

## FACE TIME

By Lisa Mulcahy

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When it comes to imagining wild, shocking or bigger-than-life F.X makeup, for the most talented artists, the sky is truly the limit. Reality, however, has its limitations. Many makeup artists/designers don't have a lot of experience actually working with more extreme F/X such as prosthetics in a delicate area like the face. What's more, the actor wearing such a design must be able to move and emote without limitation-plus wear the makeup safely.

Learning the facial F/X/ ropes sound like a pretty daunting prospect, doesn't it? It doesn't have to be. What follows is a primer covering all the basics, from safety testing and usage to application and removal, to great product suggestions. Soon you'll be making those designs you've dreamed up actually happen!

### The Skinny on Skin Issues

Your first concern when prepping an actor for facial F/X is skin compatibility. Even the mildest allergic reaction, such as a rash, is going to make your actor uncomfortable and hamper his or her performance. Additionally, you don't ever want to risk a more serious scenario such as a major inflammation, burning or potential scarring. Robert Hall, owner of Almost Human, a highly respected makeup F/X company in Culver City, California, has worked on scores of designs for TV projects, films, and numerous Marilyn Manson music videos. Hall, a seasoned stage performer, concurs that safety must be your prime concern. "Makeup tests will help to ensure safety, as many people's skin is different and can be irritated by common fragrances, pigments, etc." he explains. "Do a makeup test or at least a patch test to avoid this problem."

Gene Flaherty, a makeup artist whose specialty is F/X, agrees about the importance of taking makeup tests for safety reasons. However, he feels a skin test should be done twice over a 12-hour period. "You cannot be allergic to something until you've been exposed to it. Introducing an actor to chemicals they've never heard of will not ensure that they are not allergic," he maintains. "You don't want to have a negative test result and then have a positive reaction on the first application. If there is some doubt about a slight reaction, use a barrier cream or spray to protect the skin.

### The Prosthetics Process

Another crucial safety factor is making sure the prosthetics you choose won't limit range of movement in any part of the actor's face. Lars Carlsson, a renowned makeup artist based in Gothenburg, Sweden, who has worked worldwide creating scores of creature effects and various F/X for stage, opera, and film stresses the importance of proper planning.

"Most actors who have never used facial prosthetics are a bit afraid they will inhibit their acting," he says. "If the prosthetics have been done with the actor in mind, the risk is significantly less. When I plan a facial piece for an actor, I always look at their facial movements and sometimes even film them doing all the movements they can think of. Later, when I sculpt the piece, I study the video and make sure

the sculpture matches the actor's muscle movements.”

The material of the prosthetic should be carefully considered as well. “Something that is equally important is the material I choose and how thick I make it,” Carlsson continues. “If I choose to make a piece in latex, it will be impossible to move in. Sometimes this is the effect you want, for a bad burn, for example. But if the character should be a natural person who can express his feelings better than that, I have to choose a material that's flexible and creases correctly. My choice for an old-looking face would be silicone or gelatine, as they both mimic real skin very well. For a big monster makeup where thicker pieces are necessary, I would opt for foam latex. That's lightweight and easier to wear.”

## Application Essentials

When it comes to actually applying prosthetics, a little common sense goes a long way. Make sure your actor's skin is totally clean before applying your base coat of latex. Don't deposit blobs of latex onto the skin; build up a gradual coating using thin layers. “Anything you can do to minimize sweat, the better,” Hall advises. “Your makeup will stay in one place. The job of makeup is to be as unobtrusive as possible.”

Different facial prosthetics can pose different application challenges. Here are a few specialized points to keep in mind, depending upon the F/X you happen to be working with:

**Prosthetic Noses and Ears.** Avoid using the wrong adhesive. “The most common mistakes I see are people using ancient techniques and materials to glue appliances on,” notes Hall. “Spirit gum or matte adhesive is the wigs. Never glue a rubber piece onto the skin with spirit gum. There are better glues such as Pros-Aide and the silicone-based Telesis. These are available at quality makeup stores, or easily found on the internet.” Also make sure that your actor can breathe clearly and hear well at all times; if there's any blockage, refit the prosthetic properly.

**Prosthetics Applies Close to the Eyes.** Facial molds or masks should have sufficient eyehole width so that vision isn't compromised. Also, never use liquid latex in this area of the face because this product is ammonia-based and its fumes can cause eye burning. As for eye-specific applications such as contact lens F/X, consult an eye specialist with your actor to ensure that the lenses used are safe to wear and properly fitted.

**Dental F/X.** Again, it's highly recommended you consult with a dentist regarding the safety of any false teeth you make or have made. Be certain that any adhesive you use is nontoxic (a commercial denture adhesive such as Sea Bond is always a safe choice). If an actor tells you a dental prosthetic is cutting his or her tongue or slicing into the gum line, move quickly to fix any sharp edges on the prosthetic and refit the piece from scratch. Check in frequently with your actor to make sure they can speak with ease and that the device isn't slipping even the slightest.

## Your F/X in Action

Once the application process is complete, your next obligation is to help your actor work comfortably with a prosthetic in performance. “The cooperation between makeup artist and actor should be very close,” says Carlsson. “The actor must realize that acting through makeup is always demanding, but their performance can gain enormously through learning to work in it, even if that takes a bit of time. The makeup artist should respect the actor and not make pieces that are impossible to work in.”

To this end, Carlsson guides his actors through every possible challenge where movement is concerned, as early in a production as he possible can. “Generally, I train the actors before they go out onstage for the first time on how they should exaggerate their expressions to get maximum effect out of the makeup. Sometimes, it can be as important to tell actors what not to do as it is to tell them what to do. If I have made some false teeth for someone, they then to always want to show them too much. This totally spoils the effect! Teeth are great, but should be treated as just part of the natural face. If you had big teeth, you would try not to show them, wouldn't you?

It can be extremely helpful to sit in on all dress rehearsals and previews, to watch your actor working with the F/X as closely as you can. Offer to take notes for the performer, if he or she wishes, so that movement mistakes and awkward moments can be caught and brought to the actor's attention.

#### Premium Products

There's a huge range of terrific facial F/X products on the market to help you execute whatever design you have in mind. Please consult each manufacturer for up-to-the-minute price information and availability.

#### Ben Nye -

- F/X Color Wheels -
- Age Stipple
- Burns & Blisters
- Severe Exposure
- Old Character
- Camouflage

#### Mehron -

- Tooth F/X
- 3-D Gel
- Sweat and Tears

#### Graftobian -

- EMS/Severe Trauma makeup kit

#### Kryolan -

- Fix-Blood

## Magic Blood Blood Sachets

And when it comes time to take it all off? “Supersolv is a gentla adhesive remover (for prosthetics)”, recommends Hall. “Use that with a soft, large flat brush. Gently work the brush under the piece and never tug too hard. Take your time.” The makeup manufacturers listed above offer a range of gentle makeup removers and cleansers for liquid and powder F/X as well. So wipe off today’s face and start fresh with yet another incredible F/X design tomorrow!