



Downey praises Gurney (pictured) for his powerful presence and reflects on the impact of working with a predominantly deaf cast (Credit: BBC/Warp Films/Matt Squire)

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Ollie Downey BSC relied on Astera tubes with diffusion socks and HMIs outside windows to light *Reunion*, managing a tight schedule and high page count with a traditional yet effective lighting setup.

The BBC drama miniseries *Reunion* is widely regarded as the first major UK primetime series to place the deaf experience at its heart—not as an add-on, but as the emotional, cultural and visual centre of the story. While earlier works such as *Soundproof* (BBC, 2006) and Channel 4's *4Love (Signed)* showcased deaf talent and British Sign Language (BSL), *Reunion* breaks new ground in both scope and ambition. Conceived bilingually in BSL and spoken English, the series features a predominantly deaf cast and crew, with sign language fully woven into the storytelling.

Produced by Warp Films and set in Sheffield, the drama is led by Matthew Gurney as Daniel Brennan, a Deaf man newly released from prison who must choose between revenge and building a future with his estranged daughter. He is joined by a strong ensemble cast including Lara Peake, Anne-Marie Duff, Eddie Marsan, and Rose Ayling-Ellis.

Ollie Downey BSC says, "The obvious visual route was a kind of handheld social realism, so we tested the relatively new Alexa 35 against the Alexa Mini LF." He had used the latter on the last two seasons of *Silo* and "was blown away" by the former's skin tones and dynamic latitude.

"Certainly using the Super 35 sensor rather than the larger LF felt correct because of this," he adds. "Luke Snellin (director) and I talked a lot in prep about leaning into something a little more classically cinematic though, exploring the origins of William Mager's scripts as a road movie. We tested a lot of glass but the soft roll off and classic portrait look of the Panavision H Series felt ideal for our hero lenses."

TIME TRAVEL

There are three timelines in *Reunion* — the present day, the late 1980s and the early 2000s — and Downey's choice of kit reflected those periods.

"We added a set of older PV lenses for our '80s flashbacks of Brennan's school days, and a set of Hawk V Lites for our later flashbacks. Kim Vinegrad (focus) and Jonny Stilwell (loader) did an incredible job of keeping everything sharp and running smoothly in pretty testing circumstances. Gareth Spensley of Company 3 built a great LUT that really reinforced our 'legacy' look, and made the post process incredibly straight forward in terms of colour."

MAKING LIGHT WORK

Downey opted for a "pretty traditional lighting package," given the tight schedule and high page count each day. He relied heavily on Astera tubes in diffusion socks on set, with HMIs placed outside the windows, and speaks highly of gaffer Luke "Mani" Mansfield, praising his calm leadership and on-the-spot problem-solving throughout the shoot.

"We'd worked together when he was part of his dad's team years before and he's a really good gaffer in his own right now," he continues. "Luke's visual ambitions were high and we gravitated towards larger locations, which on a low budget makes the lighting team's jobs that much harder. Mani and his team rose to the challenge brilliantly - nothing was too much trouble."

A particularly challenging sequence was when Brennan, fresh out of prison, visits a house party looking for an old acquaintance. Luke Snellin was keen to break the five scenes down into two

shots; one following him into and through the party and one (at speed) out through the house, down the driveway and into a waiting car that screeches up at the last moment and then drives us away.

"We had a day and a half to shoot these sequences, including rigging and rehearsals," Downey recalls. "We relied on a couple of cranes with SkyPanel 360s for the exterior, numerous practicals, with hidden Astera tubes and AX3s inside. It was hugely ambitious given our schedule and budget, but I think everyone enjoys these sequences and it really pulls a crew together. When Luke and I had first started talking in prep we had asked to move some of the budget around between our departments."

The director and DP decided to drop the second camera and the budget allocated for volume driving sequences to ringfence funds for an operator—ensuring a Steadicam was readily available—and to cover the cost of a pod car, since Gurney doesn't drive.

"As such we had the great John Hembrough Assoc. BSC ACO behind the camera for our party sequence," says Downey. "Guided by our grip Phil Whittaker, John did a great job operating the Stabileye, complete with a hand over to the waiting Jon Beacham Assoc. BSC ACO in the back of our pod car."

SIGNED, SEALED, DELIVERED

Working with a mostly Deaf cast and crew, Downey describes *Reunion* as "fascinating and humbling," adding that being unable to follow the communication around him was an "eye-opening" experience.

"Matthew Gurney as Brennan was just a revelation," Downey concludes. "He has a real physicality and incredible presence—he's a huge talent. In terms of representation and inclusivity, it's great

that *Reunion* is now out there in the world, but what next? It would be criminal to waste talents like Matthew's. We need broadcasters to be braver, especially domestically, and not to underestimate audiences or focus solely on viewing figures. I hope that, as a result, the show portrays the Deaf experience authentically and truthfully."

The reviews and audience reactions speak for themselves. ■



Lighting combined practical sources and HMIs to shape mood and atmosphere (Credit: BBC/Warp Films/Joshua Carver)



Downey (R) and gaffer Mansfield expertly crafted *Reunion*'s challenging lighting design (Credit: Ollie Downey BSC)