

Reynolds focuses on The Closer

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Inset: DP Brian Reynolds preparing to shoot a scene for *The Closer*.

The *Closer* is an hour-long television drama about a Los Angeles Police Department homicide investigation squad led by Deputy Chief Brenda Johnson who is portrayed by Kyra Sedgwick. The series is produced by Warner Bros. Television and it airs on the TNT cable network.

Most of the action happens on stages designed to emulate police headquarters at Parker Center in the middle of the city. There are standing sets on three stages at Raleigh Studios in Hollywood, including Johnson's office, an open squad room where other characters have their desks, and interrogation and electronic surveillance rooms. A fourth stage is used for swing sets, including a morgue and interiors of Johnson's home in Hollywood.

Chris Baffa photographed the pilot. Brian J. Reynolds was brought on board to film the series by executive producer Michael M. Robin, who worked with Reynolds at Steven Bochco Productions.

Reynolds is no stranger to police dramas. He earned four of his eight nominations in the annual American Society Cinematographers Outstanding Achievement Awards competition for *NYPD Blue*. Reynolds helped create a signature look for that classic series.

"There's a lot of hype about how new technology allows anyone to pick up a camera and make movies and TV shows today, but that's very misleading," Reynolds says. "New technology provides useful tools, but it doesn't make you into a storyteller."

Each episode of *The Closer* is produced in seven days. The filmmakers generally shoot five days on stages and two at practical locations. Reynolds uses a dimmer control board to orchestrate lighting to create a sense of place and time, and to amplify moods in tune with the stories and performances. One entire wall in the squad room consists of picture windows overlooking a cityscape that is actually a Rosco translucent backdrop.

To emulate reality, Reynolds artfully mixes color temperatures from practical cool white fluorescents built into sets and HMIs with warmer tungsten light. Light Panel (LED) lights are hidden behind props or placed just out of frame, and Kino Flo Image 80 lights are used for walking and talking shots and close-ups.

"You have to mix light on stage so it looks and feels realistic," he says. "Sunlight coming through windows can be cool or warm, but if all the lights are the same color temperature it can look fake. We also try to create mood and enhance storytelling by changing the lighting to emulate morning, late afternoon and dusk to night."

Reynolds generally covers scenes with two Panaflex Millennium XL 35mm cameras with Primo prime lenses. He records images onto three-perf 35mm film that is usually loaded in 1,000-foot magazines. That combination enables the scriptwriters and directors to stage interrogation and other long dialog scenes that can be up to ten minutes.

"It's hard on (operators) John Fuller and Chris Tufty," Reynolds observes, "but they do a great job of keeping the cameras steady and invisible to the audience. Handheld shots create a feeling of immediacy that gives the audience a sense of being there."

He composes images in the 16:9 aspect ratio. Reynolds says the wider frame gives him the freedom to compose shots with three or four characters interacting.

He records images on Kodak VISION2 500T 5229 film. "It's the perfect film stock for telecine," Reynolds describes it as a lower contrast 500T emulsion that can hold details in the darkest shadows and brightest highlights. He uses quarter, half and custom-made three-quarter Schneider Classic Soft Filters on the camera lenses, sometimes with a bit of net on Sedgwick's close-ups.

"We are shooting day interior scenes on location at stop T2.4 and getting detail outside the windows without ND-ing. There's tons of information, even on the brightest days," he says. "The HD telecine colorist at Encore can dig the subtlest details off the negative. All I have to do is ask." ■

