

## Funny or Die's "The Sisters Plotz" Becomes a Feature

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It was just a matter of time before the original content on the popular website **Funny or Die** generated a large enough audience to turn its short-form videos into feature films. The website was created by Actor/Writer Will Ferrell, Producers Adam McKay and Judd Apatow, and Silicon Valley venture capital specialist Randy Adams. It features thousands of short videos and web series created by a mix of in-house talent, celebrities and independent filmmakers, but the first video to make the leap into features is the musical web series "The Sisters Plotz," which spent its first week as one of the site's "Top Five Most Watched Videos."

Currently in postproduction, the film *The Sisters Plotz* is an eccentric comedy about three madcap heiresses who live in a New York City townhouse with a devoted butler, two scheming maids, and lots of singing. The web series was created by award-winning underground Filmmaker Lisa Hammer, who stars on Adult Swim's hit cartoon "The Venture Brothers," and Writer Lisa Ferber, whose film Whimsellica's Grand Inheritance won the audience vote in a contest by Indie Pix Films. Hammer and Ferber also produce the series and film, and they star as the sisters along with Eve Plumb (best known as Jan on the classic 1970s sitcom "The Brady Bunch").

This all began as a stage play called "The Plotz Sisters and Their Adorable Butler Reginald" which starred Ferber, Hammer, Plumb, Ryan Stadler and Levi Wilson (who is also Hammer's husband). Hammer says that when the play received a great response, a light bulb went off in her head. "I told Lisa Ferber that we need to film this and put it on the web," she recalls. "'Leave it all up to me,' [I said,] 'I will make it happen.'" And Hammer was as good as her word. They shot the play in Ferber's apartment and edited the footage as a series before uploading to Funny or Die. "It's 'The Addams Family' meets 'Absolutely Fabulous' meets 'Downton Abbey,'" says Ferber. "I'm also a big fan of effervescent 1930s screwball comedies, and this project celebrates that bubbly feeling. It's basically three gals having the best time and cracking each other up. I like to work with people who can do high comedy while maintaining a sense of absurdity. Lisa, Eve and Levi are perfect for that. Plus, we're all super-close friends and really encourage and inspire each other creatively."

When the decision was made to expand the web series into a feature, Ferber and Hammer faced some new challenges, beginning with operating capital. Initially, Ferber, Hammer and Wilson covered production costs out of their own pockets, but now they needed to upgrade their production values with a much higher budget to cover things like theater space and permits. To raise funds, they mounted an Indiegogo campaign and gave themselves two weeks to meet their financial goal. Another fundraising strategy involved Hammer's "pie fight" campaign, which offered prizes like getting a pie thrown "in your honor or in your face," along with a cameo on the show. While their expectations were humble, Hammer says that these efforts tripled their funding goal.

The feature was shot by Cinematographer Nishell Falcone with a Canon Rebel t3i DSLR camera, Canon EF-S 18-55mm IS II lens, and a Nikon 2000. Initially, Ferber, Hammer and Wilson covered the cost of production out of their own pockets. Max Liedtka recorded sound on a Zoom H4n recorder using a combination of Sennheiser MKE 600 shotgun mics and Audio Technica 8537 lavalier mics. The musical's book and lyrics were by Lisa Ferber, with music by Mary Feinsinger. Recorded by the actors ahead of the shoot, the songs were played back on location over a speaker system for lip synching. The feature is currently being edited with Final Cut Pro 7.

Like so many indie producers, Hammer and Ferber are actively looking for the best possible distribution options, including working with an experienced sales agent. But they've decided to postpone contacting potential distribution partners until the film is done, as they maintain an eye towards exposure through outlets like Netflix and cable networks IFC and AMC. Since Ferber and Hammer have already created a pitch bible to bring to networks and a storyline that could carry the series through several seasons, the brass ring would be to get picked up as a regular TV show. For now, "The Sisters Plotz" web series can be seen on both YouTube and Funny or Die.

[< Prev](#)

[Next >](#)