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PRODUCTION NEWS & NOTES



Risky Business

▶ THE HUB'S NEWEST GAME SHOW, *FAMILY GAME NIGHT*, features families competing in life-sized versions of traditional Hasbro games. A joint venture between Discovery Communications and Hasbro, Inc., the show includes games like *Cranium*™, *Bop-It!*™ and *Connect4*™ in an environment that lighting designer Michael Veerkamp of Team Imagination describes as “big, bright, energetic, and colorful.”

Veerkamp joined the creative team for the cable channel's new show once production designer Anton Goss' set was in place. “Anton loves to do his sets in a neutral gray, so my contribution is, foremost, to add color, then textures,” says Veerkamp, adding that designing for game shows is a unique undertaking. “I can design lighting cues and lighting looks just because I want to. My principle goal is to utilize effects and cueing to create looks that move along

and enhance the game play. We try to help the audience at home get drawn into the games and understand when elements of game play have advanced. I also try to create a look and excitement on screen that will make the television viewer surfing at home stop and check us out.”

Bringing the set to life and using colors that mimic the Hasbro games is a rig outfitted with various Martin Professional fixtures—six MAC 700 Profiles, 34 MAC 250 Entours, 12 MAC 301 LED Wash units—as well as 30 Coemar ParLite LEDs and 24 Philips Color Kinetics ColorBlast 12s. Rounding out the effects are Martin Professional Atomic 3000 Strobes, GAM TwinSpin Dual Pattern Rotators, Reel EFX DF-50 Diffusion Hazers, and a Martin Jem K1 Hazer. 4Wall Entertainment's new Los Angeles office provided the lighting equipment.

Veerkamp calls the MAC 301 LED Wash his “new



/// *Family Game Night* is the first television show programmed on the new Martin Professional M1™ lighting console.

toy,” as this show marks his first use of the fixtures. “They have nice bright, smooth color changes, perfect matching of the LEDs, and a great strobe,” the designer says. “The zoom function is amazing with the ability to go from a nice wide shaft to a narrow beam. Equally important to us is that they have an option to switch into a flicker free-television mode.”

The Coemar ParLite LEDs are also a favorite, and Veerkamp jokes that he uses so many, so often, “that I should own stock! They are very cost-effective and bright,” he says. “With custom lenses, I’ve used them to wash a cyc with great success. For *Family Game Night*, they are coloring the columns. Just two fixtures with 30° lenses are fully saturating a 20’-tall column.”

The MAC 700 Profiles fill in any dark spots or unexpected talent marks and are also used for beam effects and the animation wheel. The MAC 250 Entours are the workhorse of the rig, used primarily for air effects and ballyhoos. The Philips Color Kinetics ColorBlast 12s are used as a color wash effect under the stage, where Veerkamp notes

they “really give a signature look to the set.”

The playing area is 70’ wide by 40’ deep, all of it used for the show and shot from many angles. “Using the more traditional approaches of 2kW Fresnels would have been beyond our budget and the ability of our crews to get them up in the air in time,” says Veerkamp, adding that he opted instead for ETC Source Four PARnels and PARs on bars, heavily diffused with GAM 1070. Additional conventionals include Source Four 36° ellipsoidals, as well as James Thomas ACL Bars and 1kW PAR bars

The show also has the distinction of being the first television production programmed using Martin Professional’s new M1™ lighting console, though the show is operated on a Martin M-PC™ lighting controller with a Maxxyz Wing. “Programming with the M1 was flawless,” says Veerkamp. “It runs the same operating software as the Maxxyz console that we’ve been using for years, so there was little fear of being the first to take it to a television program. Television is a bit different than a theatre or concert setting. We work 10- to 14-hour days, and



/// With lighting design by Michael Veerkamp of Team Imagination, the show features lighting fixtures from Martin Professional, Coemar, and Philips Color Kinetics.

most of my shows are cue-heavy. We also used MIDI macros to trigger cues from the gaming system's computers." Veerkamp notes that the lighting team used only the console to do the bulk of programming before switching to modified PC units, adding, "We are very comfortable with the ability to migrate from the desk to the PC."

Mark Pranzini, whom Veerkamp calls "a great programmer and a very gifted designer with a great eye," programmed the show and was also responsible for training the operators. "Family Game Night was all over the place and required many handles for the initial programming of each game," he says. "Team Imagination doesn't like to hold up production, so we must work in almost a 'live' mode, so speed is key. The M1 gives the programmer numerous functions that are laid out logically and efficiently to accomplish the programming speed this production required. My favorite features are the many live playback features and that it's light, compact, and efficient."

Shooting 60 shows in six weeks brings its challenges, especially keeping consistency and repeatability of the looks. "Every time

a contestant hits a button or rolls a game piece, the same series of cues must hit," says Veerkamp. "It's a bad, bad thing if we accidentally trigger a cue that indicates players have won when they have not. We always work very hard to proof our program. When you add a series of triggered cues that are coming from another department's computer—also running very intensive complicated code—you always have to be prepared and especially confident with your console, and you cannot be an operator for one of my game shows if you have a short attention span. You're playing along with the game."

Team Imagination has three new shows in the works: *Scrabble*, *The Game of Life*, and *Lingo*, with a larger version of *Family Game Night* to follow. Adam Portelli is the assistant lighting director, with Brent Wrobel as gaffer and Brandon Bagwell as assistant to the LD. Veerkamp says the trick to making it all work well is "simply that I hired the best assistants, programmers, and crews, and as a team, we work together, have fun, and try to take really good care of our clients." Sounds like a smooth operation.

—Marian Sandberg



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