

PUMP UP THE VOLUMETRIC



PHOTOS BY: CLAUDIA HOAG
SEPTEMBER 2023

Women In Media and Quasar Science hosted a two-day LED stage educational experience. WiM members shot a music video for the song "Never Too Late" by Becca Schack (article coming soon!)

In September, Women In Media and Quasar Science hosted an LED stage hands-on educational experience for our members. We hosted a seminar with Lightsail VR, our members got hands on time with the gear, and got lots of questions answered. The objective was to prepare our members to shoot an MOS project while learning volumetric technology and Quasar lighting that would propel their careers. We wanted them to have something tangible to show beyond the training, so we shot a music video for Becca Schack's electronic pop song, Never Too Late, using Arri Mini LF and Amira cameras on the volume at Quasar's studio. We learned some rules, and broke some too! Expect to see the video online in early 2024.

We chatted with Never Too Late music video Director, Alesia Glidewell, Cinematographer, Daria Rountree, and Production Designer, Antonella LoBrutto about their experience as creatives working with the tech as well as the collaborative process.

You have all been doing traditional storytelling for more than a minute. What got you excited about making films?

Antonella: Since I was a child, I enjoyed the movies and performing arts. I always knew my future was going in that direction. Director Darren Aronofsky was a big influence for me when I was in high school. His movies were the perfect example of how an outstanding crew could evoke strong emotions independently and altogether; art department, talent, sound design, make-up, cinematography.... Different departments with their unique visions creating a masterpiece.

Alesia (also known as "Z"): I got excited about making films as a child. My father and I made silly shorts together during the holidays and it was a beautiful way of bringing together my loved ones in a form of play. Later in life, I got excited about the art, craft, psychology and collaborative nature of making films and I'll never look back.

Daria: When I was 5 my mom took me to visit my dad on set while he was working on Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas. That was the moment I realized that movies weren't real and I've been obsessed ever since.

What piqued your interest about this volumetric production project? How did it differ from working on a traditional project?

Daria: I've never had the chance to shoot with this technology, so I was intrigued to see what it was capable of and what went into shooting on the volume. I'm used to having full control during traditional shoots, so I was excited to take on the challenge of shooting against an LED screen. I wanted to see how lighting and framing were affected and see what aspects would shine during this process on the volume.

Alesia: I've wanted to work in virtual production since it first came about. I was excited by the possibilities in cinematics with game engines. The idea of controlling worlds, lighting, art and physics within a digital space, and now blending that with live action performances is incredibly exciting to me. I also love science fiction and epic historical-fiction films which are very expensive genres to explore as an indie filmmaker.

One of the differences in working on this project was the ability to alter the set decoration and colors within the virtual environment. For example, the cyber club environment did not come with the same lighting and colors that I had seen in reference images. So, we were able to swap them out. We also were able to remove walls and furniture in the chosen space to allow for a wider framing. I was fortunate to work with a Production Designer who understood the tech and the mission. I had only come to the table with some initial thoughts on flooring, foreground pieces and a couple of handheld props, but Antonella put together an entire creative vision that brought so much more of the story and environment to life than I ever could have hoped for.



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Antonella: As a professional you always need to adapt and expand your skills as the industry evolves. Working with these new technologies still represents a big challenge.

Art department has changed a lot since the volumetric productions started a few years ago. You have a digital environment to align with a traditional set design, you need to work with an Unreal engine designer and acknowledge the fact that your world is not just the actual set. You also have a digital set to work with in order to create that sense of depth of field, accurate perspective, and reality that every project needs.

Working with an Unreal Engine designer to adapt the digital world to match the set dressing was a plus. We sat down with Alesia and immediately started to discuss how to frame that digital world and the elements that we needed to adjust. For example, we moved and added neon signs and removed trash cans. This required a special attention to detail during pre-production. There are certain changes that you can't do the same day of the shoot with the Unreal Engine designer. A simple change could require several hours of work, so definitely knowing the digital world very well prior to the shoot day is a must.

Tell us about your process coming up with the story for Never Too Late.

Alesia: I brainstormed ideas after hearing the song and Becca's impetus for writing it. Never Too Late was written for a film in which an older gentleman suffers from a deep depression after losing his wife. Hearing the song brings him out of his depression and alive again with possibility and hope. The idea continued to take shape as I dug deeper into Unreal environments, scouted at Quasar and talked through my treatments with Becca and the producers. I wanted to find a way to emphasize the meaning of the song and bring out those deeper layers of meaning without being on the nose with it. I also wanted to highlight the magic of the volume, stay true to the emotional flow of the song and do something fun to watch. And I think we did!

There were three cinematographers on this shoot (Daria Rountree, Michelle Crenshaw, Rachel Hastings). How did you make the collaboration cohesive?

Alesia: The DP's and I had group conversations during prep and worked with one colorist. The creative also naturally lent itself towards having three slightly different looks as 'Beca's journey takes us through three very different environments.

Daria: I worked closely with Alesia to achieve her vision and also worked in the G&E department for Rachael Hastings. I had the scenes following Rachael's, so we made a seamless transition from the end of her scene into mine using the same movement. It also went from real life into the VR world so we separated the different worlds between each cinematographer.

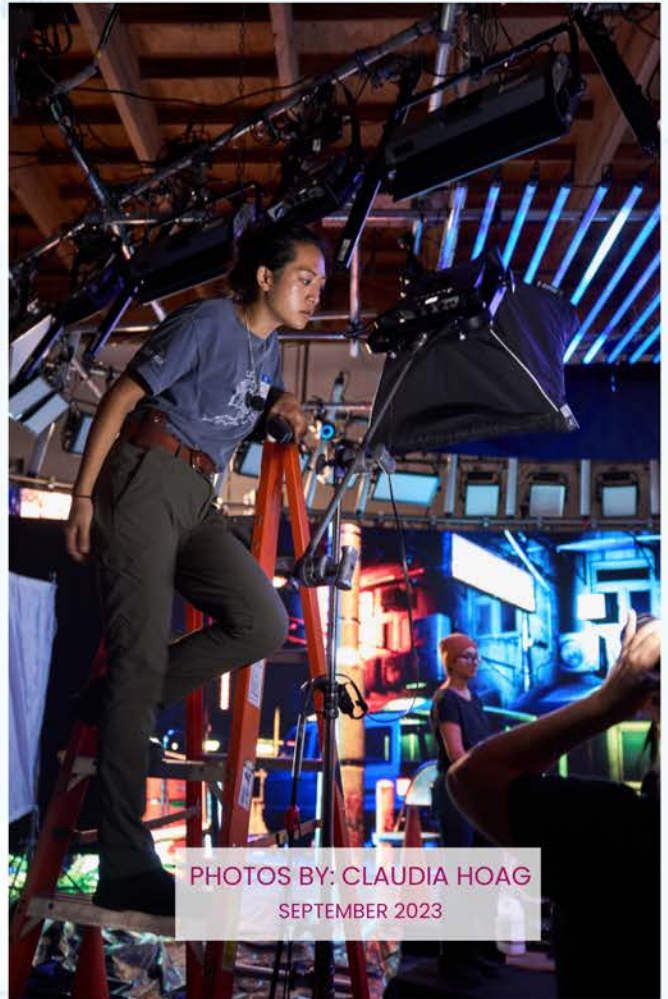
One of the cameras was on sticks and dolly. The other was on steadicam. Did you have any discoveries on the shoot?

Alesia: We technically pulled a no-no with two cameras on a volumetric shoot without the ability to track both simultaneously. It did create an issue where the 2nd camera caught the frustum in frame on occasion or the background was at an off angle. We kept the B camera on a longer lens in order to pick off close-ups and allow us more footage in the edit since we had a limited schedule.

Daria: We could only link one camera to the volume so I had to find ways for our B cam to get coverage without seeing the edge of our scene. Since our A cam was on Steadi our B cam had to be in a spot where it wouldn't get blocked, so having it on the Dana Dolly was helpful to adjust the frame to not only avoid Steadi but also the background as the edge of frame shifted. Using a longer lens also helped us get coverage on B cam to push the limits of the shifting background.

Daria: I feel much more confident in my knowledge of what is needed for these types of shoots now. When the opportunity arises to shoot on one again, I feel comfortable in knowing what to prepare for.

Alesia: Even though I've attended many talks on virtual production, the opportunity to actually work with a volume has given me a whole new foundation. It's also reinvigorated my desire to learn more! I'm feeling the impact and glow of the personal and professional relationships I've formed on this production. Let's go, team!



Tell us about your experience working with ARRI cameras on the volume.

Alesia: We filmed the video with a Mini LF and an Amira. Although it wasn't a creative choice to use two different cameras, the footage blended beautifully. The picture clarity and dynamic range of these cameras were perfect for filming on the volume.

Antonella: I have worked with the ARRI Amira and Mini LF cameras. They are both outstanding, and top of the line for productions. As we all know, the better quality, pristine image we get, the better our work on set should be. I'm also aware that the color science that ARRI has is always gentle and the most accurate to what we, as production designers, choose when working with certain color palettes.



Alesia: Beautifully said, Antonella.

Daria: The Alexa mini is a favorite of mine, so I was glad that we were able to shoot on one and have the Amira as a B cam.

What was your artistic/developmental process when preparing for the music video?

Alesia: It was a delightfully iterative process with many discoveries throughout. I thought creatively first but always kept in mind the resources and team members we had and our collective goals on this project. I wrote several treatments and continued to flesh out the ideas as I prepped with the keys. The DP's, Becca, and the Costume Design team were such stellar creative collaborators. Their ideas and adaptability during prep really helped to shape the video.

Antonella: Understanding the director's vision is key. I had a limited space to work with, so the props and elements to set dress needed to be carefully chosen. Doing a page to page and a breakdown with Alesia "Z", was highly needed. The process was super fun, and "Z" trusted in my vision and experience, so we immediately clicked on what our goals were and everything ran smoothly on set.

Daria: I had many discussions with Z about her vision. We went over shotlists to find ways of bringing out the emotion of the scene without seeing the edge of frame, thinking up ways to push our boundaries and achieve the shots we wanted. .

Alesia, What are our upcoming projects?

Alesia: I'm currently prepping four episodes of a short-form dramatic series and start filming in mid December. I'm also looking forward to finishing post production on an indie feature biopic about Sean Bell's fiancée Nicole Paultre-Bell.

I'm so grateful to have worked with all these amazingly talented Women in Media members on this project. Every single person on this shoot was absolutely impressive! Please look them up and hire them!

The Women In Media producing team (Tema Staig, Rachel Wilson, and Jane Hare) agrees. We are so proud of all the WiM members who made this project possible. We look forward to seeing you in 2024!

Holiday Toast '23



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New in 2023 ~ WiM Certification

In order to get WiM Certified, participants had to fulfill the following criteria: Be a Women In Media member, attend both days, and pass the exam. We shared, and continue to share the contact information for those who got WiM Certified with people in a position to hire, DEI and HR departments at a number of studios. You can find WiM Certified crew members by going to the CrewList and using the "WiM Certifications" pull down menu.

CAN'T GO BACK



The entertainment industry has long been plagued by gender inequality and lack of diversity, with women and other marginalized groups often overlooked for opportunities and recognition. However, there is hope for change, as more and more individuals and organizations are working towards achieving parity in the industry. As an intern for Women in Media, a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting gender balance in the entertainment industry, I had the opportunity to witness firsthand the efforts being made to break the glass ceiling.

According to a 2020 study by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, women accounted for only 21% of directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 100 grossing films of the year. This lack of representation has a significant impact on the stories that are told and the perspectives that are represented on screen.