

on Craigslist," she remembers. "A producer, Peter Odio, saw the ad, and for some reason he contacted me. He told me he was not interested in wearing a Speedo for our car-wash scene, but that he was looking for a female director of photography who could speak Spanish." *Cartas a Elena* put Cabana on the map, leading to multiple features and to the cinematographer's highest profile work to date on season two of the Netflix series *Narcos*.

Cabana has earned accolades for her action photography on the show, and revels in the opportunities it has created for her. "I love action, and *Narcos* gave me an opening to do things I have never done before — explosions, car chases, shootouts, miniature work — and to use tools that I never had available due to budget restrictions."

When asked what's next, Cabana excitedly responds with a long list of projects and ideas; she's especially interested in creating VR content while continuing to pursue her aspirations in features and TV. "I dream of shooting a show like *American Horror Story* or *Westworld*," she says. Laughing, she adds, "Just putting that out there."

Bjorn Charpentier, SBC

Belgian cinematographer Bjorn Charpentier, SBC was always a movie lover, but one film in particular made an impression. "When I saw *The Rock*, directed by Michael Bay and shot by John Schwartzman, ASC, I was blown away by the dynamic framing and lighting," he recalls. "That film made me interested in photography."

Charpentier began his formal training at the Narafi campus of the Luca School of Arts in Belgium, and went on to work with Danny Elsen, NSC, SBC as a camera assistant. Charpentier's career was further facilitated by a Belgian directing duo known as "Norman Bates," who brought him on board for several international projects.

Now, Charpentier divides his time between commercials, music videos and features. He recently received high honors at Cannes with a promotional spot called *100* that he shot for Leica, which won a Grand Prix and a Gold Lion in 2015. "That



From left: First AC Iurie Bustiuc (inside tracking car); cinematographer Bjorn Charpentier, SBC; and 1st AD Ahmed Hatimi on location in Tangier, Morocco, for *High Wire Act*.

was a career changer for me," he says.

Charpentier enjoys moving back and forth between film and digital — sometimes on the same project. "I shot several commercials where I combined both," he says. A Jeep commercial that spans various time periods, for example, "was shot on Alexa, Super 8mm, 16mm, and even on the iPhone, all in one project." He adds, "The advantage of digital is that you can push the image further because you can see the direct result on the monitors. You don't have sleepless nights waiting for the prints. Also, the sensitivity is greater, so I can use less light and a smaller generator, and I have fewer reloads with digital, so the director can keep shooting and find more emotional moments with the actors."

In terms of his narrative feature work, Charpentier is particularly excited about a pair of features that he shot in

anamorphic format with vintage glass on Arri's Alexa Plus 4:3 with an XR Module upgrade. "Over the last two years, I've been shooting an epic sci-fi story titled *Behold a White Horse*. Every shot looks extremely expensive, even though we shot it with a small budget and with small lighting setups, as we wanted to keep our footprint to a minimum. The idea was to take items away from the existing locations and to turn lights off instead of adding them."

For director Brad Anderson's *High Wire Act*, "Brad wanted to push the limits of darkness and night scenes. The theory was that we would light everything from within the location with lots of practicals and a lot of murky industrial lights and old fluorescents. Given the aesthetic we were going for, I shot with a lot of reflected light, which meant that all the sources in the frame would have to be shiny — the walls and even the makeup." Charpentier

On the agent-cinematographer relationship:

"It's a partnership. We're in the same two-man canoe. We have to be in sync and operate in tandem to move smoothly through calm waters and through rapids. I have to find what works for each client and tailor that; it's not just one-process-fits-all. Some clients are great communicators; others need help in the promotional area, selling their personality and selling their artistry. A lot of cinematographers disdain self-promotion, and that's why they need an agent."

— **Charles Lenhoff, Lenhoff & Lenhoff**



Left: Ruben Impens, SBC frames a shot. Right: Cinematographer Kira Kelly on set for the upcoming feature *Skin in the Game*.

teamed with production designer Arad Sawat and supervising art director Ian Bailie to achieve that plan, and is quick to praise his collaborators on all of his projects. That said, he singles out one partner as most deserving of the credit for his work: “My wife supports me all the way. That is the main reason I can do what I love.”

Ruben Impens, SBC

Ruben Impens, SBC, also from Belgium, visited a film set as a teenager and immediately knew that he wanted to participate in making movies. “At that point I didn’t know I wanted to be a director of photography — I just knew that I was interested in filmmaking,” he recalls. He enrolled at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent, where his first year was spent studying both directing and still photography. “It was kind of a strange situation that the school didn’t really have a cinematography program. It’s mostly for directors, still photographers and other artists — design, sculpture and that

kind of thing.”

While still in school, Impens began working as a clapper loader for director of photography Walther Vanden Ende, who became a mentor along with another Belgian cameraman, Jan Vancaillie, SBC. He worked as a focus puller for several years while shooting footage on the side, and ultimately found a valuable partner in director Felix Van Groeningen. Their film *The Broken Circle Breakdown* was nominated for a Best Foreign Language Film Oscar in 2014, though Impens is more partial to their prior collaboration, *The Misfortunates*. “That was the first time I thought to myself, ‘Maybe I’m not bad at cinematography,’” he says with a laugh. “It’s a movie with a lot of flashbacks and different time periods, and we shot it digitally but treated it with different looks for different sections — black-and-white, grain, etc. When we screened it and people asked what different film stocks we used, I knew we had done something right, because we didn’t use film at all — it

was all shot on the Red One.”

Impens adds that he “likes film a lot, but in a small country like Belgium, our budgets are low and the film stock can become a big part of the budget — 15 percent of your money goes to processing and stock.” Currently Impens hopes to work on Van Groeningen’s next project, a film he’s developing to shoot in America. “At this point I think I’ve done something like 15 features, so I’m becoming a little more selective in terms of the scripts,” he says. “I really want to focus on the most challenging stories possible.”

Kira Kelly

Like many of the cinematographers profiled in this piece, Kira Kelly is comfortable in a variety of genres and styles, jumping back and forth between documentary and narrative features, as well as music videos and commercials. She recently garnered acclaim for Ava DuVernay’s *13th*, a powerful documentary about mass incarceration. “I’m beyond proud of that movie,” she says, noting that she shared cinematography duties on the project with Hans Charles.

Kelly worked as a gaffer in New York City after discovering her passion for the camera department in film school. “In high school I loved movies, but I couldn’t have told you the difference between a director and a producer,” she recalls. “I went to

On advising a cinematographer:

“You don’t want to force anybody to take a project; you can only give your opinion or your perspective. That’s what you’re there for. You never want it to result in an awkward relationship if somebody doesn’t take your advice. For me, everything is based on, ‘Is this the right project for the cinematographer?’ You have to take the money away and just look at the creative aspects, the client, and the director as well.”

— **Kristen Tolle-Billings, Worldwide Production Agency**

Impens photo courtesy of the filmmaker. Kelly photo by Howard Barish.