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By **Matt Armstrong**

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For years, beauty work – removing wrinkles, blemishes and giving a glow to the skin - has been common in music videos. Less drastic beauty work has recently become more common in movies to make actors appear more vibrant and attractive. But visual effects company Lola took this to new heights on *X-Men: The Last Stand* by making actors Sir Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart appear 25 years younger.

“On music videos, the beauty work is just a blurred grain that gives you that porcelain, perfect skin, Britney Spears look that’s been done for years,’ explains visual effects supervisor/co-owner of Lola. “But on feature films, they want to maintain the texture of the skin so it’s a bit trickier to keep the texture while trying to make it look younger.”

But the X-Men required no ordinary beauty makeover but more like major plastic surgery. In fact Lola did consult with two different plastic surgeons.

“That was extremely helpful because they are very specific about what needs to be fixed and come at it from a very scientific point-of-view. Our work probably got 30 percent better after consulting with them. After working with them we added one of them to our staff as a consultant.”

After doing tests reassuring the production that they would be able to make the actors appear decades younger, Williams showed up on set the day they were shooting the ‘younger’ scenes.

“We’d asked them to do very light makeup on the actors so we didn’t have to deal with them looking pan-caked,” recalls Williams, “and also to have McKellen’s hair darkened because hair is very challenging. But the hair people said McKellan didn’t want his hair dyed and they just started shooting without it. So that was another thing we had to tackle.”

So how did they make them look younger without just blurring out the wrinkles?

“Essentially we did two things: we manipulated the lighting and the bone structure. First we stripped away all the original lighting, removed all the shadows on their faces and then rebuilt the lighting. That basically removed the wrinkles.”

But the effects of aging are a lot more than wrinkles.

“As you age you start to droop. Your nose starts to dip, your ears get a little bigger. Your top lip becomes thinner, your eyelids starts to droop. So the second thing we did was using mesh warpers in Discreet Inferno we literally moved the bone structure and tissue mass. We did some 3D models for lighting reference but other than that it was a 2-and-a-half D solution. We did 3D tracking because the actors’ heads move or there is a camera move and we had to track our digital band-aids. Boujou was used for some of the 3D tracking and Maya as well.”

