



CASE STUDY

# Disguise powers Olivier award-winning Stranger Things

“Stranger Things: The First Shadow,” the theatrical prequel to the hit Netflix series “Stranger Things”, opened at the Phoenix Theatre in London in December 2023.

In this case study you will discover how the visually intensive production was the first to use the Disguise 10-bit workflow to cohesively drive onstage HDR content displayed on an LED video screen as well as content from almost a dozen projectors.

# Summary

“Stranger Things: The First Shadow” is an original play that’s part of the canon of the extremely successful Netflix series. Taking place in Hawkins 1959, the world was brought to life by a multi-award winning creative team.

Directed by Stephen Daldry, co-directed by Justin Martin, and written by Kate Trefry, the play is an original story by the Duffer Brothers, Jack Thorn and Trefry, serving as a prequel to the events of the television series Stranger Things. 59 Productions was responsible for the design, content production, programming, and creative and technical commissioning of the show’s video elements. The company needed to integrate with and collaborate across the video, lighting, sound and illusion departments to achieve spectacular visual effects.

Working on a show with so many moving parts meant the team needed a flexible workflow for the designers to spontaneously make changes during technical rehearsals.



# The challenge

It took more than three years for the production to get off the ground. R&D for the show began in 2020 with video effects workshops underway during COVID, video design starting in 2022 and tech rehearsals beginning in October 2023, two months prior to the opening.

It was one of the most technically complicated shows that 59 Productions has ever been involved with, requiring numerous projectors plus a large LED video surface. The company needed to devise a workflow that enabled everything to work seamlessly - a job Disguise was born for.



# The solution

*59 Productions* used Disguise's 10-bit workflow, featuring four GX 3 media servers and the OmniCal camera-based projector calibration system. These tools allowed the company to deploy almost a dozen projectors and a large LED video surface cohesively while also keeping the large complement of projectors aligned.

Disguise Multi-user sessions allowed their team to make the most of the allotted time – a tool that Disguise does better than anybody else. People could make changes to different elements on stage simultaneously and at other points in the timeline.

Additional flexible elements and toolsets, such as Disguise Expressions, permitted the creation of custom tools that simplified workflows.



“Disguise supported us well in the tech process when we had a dedicated channel with them and they responded on a daily basis.

The Disguise team also worked closely with us to address both bugs and feature requests and gave us new builds of the software throughout, which helped us stay on track.”

Ben Percy  
CTO

# Results

The show opened to positive reviews and continues to enjoy wide critical acclaim, winning the 2024 Olivier Award for Best Entertainment as well as Best Set and Video Design, a crowning representation of the highly technical, spectacular visual effects achieved by the team at 59 Productions. The show has also just announced that it will be extending its run at the West End's Phoenix Theatre until February 2025.

It proved the efficacy of implementing the Disguise 10-bit workflow on a theatrical production of great complexity, which required both extensive projection and LED video displays. Disguise GX 3 media servers and OmniCal offered users speed and flexibility from the rehearsal process to the mission-critical driving of content at every performance.



# Disguise equipment used



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## OMNICAL

Our camera-based projector calibration system, OmniCal, quickly captures a point cloud of your projection surface and accurately calibrates projectors.

**Find out more** [→](#)



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## GX3

The GX 3 is the most powerful and versatile disguise machine to date, unlocking new potential in generative graphics thanks to its GPU's processing capabilities.

**Find out more** [→](#)

# In Partnership with



**Project Director:** Leo Warner

**Associate Project Director:** Ben Pearcy

**Lead Video Designer:** Tom Wexler

**Video Designer:** Matt Taylor

**Animators:** Jason Devine, Emily Howells,  
Jarek Radecki, Nicol Scott, Edd Stockton,  
Laurent de Vleeshouwer, Lawrence Watson

**Producer:** Teya Lanzon

**Video Programmer:** Liam Daly

**Video System Design:** Richard Wells

**Lead Video Engineers:** Mogzi, Alex Ramsden





# 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.

Get in touch

Get Started