color space provided by the camera captures very well the tone gamut. In this case, indoor lighting was made with Kinoflo lights to 3200°K, filtered with ¼ CTO and softened with silks of middle density in addition of candles arranged here or there, whereas for light from outside we have used 1/8 CTB and diffusion filters alike.



Compare the image now with the other one regarding the seventies, after Pambelé won the World Title.



Here the lighting is cold with a mixture of Kinoflo tubes to 5600 °K and 3200 °K. We have already used the Vision6 LUT on the image whereas before have used the KDX.

**A.B.** What kind of lenses have you used?

**A.P.** We used Ultraprime lenses. I needed some lenses with high contrast and good definition in order to create different atmospheres; it should be pointed out that the story mainly takes place in the warm climate zone with high humidity, such as Cartagena de Indias. It entails a soft atmosphere and I was looking for “harder” one. We have to reproduce such atmosphere in the different sets of Bogotá where we have shot, we have used smoke and different filters as the Tiffen Glimmerglass. I was also thinking about how the Ultraprime resolves very well high contrast, for example, in the backlighting over the both boxers bodies or hue skins after applying the LUTs.

**A.B.** You have mentioned the Glimmerglass filters, what effect does it do?

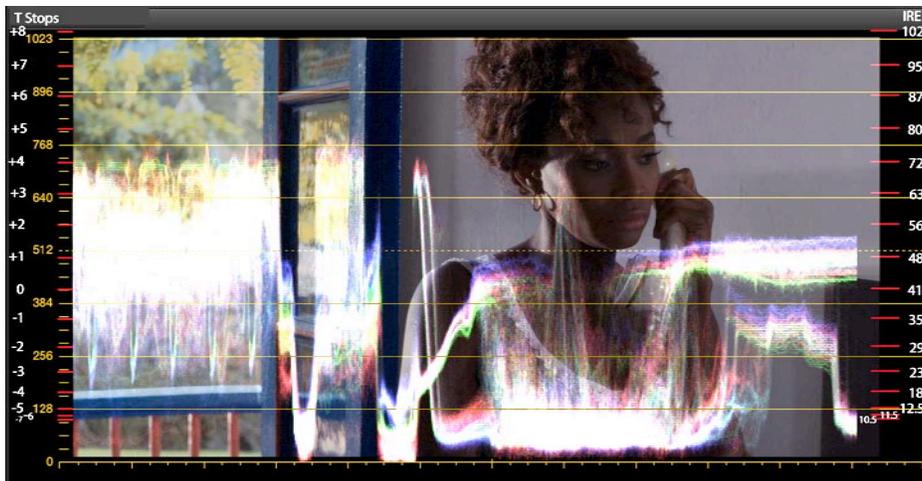
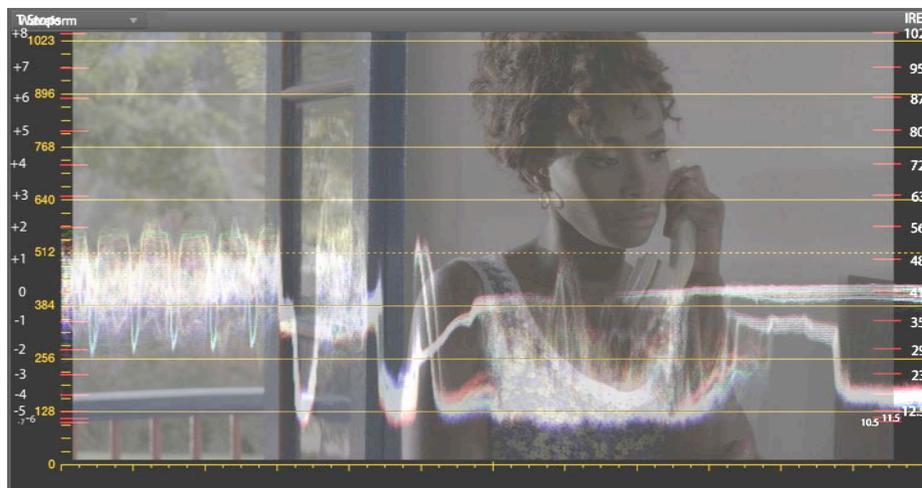
**A.P.** They are diffusion filters, which I have already used in the film *La bicicleta*. I like them a lot because they change the high light, they scatter it, blur it, in addition they do not affect basically either to middle tones or shadow. Above all, I liked at backlighting on dark skins. Moreover, they soften the finest details of the image that helps to reduce the occasional excessive sharpness of the digital cameras.

**A.B.** How did you deal with the skin tones? Did you have any experience in shooting Afro-Descendants?

**A.P.** Yes, I did. However, it has been somehow complicated because truly I have never shot such extensive skin tones, which are so different among them, at both lighting and color,

from an actor to other one. Previous tests were useful in order to know how I had to photograph such skin tones. Firstly, I examined their right exposures, that is, where the skin tone accomplishes the best texture, above all for the main characters, for Yarlín who plays the role of Kid Pambelé and Marianela, the actress who plays the role of Carlina, the girlfriend and finally boxer's wife, whose face is gorgeous. I am very demanding with the exposure as the DIT Juan Pablo Bonilla can tell you. I believe that is fundamental a good exposure to get the right skin tones as well as the special and texture consistency. The right exposure does not mean a "standard" exposure, but one that is needed to fix the photographic view. This is what Juan Pablo understood very soon and it was a great help to me. He never did such kind of remarks as "is underexposed or overexposed", but "the face is to -2 stops", what was right for our planning. In fact, in the wave monitors of the station I put the scales that linked the T stops at Log with both IRE values at linear and CV values at 10 bits.

This way, he could always know which the value of a particular signal is, at both Log and its related value at linear after applying the LUT. He can talk to you about the process.



*We can see in the two images the signal from the wave monitor over a frame. The upper image is on the logarithmic and the next with the LUT Vision6. In the wave monitor are marked the IRE values at 10 bits and T-stops at logarithmic. As I told you about the wave monitor, it was in the set, so, we could examine accurately the exposure and see how the Log values were transferred at linear through the LUT.*

**A.B.** Juan Pablo was Alfonso's DIT. How have you worked in the set?

**Juan Pablo Bonilla.** The normal task of the DIT all over the world consists in preparing the cameras and checking daily their particular parameters in order to be always in the same way for both the image and metadata. Of course, I control constantly the exposure and color (video signal) through devices as the WF or vectorscope regarding the DoP's judgment. Likewise, I deal with the live color correction through LiveGrade generating the CDLs based on the LUTs that Alfonso Parra had designed in advanced. In brief, I have to give to the DoP the suitable image that agrees with his guidelines. I have also the responsibility for the filmed material, that is, I have to change the cards, downloading and checking the material, doing the backup and delivering to production. All of that according to the workflow designed by Alfonso, the TV station and Outlabs.

**A.B.** What is exactly LiveGrade?

**JP.B.** Pomfort LiveGrade is a program that generates CDLs. You control the image regarding the light, and if you want, regarding the color too, but without changing the data, that are being recorded in the camera. The application controls the high light, middle and shadow, as well as the chromatic circles related to each different light. Thus, we can change in great detail lights and sometimes the



*Juan Pablo Bonilla. DIT*

color too. You can also change between the native image from the camera and your light modifications with a single click. In this case, after exposing always to the logarithmic image, the decisions about the color are based on the LUTs designed in advance, and the changes of the LUTs depend on the narrative intentions of each scene or even on each shot. Finally they are exported as CDLs (metadata) to carry on postproduction. The operation is very simple: the image from the camera reaches a controller, in this case the Black Magic HD LINK, which is plugged in the computer through a USB; then LiveGrade program recognizes it and does all through it, even it is able to send the image to the monitors, which obviously are properly calibrated.

**A.P.** Let me clarify one point over the comment that you have made about the exposure to the image Log. The exposure is related to the narrative that we are watching, therefore it is useful to have the whole view of the exposure regarding the narrative. To the final exposure I look at the value given by the Log curve, which in this case matches the Slog3 to the ISO 2000, what is how the camera records. Nevertheless; my light levels are fitted for the ISO 1000 value to some particular ratio of contrast and it is also finally the transfer to the linear curve through the LUTs. The combination of the three elements establishes the final exposure.

**JP.B.** Alfonso is a very responsible person regarding his work. He inspires respect in the set but with a great sense of humor. Perhaps the most curious it is his obsession for the exposure, but not for the exposure as a tool in order to get levels of images which match the "right" technical standards, but as a tool of surgical accuracy (I guess that his obsession is coming from such idea) which is part of the whole narrative universe. Each lighting value has a purpose within an established and concrete discourse. I would like to tell that I have

learnt the most from this way of understanding the image, from the obsession for doing thing “well” and from the grounds, which is based.

**A.B.** Did the DoP give to you some guideline regarding the color management?

**JP.B.** There is a wide variety regarding the color in the set. At first, I showed Alfonso the different possibilities we could handle although the color management he proposed was too dazzling. Thus, his only advice I received regarding the color management was that the two cameras have to be arranged as similar as possible. Then, at filming, I understood that depending on the cameras location. Alfonso favored the atmosphere with one camera, whereas with the other emphasized the rhythm or the dramatic intention of the character, what entailed that both cameras were not exactly equal. It was clearly done because of the narrative purposes.

### **Sergio Palacios. Colorist**

With regard to the model, in my case, Alfonso spoke me about the film *Ray*. From there we began to study the color with the selected LUTs. From the first tests, we were working with the camera and lenses, which should be used with the TV series; then we watched the material in colorization where we fitted the LUTs to our purposes, either downing the saturation of color or changing slightly the bright of the middle light. To me, testing was fundamental as well as the communication with Alfonso who is always open to suggestions that we can do. This communication has been constant all over the shooting; Alfonso came at least once a month to watch together film footages, correct them and so, put the basis of the colorization.



*Light boxes for the gym La Vega. Over the ring two wall-o-lite filtered with silks, on the background 3Kw light box bounce tungsten over plasters and filtered with CTB and WhiteDifussion. The color temperature of the first 4400K and the second 3800 K. Fluorescent lights, Philips cold tubes 5500. Outdoor locations HMI 4Kw filtered with Light grid cloth and Opal.*

**A.B.** Alfonso, how was your relation with Juan Pablo? Sometimes I read in interviews with DoPs that the relation is not always easy.



**A.P.** I have not had any problem. Juan Pablo works for Outlabs, which runs Jesús Haro; you know him because he uses to collaborate with this magazine. Jesús, with his wide knowledge and experience has prepared the DIT very well; they know how to treat with the DoPs. In addition, I believe that whether one clearly explains what he wants to do and involves the person in it, everything will be satisfactory. To me, Juan Pablo has been a great help and a person I trust absolutely in.

**A.B.** Let us be back to the work with the light. How did you do the lighting regarding the skin tones?

**A.P.** As ever, there is an intimate relation among lighting, camera and the elected parameters to configure the photography. Using the LUTs which I have already mentioned, the Slog3 curve of the camera and my own perception of the light led me to build an alight very kind to draw the faces of the actors and actresses. The lighting sources, whether were natural, for example the Sun, were sifted out by silks, my devices were basically soft as Kino, which in addition blurred. This soft light favors very much faces, veils them and makes less hard the features faces. I have worked in such way above all with the actresses; in addition I have built a harder light for the boxing world with light less diffused, more contrasted and generally crossways lighting or zenithal. I have filtered the most powerful lights, as the 12Kw or 6Kw HDI, with silk and diffusers until reaching the suitable intensity and texture.

We had to fit each device to the different LUTs; then we had to do the necessary changes at the color correction in order to get exactly the tones we were looking for. I insist on the fact that these tones are not realistic.



The frame is from the first meeting of Carlina with Pambelé. The light, which reaches her face, is sifted out with silks and stretches of White diffusion as well as using the Glimmerglas 1 filter in camera.



As you can see in this other frame of Yarlín in Cartagena de Indias (left), his skin tone is pretty different to the Carlina one. I have needed to Yarlín, with the LUT KDX, a bit more of light over his face, a treatment slightly colder. I show you the comparison with a frame from a later scene with the Vision6; then we did not have to cold the light over her face. As you can see, they are two different textures. Yes, indeed, I have had many skin tones and quite different.



*Gym Legata. Main light is coming from the windows with HDI softened by silks. Light ring is coming from 2Kw old tungsten Scoops filtered and regulated. Mixture of warm lights in the ring and cold light surrounding area. T2.8*



*Gym La Vega. Lighting is a light box built which contains two wall-o-lite with silk. LUT KDX. T 3.4*

**A.B.** Alfonso, I can imagine that in this series with more than four hundred sets, both natural and built, and so many actors and actresses the work with your gaffer has been intense.

**A.P.** Indeed, Darnal Trujillo has been together with the DIT my great support in the day-to-day. Not only has solved all the challenges but also he did it faultlessly, with montage absolutely meticulous and accurate.

**A.B.** We ask to Darnal Trujillo, Alfonso Parra's gaffer.

**A.B.** Alfonso with regard to the use of the light has told us that is natural but not realistic, from your point of view, how did you deal with this fact?

**Darnal Trujillo.** It is true that the light designed by Alfonso Parra has a natural look, that is, the light seems to come from the source itself: the window, the door, lamp, and wherever the strong light with very hard shadow in its limits does not fit, or rather, whenever the shadow is deep, their outlines are soft alike. It is photography whether you prefer quite cosmetic which favors quite a lot the skin tones. It seems to me that his work is pretty European compared to our continent, which is more predisposed to a more detailed light, intense and contrasted.

It was also surprising how the constant handling of different temperatures of color, mixing all of them in the same shot, how such mixture of warm and cold has been very important not only to mark different atmosphere for each hour of the day but also for the skin tones.

**S.P.** For me as colorist the work with different temperatures that points out Darnal seems to be a daring proposal to the TV framework in which I work. However I liked a lot because generates depth in the image pretty attractive visually as well as quite narrative value, so for example we could have to the actor with a skin tone cold whereas the background was much warmer, with a peach-like hue provided by the KDX LUT quite beautiful.

**A.B.** Darnal, with which material have you worked, which devices, which type of filters?

**D.T.** Mr. Parra is very keen on the diffusion filters, for that very reason to create the light I have named as cosmetic. We have used from the most conventional filters of diffusion as the White Diffusion, Opal or LightGride to white fabrics and silks bought in the Bogota's department stores. We have been able to filter lighting devices with until four different frameworks of diffusion, in such way that the actor receives just the needed light with a particular texture. With regard to the lights, we have basically used HMI and Kinoflo; this last one fascinates Mr. Parra, above all handling the loose tubes to his taste, placing either in a corner or in lot of times on the floor.



*Darnal Trujillo con un KinoFlo en la mano durante la iluminación de una secuencia en el gimnasio Legata*

**A.B.** How was it to work with the DoP?

**D.T.** Mr. Parra is extremely organized. Before shooting he gave me, the lighting maps where were not only the lighting sketches for the most important sets but also the description of the photographic treatment. Throughout the shooting, working in multitude of locations the key has been his experience, since with a small quantity of light devices we have lit the set on time (smiles). Moreover, he placed them with absolute accuracy, is a real perfectionist; we had sometimes to move a device hardly fifty centimeters because he did not like where it was.

Mr. Parra's peculiarity is that he works a lot from the camera, which he knows very well. I was amazed by with the low level of light that works. He lights up in a simple way but showing a taste and feeling, which are difficult to find. To me, it was really a pleasure to collaborate with him, because of both his experience and personal attention, at all the times respectful and friendly.

**A.B.** What about the nights? How did you deal with night shooting with actors with sp dark skin tones? (Smiles).

**A.P.** Just working on the lowest part of the Slog3 curve, what in a similar way to the emulsions, we call the *toe* of the curve. We worked with the camera in the extreme cases up to four and five points of underexposure. For example, shooting the night scenes on the Venezuelan border, the skin tones of Yarlín, Antonio Cervantes, is 6 stops bellow middle value It should be pointed out that the camera in such limits responds very well.



*1200w HMI Gaffair to moonlight effect*

**D.T.** In the shot mentioned by Mr. Parra actors were bellow a tree. We have placed a 1200 HMI Gaffair pretty high and far away as a lateral moonlight; in the opposite side, we have also placed far away a couple of Flatheads filtered with diffusion. We could hardly see anything, however we have shot to the exact hour and with the suitable filters. Finally, the result was a moonlight shot pretty convincing but with a light extremely low.



*In the shot the Antonio Cerventes' skin (center) was 6 stops bellow-average of gray. The image has a degraded neutral clipped softly to 1.2 in the sky and the lowest part of the frame is underexposed a bit mor than 3 stops. T4*

**A.P.** Indeed, in the frame, we can hardly see the actor's faces, but we can see their silhouette and outlines, which are supported by the voices and countryside noise. They give the feeling of solitude and darkness, in addition, it was supported by drawing stars and the Moon in postproduction.

**S.P.** It was very interesting to work in this shot. When we showed in the TV station, everybody told that was dark; however, Alfonso brought more cinematographic ideas to the series and finally those responsible of the station agreed these ways. They liked a lot the cinematographic approach for the TV.

According to what Alfonso told the shot already was dark and we have still lowered more of light at Baselight adding the Moon and stars. For me the evident contrast between the daylight shots with a high brightness which created certain feeling of suffocating hot and the night so dark, favorable to generate in the spectator the feeling of solitude, isolation and fear was very interesting. When I watched the scene I was concern about the noise, however we saw that the camera behaved pretty well, in fact we did not have any problem regarding such question. Perhaps, we have seen some problem when we have watched scenes shot a high speed and we had applied Dgrain. However, we do not have seen anything that was not easy to handle.

**A.P.** Sergio, regarding your observation about the high-speed shooting, I have to say that we used the two Sony OLFP; the 4K, which is originally with the camera. Moreover, the

2K we used to shoot to more than 60 fps at Full Scan to avoid Moire and artifacts on the edges of the image. We used a lot in the fighting where the punches were shot between 120 and 180 frames.



*Carlina, the Plembé's girlfriend, in a night shooting. The part of the face which falls in shadow is -4 stops. LUT KDX*

**A.B.** Alfonso, what has it meant for you shooting a series so complex, vintage and so long regarding the photographic treatment?

**A.P.** From the photographic view, it was a huge challenge because we have to deal with different atmospheres and times, all of them without ever losing the guiding thread which is the ground of the whole series. It was difficult to keep on with absolutely exhausting planning of production. Seven months of intense working, two units, four cameras, hundreds of natural and studio sets, special effects, a lot of chromas, etc.

**A.B.** How was the collaboration with the second unit?

**A.P.** Fortunately, Lucas Cristo, a young Colombian DoP who immediately understood the basis of the photography that I was suggesting, did the photography of the second unit. He was very diligent to fit with the parameters I had planned. We have kept in contact during the whole shooting exchanging images of reference and collaborating all of the time in order to get homogeneous results.

**A.B.** How was the camera planning?

**A.P.** We have shot with two cameras for unit and their positions were worked from the direction basically, it was limited by the television time. Thus, the series is midway which are doing all of the TV stations: shooting more in cinematography way although still with the frame and structures of the television.

**A.B.** Many thanks to all of you for your time and collaboration.

*Frames and images courtesy of 11:11 Films and RCN*



Adriana Bernal is DoP ADFC, as well as professor of Audiovisual Narrative in the most prestigious universities in Colombia and founding partner of the Digital Cinematography Center (CCD).