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## **MR. X THANKS CRITIC ROGER EBERT FOR ULTIMATE COMPLIMENT ON “ICE PRINCESS”**

*Effects Studio Fools the Eye – and Helps Star Trachtenberg to Soar*

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Toronto, Ontario. March 22, 2005 – Acclaimed movie critic **Roger Ebert** gave Visual Effects studio **Mr. X** the ultimate compliment in his March 18, 2005 review of the film ***Ice Princess*** for *The Chicago Sun-Times*. Ebert, who gave the film three stars, praised the surprisingly advanced skating ability of its star, Michelle Trachtenberg. But it was Mr. X, among others, who actually brought a little magic to the ice, using a host of visual effects to make it look like Trachtenberg is in fact an Olympic-level skater.

In his March 18 print review of *Ice Princess* (for the *Chicago Sun-Times*), Ebert says:

“I was surprised how entertained I was. Like "Shall We Dance" or "Saturday Night Fever," it escapes its genre. That's partly because the screenplay avoids the usual rigid division of good and evil, and gives us characters who actually change during the movie. Partly because the acting is so convincing. And partly because the actresses in the movie really can skate -- or seem to. Well, no wonder, since two of them are figure skaters, but the surprise is that Michelle Trachtenberg seems able to skate, too. That didn't look like a double on the ice, although *Variety*, the showbiz Bible, reports, "Four different skaters sub for Trachtenberg in the more difficult performances.”

“Thank you, Roger Ebert!” comments VFX Supervisor **Dennis Berardi**. “Ultimately, The best effects are those that look so real that they cannot be seen. So, in his review for *Ice Princess*, Ebert actually pays our digital artists the ultimate compliment -- by not recognizing their work.”

Trachtenberg demonstrated considerable natural skating ability during filming, and her talents provided the foundation for the studio's effects work. However, the performance of the Olympic-caliber loops and lutzes executed by her character, Casey Carlyle, would have required years of rigorous training. For such advanced and technically demanding elements, four talented skating doubles (Jennifer Robinson, Sandra Jean Rucker, Cassandre Van Bakel, Lauren Wilson) were therefore used to help Casey take flight. Thanks to these skating doubles, as well as seamless visual effects, Trachtenberg was transformed into a skater capable of even the most difficult moves and jumps, among them the notorious triple axel. "Michelle could already skate," adds Mr. X's Berardi, "but Mr. X helped her to soar."

To create the illusion that Trachtenberg was actually performing these complicated jumps, Mr. X accomplished numerous digital face replacement shots using a combination of compositing effects and 3D techniques. The Face Replacement Team was headed by VFX Supervisor Aaron Weintraub, and CG Supervisor Mark Stepanek, and accomplished the task of digitally integrating Trachtenberg's face with the body of the stunt double doing that particular jump. The obvious advantage of employing digital face replacement is that it helps remove the limitations filmmakers often experience when selecting camera angles for complex action sequences.

To begin the process, a digital scan of Michelle Trachtenberg's face was taken by Eyetronics. This digital mesh was then textured and rigged by Mr. X in preparation for the next stage of animation, and rendered in 3D. Painting and compositing effects were then used 'Frame by Frame' by the Mr. X team, among others, in an exacting and painstaking process to ensure an authentic performance. Each face replacement was accomplished down to the most minute detail, so that the actress's face can be clearly seen in several highly difficult skating moves actually accomplished by doubles, fooling even the discerning eyes of moviegoers and critics alike. When combined with Trachtenberg's natural elegance on the ice in many other moves, the digital work helps to transform the character of Casey Carlyle into an instantly believable world-class skater.

The Mr. X team was led by Visual Effects Supervisors **Dennis Berardi and Aaron Weintraub**, along with CG Supervisor **Mark Stepanek** and Compositing Supervisor **Noel**

**Hooper**, and used such tools as *Maya*, *Renderman*, and *MentalRay* for the 3D work, as well as *Shake*, *Flame*, and *Inferno* for compositing.

Mr. X continues to build upon its successful track record of partnering with filmmakers to create story-driven visual effects, as seen in ***Assault on Precinct 13*** (2005), ***Dawn of the Dead*** (2004) and ***Resident Evil: Apocalypse***, as well as dozens more.

Exciting upcoming projects for Mr. X include such anticipated titles as ***The Greatest Game Ever Played*** (another Disney project), ***A History of Violence*** for David Cronenberg and New Line, and ***Where the Truth Lies*** for Atom Egoyan, among many others.

### **About *Ice Princess***

Released on March 18, 2005, Disney's ***Ice Princess*** tells the story of Casey Howard, a talented young figure skater who dreams of becoming a champion. The film stars Michelle Trachtenberg in the title role, as well as Kim Cattrall, Joan Cusack, Hayden Panettiere, Trevor Blumas, and Connie Ray. The film was directed by Tim Fywell.

### **Who is Mr. X?**

Bringing together a unique mix of artists, filmmakers, VFX supervisors, and programmers, Mr. X specializes in partnering with filmmakers to provide story-driven visual enhancements. The artists and creative minds at Mr. X are known for their superb, photo-realistic achievements in CGI, their skills in digital matte painting, VFX compositing, and Post/VFX supervision, as well as for their realistic digital creations of epic-scale and otherwise impossible stunts. With a studio equipped with a rare mix of the latest imaging technologies, the team at Mr. X is committed to pushing the limits of the digital realm, and in making the impossible, possible.

With credits on dozens of distinguished projects including ***Resident Evil: Apocalypse***, ***Dawn of the Dead (2004)***, ***Wrong Turn***, ***Blizzard***, ***Ararat***, ***The Sweet Hereafter*** and many more, Mr. X helps to define the very look and feel of a film.

For more information on **Mr. X**, please visit their website at [www.Mrxfx.com](http://www.Mrxfx.com), or for pictures or interviews, please contact Dennis Berardi at **(416) 595-6222**, or via e-mail at [Dennis@Mrxfx.com](mailto:Dennis@Mrxfx.com). For public relations materials, bios, or further backgrounders, meanwhile, please contact publicist **Angela Mitchell** at **(904) 982-8043** or [Paramitch@aol.com](mailto:Paramitch@aol.com).

**Note:** For a complete list of Mr. X titles and credits on *Ice Princess*, please refer to the credits list to follow.

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## **Digital Visual Effects by Mr. X**

*Ice Princess*

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Visual Effects Supervisor	Dennis Berardi Aaron Weintraub	Lighting and Rendering	Sean Cohen Aaron Pozzer
Visual Effects Production Manager	Sarah McMurdo	Matchmovers	Mike Mulock Karl Sisson
CG Supervisor	Mark Stepanek	Operations Manager	David Singer
Compositing Supervisors	Noel Hooper	Visual Effects Producer	Fiona Campbell
VFX Compositors	Rob Del Ciano Barb Benoit Kris Brockman Bonnie Dickson Brian Lui Jef Lonn Seth Martiniuk	Tape Operators	Mike Diltz
		Systems Administration	Vladimir Popovic
		In-house Accountant	Linda Rose
3D Animators	Brian Anderson Daniel Mizuguchi Matt Ralph	Office Administrator	Andreea Denes

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