



These Rising Cinematographers Are Shaping Tomorrow's Media

Variety Staff



Michelle Lawler

Photo : Courtesy of Michelle Lawler

“I’ve been doing this for many years now and it’s taken me a while to get through,” says Lawler, who graduated from AFI in 2012. She started out shooting musicals and documentaries and even directed a doc called “Forever’s Gonna to Start Tonight,” which won several awards, including at Outfest L.A. in 2010. “That was my on-ramp to filmmaking,” Lawler says. But lensing was her true love, and after stints as a grip and camera assistant, she moved up to being a DP — and to Los Angeles.

“As a DP, I am always learning,” she says. “The crew really supports you: I learn so much from my camera assistants, my gaffers and my key grips.”

Lawler was an operator on “Insecure” for a couple of seasons.

“My good friend Ava Berkofsky is the DP on that show, and then they brought me on to shoot season 4,” she says. That was in 2019, when she also shot “Rust Creek,” directed by Jen McGowan in Kentucky. “That was really fun, ’cause it was all handheld [with an Arri mini camera]. I was running through the woods handheld for a month.”

Discussing tech tools, Lawler says: “I do love the Arri, I love the way it renders skin tone. I find the mini to be very versatile and user friendly.”

Also last year, Lawler lensed Lena Waithe’s BET show “Twenties” and the pilot for “Awkafina Is Nora From Queens.” Next up for her: the Apple TV Plus dramedy “The Shrink Next Door,” starring Will Ferrell and Paul Rudd, with Michael Showalter directing, from Gloria Sanchez Prods. It goes into production Nov. 9 in Los Angeles. “Moving forward, with COVID, it’s always going to be an evolving discussion around what works and what doesn’t,” she says, adding that she will be tested weekly and there is plenty of sanitizer on hand.

Addressing inequality, Lawler says, “I feel that women have to work harder to prove themselves. In the past 10 years, things have gotten easier. I definitely feel there’s more women in the room. I think there’s more people of color in the room. It makes the project better.

“There’s still a long way to go but in the last two years some people in power have pushed to think differently and not hire the traditional choice.”

— *Shalini Dore*