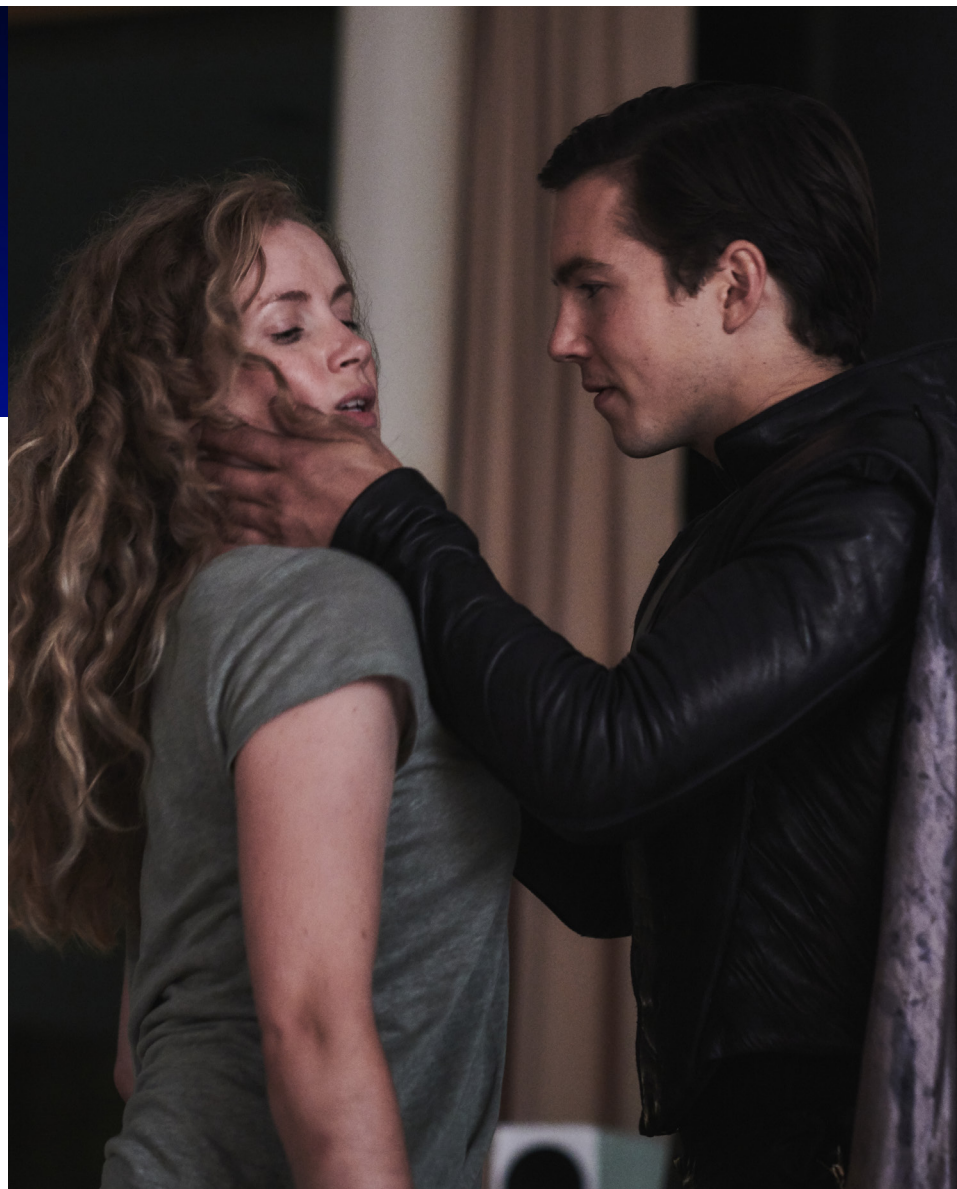




Dolby Gets its Freaks on with Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos

Many of today's most popular movies tell stories of the lives of ordinary people with extraordinary powers in tales of discovery, transformation, and plenty of action. From ancient tales of magic to modern stories of technological feats, heroes with special powers have always been a part of storytelling.



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Florian Schneider, producer





"For the first time you can capture the essence of being in a dark room with a window that's brightly lit from outside, you can see the details of the world beyond the window, but still be immersed in the room."

Stephan Kuch, colourist

So when a German team got together to make the movie *Freaks - You Are One Of Us* for Netflix, they needed their own extraordinary powers to give a mid-budget production the same emotional impact as the Hollywood blockbusters they're competing with. And, like the best mythical heroes, the production had its own tale of transformation and discovery.

For Florian Schneider, producer for PSSST! Film, even the production of *Freaks* underwent a transformation. He'd never worked with Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos before and they weren't part of the original plan. "The final decision to go to Dolby wasn't made until after primary shooting had completed," he says. "We started out just in 4K UHD, but we had a plan in the back of our mind to do better than that."

Armed with the early footage and a good story, the production team went back to Netflix, and made the case for adopting Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos in post-production - a case that married creative impetus with commercial

nous. "We knew we really wanted the extra boost Dolby Vision could give us, because it let us highlight the visual impact at just the points we needed," says Schneider. "Our combination of being supernatural on one hand, but with a grounded - almost art-house - story, we thought Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos could give us a great 'canvas' out of which the hero moments could really pop. What we had was perfectly good, but we said that we would like to turn this up. And they liked the idea."

Part of that was the creative benefits, says Schneider, but also that many Netflix members have full Dolby Vision HDR and Dolby Atmos capabilities to really see and hear the benefits of taking the movie to the next level. "It was a win for everyone!" he says.



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Andreas Rudroff, mixer

The Origin Story

The movie's story is focused on ordinary people with very ordinary lives, who are tipped off that they're the victims of a conspiracy to suppress extraordinary powers they had no idea they possessed. "On the one hand, the audience needs to be a part of the very normal life of contemporary Germany," says Schneider. "But then, as the character discovers her powers and starts to use them, we need to feel the emotional impact of the world transforming through the filter of the new skills. With Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos, you can amp up the world, give it that new feeling, without leaving the old world behind. It feels very natural, and very powerful."

Colourist Stephan Kuch of Panoptimo agrees: "You don't ratchet everything up all the time, but you still get so much extra to work with on the more muted shots. The darker side of the gamut is much richer, you can build moods and feelings, a naturalism that really works. For the first time you can capture the essence of being in a dark room with a window that's brightly lit from outside,

you can see the details of the world beyond the window, but still be immersed in the room. I had been working on another Dolby Vision project and I knew what to expect, what I could do. It's not a long learning curve, and you can get great results on your first use. You just get more of what you need."

The sound spoke for itself. "It's very easy to sell people on Dolby Atmos," says Andreas Rudroff, Orange Sound Studios. "I just bring people into the studio and press play. The argument's won in a minute."

Feeling the Power

The team had set up the production workflow from the outset to support a switch to the Dolby technologies, but the audio was a real commitment. Recorded in Dolby Atmos from the start, at the team's own expense, it was a gamble, Rudroff says, but a two-way bet that would pay off. "You need more of everything with Dolby Atmos, more tracks and Foleys, more planning. We're not a big studio with a lot of mixing rooms, but we mixed this in the Dolby Atmos



room from day one. It made sense, because even if we didn't deliver the final product in Dolby Atmos for the final production we'd have great downmixes for 5.1, 7.1, and stereo. There's a three-dimensional quality that comes across, a superior result you couldn't get before. But you have to start at the highest level first, and of course it sounds best if you keep that for the final product."

Switching to the full Dolby suite after recording wasn't entirely consequence-free. The initial choice to shoot at a high ISO led to a lengthy de-noising process, and a software update to Dolby Atmos during post-production revealed some unexpected quirks in the audio that needed some creative mixing. "The choice of ISO is the only thing I'd change," says Schneider, "but it was by no means a show-stopper." Kuch is likewise very positive about the support he got from Dolby - "they're just fantastic. The door is open night and day. Nobody else comes close."

Schneider is proud of what the team achieved. "You can really see it working in my favourite scenes, where the heroine beats up a bunch of guys in a car lot. Hollywood would have done that with 15 cameras, all the trimmings. We did it in grim light with a shaky hand-held, but you can really feel every blow. And when Electroman lets fly, that's what HDR is made for, and Dolby Vision is the best HDR there is. The screen bursts with light but no details are lost."

"We want the audience to go 'Woooah!', to jump out of their skins, to be totally immersed. We did it in a low-key way, but with state-of-the-art production. Dolby Vision HDR and Dolby Atmos were our extraordinary powers. We're small, we're the underdogs, the real-life freaks, but we gave the audience the experience we wanted them to have, because Dolby gave us the power."

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