



CANNIBAL

Pau Esteve Birba discusses shooting Manuel Martín Cuenca's macabre but touching film in ARRIRAW with ALEXA Studio and M cameras

Photos: Marino Scandurra

Director Manuel Martín Cuenca's film *Cannibal* tells the disturbing story of Carlos, a prestigious tailor in Granada who also happens to kill and eat women. He feels no remorse, until Nina appears in his life and love begins to stir. Despite its modest \$2 million budget, *Cannibal* was captured in the uncompressed ARRIRAW format because it gave the filmmakers complete freedom to delay any 'look' creation until post. Cinematographer Pau Esteve Birba has won Goya and CEC Awards, as well as a San Sebastián Jury Prize, for his work on the film.

What kind of a look did you and Manuel want to give this rather dark story?

Since the first chats I had with Manuel he insisted that this is a love story, even though it is about a cannibal, so we were always trying to find the love in it. I tried to approach these opposites of dark story/love story by mixing color temperatures. There is a particular image in the movie that is a good example of this: Carlos is looking up at Nina, who is at a window one floor above. Nina is lit with the warm interior light, which is surrounded and contrasted by the cool, ambient, exterior light that illuminates Carlos.

Why did you choose ALEXA?

I like the colors of the ALEXA, but I especially love the latitude that it gives you, so on a movie like this where we have either low light situations, such as the opening sequences, or high light scenes, like the walk in the snow, I thought it would be the best option. In addition to this, on *Cannibal* I had the option of working in ARRIRAW, which I had never done before, and it was really helpful in the grading.

Did you enjoy working with the ALEXA Studio?

For day scenes it was a pleasure to work with an optical viewfinder like you have with a 35 mm camera. By watching the scene through the finder, you can decontaminate the digital image and really focus on the light. There is something special that you feel when you put your eye to the viewfinder and see the spinning mirror shutter.

We also used the ALEXA M, with its 4:3 sensor, for all the car scenes. We needed a lightweight camera body that we could mount either outside or inside the car; we couldn't have done a shot like the one that opens the movie, where the camera was in the driver position for a driver POV, with a bigger camera.

How did ALEXA handle situations involving extreme highlights?

The sequence of the walk in the mountains of the Sierra Nevada was amazing for that. Everything was snow-covered, with millions of different whites, and you can see all of it on the screen. There is a shot where Carlos and Nina walk towards the camera with the sun as a backlight and from the faces to the snow everything is well exposed, with plenty of detail.

Were you grading images as you went along?

Manuel likes to work with as small a crew, and as small an infrastructure around the camera, as possible. For this reason we shot the movie without a monitor or any playback. Following the same philosophy we decided to go without a DIT, so very little was done to the image on set. We had a data wrangler who downloaded and checked the clips, and made the proxies. The first approach to making color adjustments was in the grading.

The budget was relatively low, but you still recorded ARRIRAW?

Once you put a shot on the Lustre and start working with it, you can really see the power of ARRIRAW. The uncompressed 3K of ARRIRAW lets you push the shot in ways that you would never be able to do normally. It was because of this that I decided to shoot all the night scenes at 1,600 ASA; I felt it gave a better grain than 800 ASA and let us work with really low light levels.

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