

disguise powers the Family's SXSW festival film Molli and Max in the Future

For Molli and Max in the Future, premiering at 2023's SXSW Festival, New York production company **the Family** took advantage of the same technology that has been handpicked by Hollywood's biggest players. With it, they brought sci-fi visuals to a heartfelt rom-com.

In this case study you will discover how disguise enabled an indie romantic-comedy film to run their LED production smoothly so they could employ blockbuster visual effects.



Summary

Brooklyn-based filmmaker Michael Litwak's ambitions for 'Molli and Max in the Future' drew on a vast array of practical and digital effects, and Virtual Production Supervisor Steve Dabal knew that the project would fit well with the Family's technology-driven approach to storytelling. Working with **Choreografx Studios**, the Family built a modular LED volume that would sit at the heart of the ambitious production - a method that mirrored the approach used by tentpole films and television shows like 'The Batman' and 'The Mandalorian.' For Dabal, virtual production didn't just offer opportunities to projects with big studios bankrolling the effects.

"The story revolves around a relationship over many years, demanding filming in multiple locations to show the passage of time. Now the film doesn't have an Avatar-sized budget, so the challenge was to blend the visually vast sci-fi worlds with the grounded romantic comedy story. Our team was tasked with building a creative and reliable system to film through space and time in as many environments as possible on-set. disguise is an insurance policy ensuring LED productions run smoothly and consistently," says Dabal.



The challenge

As writer as well as director for the project, Litwak had a detailed vision he was excited to realise. The look and feel of the extraterrestrial planets that the main characters explore through this love story are essential to the romantic-comedy storyline, and, with a short period to shoot in, it was crucial to have everything just right from the moment cameras started rolling.

Multiple scenes feature the characters in moving vehicles, so the team needed to work out how to perfect how their car process looked when the car in question was, in fact, a spaceship.



The solution

Though filming took place in a few short weeks in July 2022, the team had a year to prepare. Using disguise's pre-viz tools, they drew up designs for the sets and car process look, and created storyboards in Unreal Engine. They then tested the scenes out in a small standing stage in Brooklyn prior to shooting.

To keep the footprint of production intimate, the team programmed an iPad playback system that allowed for quick jumping between both 2D media playback content and 3D Unreal Engine scenes powered by disguise RenderStream™. To fit the timeline, Choreografx also set up a remote computer for the cinematographer to log into the Perforce server, allowing him to make changes to scenes up until the last minute. This workflow allowed the team to quickly transcode any video plates to NotchLC and optimise Unreal scenes for playback.



“

Virtual production is so powerful for immersion. In pre-production we're able to jump into the world of the movie and collaborate on scenes. And then on-set it sets a tone for the cast and crew to embed themselves in the movie together. Seeing everyone's eyes light up with each new environment set such a playful tone.”

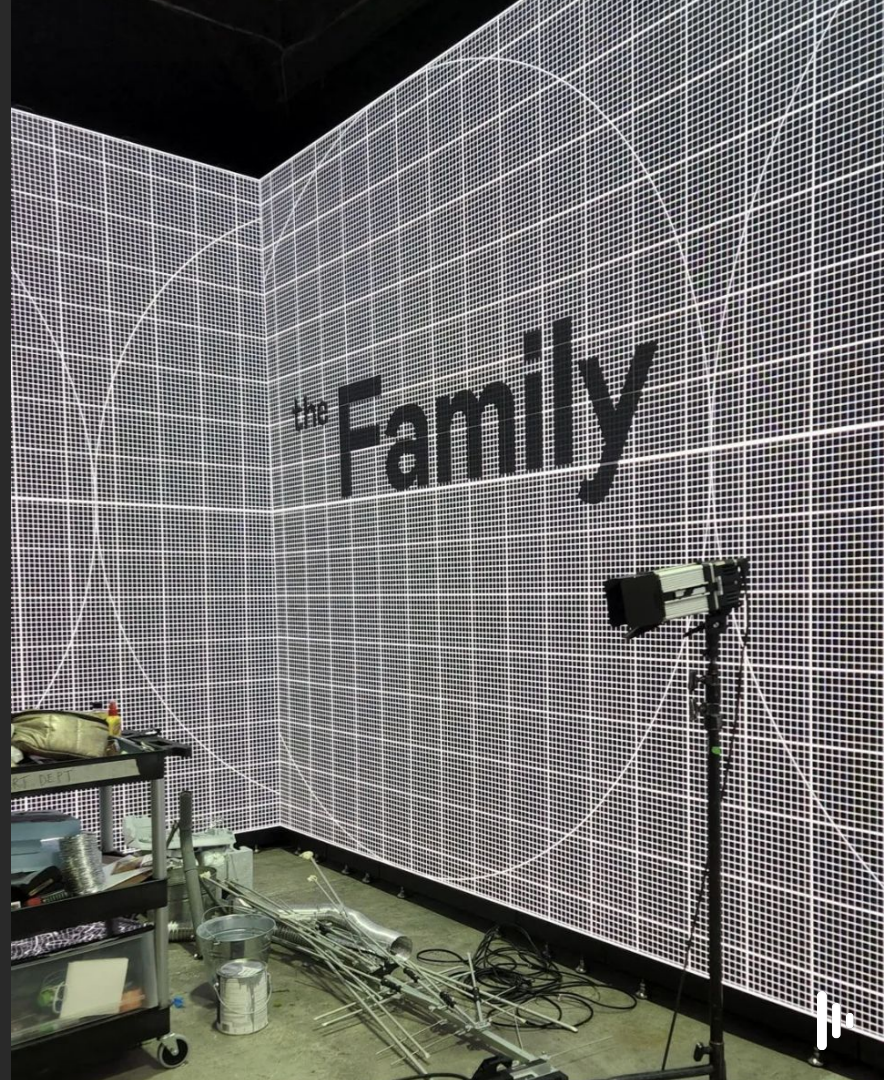
Steve Dabal, Creative Director, the Family.



Success

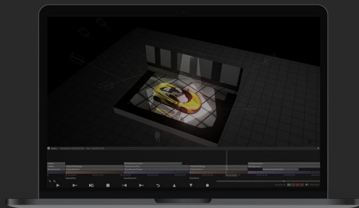
For the last few years, the stories we hear about virtual production in Hollywood have been connected to big-budget event cinema, and television shows from the likes of Disney and Netflix. The Family, however, found virtual production offered an approach to independent filmmaking that opened up new possibilities. 'Molli and Max in the Future' was selected to play as part of the SXSW Festival's 'Visions' programming, showcasing audacious, risk-taking artists in the new cinema landscape.

"A film like this can be an example for how you can take the genre of romantic comedy and use technology to raise it to an elevated level," says Dabal. It also shows that, using virtual production, everyone from the biggest studios to visionary independent filmmakers can realize their imaginations' wildest ideas.



disguise equipment used

Designer software



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The rx is engineered to deliver new possibilities for scale out rendering.

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In partnership with:

Director: Michael Lukk Litwak

Executive Producer: Jeanne Elfant Festa, Ted Geoghegan, Luke Murphy and Nicole Murphy

Producer: Candice Kuwahara, Ben J. Murphy, Mallory Schwartz, Kate Geller and Michael Lukk Litwak

Screenwriter: Michael Lukk Litwak

Cinematographer: Zach Stoltzfus

Editor: Joanna Naugle

Production Designer: Violet Overn

Sound Designer: Bobb Barito

Music: Alex Winkler

Virtual Production Supervisor: Steve Dabal.

Virtual Production Producers: Sebastian Clore-Gronenborn and Griffin Yu

Virtual Production System Engineer: Bryan Dodson

Virtual Production Screens Producer: Michelle Dodson



The
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Get in touch!

Curious to know more about us? Want to master our production toolkit? Need support on your project?

Our team will be happy to speak to you, whatever your query.

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