

Naturally, that paves the way for improvisation in the right situations. “Dan Rigby is great at coming up with extra Chris-isms that he would throw in on the day,” says Lambert, filled with enthusiasm for his star. “That man is incredible,” he continues. “He really prepares and arrives on set with a delivery of a line that I never saw coming. If there’s time on the day and the atmosphere is right then it’s always great to have a play with the scene and have a fun run take. It’s really based on the schedule for me, and getting through the day with all the material you need.”

When Lambert came on board *Undercover*, Rigby had already been cast as Chris, but he stresses he honestly cannot see anyone else playing the part. However, it took a while for them to find the right person to play his boss, Zoe, until *Green Wing* veteran Sarah Alexander came along. “We saw a lot of people,” Lambert reveals. “They’d come in and do great things, but it wasn’t until Sarah came in that we saw the complete character. Her first read was incredible, and there was instant chemistry with Daniel. I just knew we had found our Zoe.”

The duo are ably supported by some great talent filling out the cast, with the opening episodes including the likes of *Being Human*’s Michael Socha, *Sherlock*’s Yasmine Akram, *Up The Women*’s Ryan Sampson and a preview for Episode Three revealing Comic Strip veteran Keith Allan crops up as a hardcase ex-con. Naturally, Lambert is full of admiration for his cast.

“Everyone you mentioned,” he insists, “makes directing this show a joy. Mark Heap also appears later in the series and is hilarious. It was a great highlight to direct him, as I’ve been a fan for many years. Ivan Kaye, who plays Ara’s right hand man Garabad is fantastic, both visually and comically. he is such a scary and commanding presence on screen, but plays the comic moments so brilliantly.”

The cast helped Lambert acclimatise to his first long-form narrative: five weeks of filming with them allowing the building of a shorthand and complete investment in the work. In retrospect, whilst the end result is a different form, this is no different to Lambert’s previous work filming behind the scenes on all three series of *The Mighty Boosh*. The director insists he simply wanted to tell stories, and that they ended up being documentaries at first owes more to circumstance than any original intent: the first series of Boosh shared a producer, Alison MacPhail, with Baby Cow’s *Cruise of the Gods*, which he had previously worked on, and therefore he was a logical choice for the job, as we’ve previously discussed (<https://thevelvetonion.com/interviews/behind-the-camera-creatives/dave-lambert/not-your-common-man/>).

“I knew they were great,” he states when it is noted he was there to chart the rise of the Boosh from television newbies to international superstars. “But I didn’t ever imagine I’d be filming them performing live at the Roxy in LA, with Robin Williams in the audience!”

His work on the Boosh then led to work with one of big bosses of Baby Cow: Steve Coogan. After editing *Mid Morning Matters*, Lambert was asked to direct and produce the one-off special *Welcome to the Places in My Life*, and he is filled with praise for the megastar turned studio head honcho. “Steve is great to work with,” he tells TVO, “as he has an attention to detail that is second to none. I’ve learnt so much from him and Henry Normal [the other half of Baby Cow’s top tier], and the environment they foster is very creative. There’s no change whether you are on set together or having a meeting in the office.”

Up next for Lambert is editing a Channel 4 Comedy Blap he’s directed entitled *High and Dry* starring Mark Wootten (*La La Land*), **Harry Peacock**, Jessie Cave and Asim Chaudhry, which he says was great to shoot. This week also sees the launch of a series of iPlayer shorts he’s directed to tie in with Ramadan featuring five up and coming Muslim comedic talents. But of course, *Undercover* is still on the agenda, and should Dave the channel want Dave the director to return for a second run, there’s still lots of scope for fresh ideas to add to the mix.

“As much as we hit the ground running on the very first day of the shoot,” he insists, “by the end we *really* felt we nailed the DNA of the show. When it airs, I think viewers will enjoy the journey over the six episodes. There’s a real build, twists and turns, surprises and lots of laughs. I would love to return to do more, as I think we’re only at the start of Chris and Zoe’s story, and there is so much left to do and see. Andrew Milligan (co-writer/co-creator) and I speak at least twice a week at the moment about possible scenarios, scenes and even shots if we get a second series.”