

JENNIFER WOLFE

THE ART OF THE MINI-MOVIE

Kroll Show Sketches Are Each Shot As Short Features

Known for his role as Ruxin in the FX comedy series *The League*, along with stand-up specials and roles on *Community*, *Childrens Hospital*, *Parks and Recreation* and *Portlandia*, Nick Kroll returned to Comedy Central in January as the creator/writer/star of the newly minted *Kroll Show*.

A fresh take on sketch comedy, *Kroll Show* is executive produced and written by Kroll, John Levenstein (*Arrested Development*) and *Portlandia*'s Jonathan Krisel, who also directs the series. In an increasingly common distribution model, episodes from *Kroll Show* are available the day after broadcast on iTunes, Xbox and other digital platforms, even as Kroll mocks his online viewers as "completely useless."

Kroll's characters also take on digital lives, as shown by the Pinterest account maintained by the Liz & Liz "PubLIZity" team (played by Kroll and *Saturday Night Live* alum Jenny Slate), the Bobby Bottleservice Twitter account and a Rich Dicks Instagram Tumblr (a parody of Rich Kids of Instagram), among others.

Series DP Christian Sprenger, known for his parodies of Levis ads as well as his work on the Adult Swim series *Eagleheart*, combines an enormous appreciation for sketch comedy with the skills needed to reverse-engineer looks for shows that span reality, feature, commercial, music video and television series formats.

"From a DP's perspective, the amazing thing about this show is the 30-40 separate looks we had to develop," Sprenger says. "We built this insane spreadsheet with the look reference for each sketch, breaking down lighting, color profiles, lenses, all of it. As you can imagine, that led to an unbelievable amount of equipment."

The production team employed a pair of RED EPIC cameras for the series, bolstered by Sony PMW-EX3 camcorders, GoPro HERO2s and Panasonic AG-HCK10 HD POV cameras. A



Nick Kroll as Aspen Bruckheimer

Canon XF105 shot night vision footage for a *Ghost Hunters*-type parody. “This was an enormous undertaking,” Sprenger emphasizes. “I’ve worked on shows using only one camera package, one camera system, one frame rate, one set of lenses, one type of color look, and even that can be challenging.”

With a schedule that allowed for just two and a half weeks of preproduction, Sprenger and his team found themselves scrambling to prepare for the dozens of looks and location shoots the script demanded. “Many of the director’s references were extremely specific—obscure, weird little things shot in PAL, you name it. Once we had the reference looks established, we would reverse-engineer the various elements—frame rate, interlaced or progressive, zoom controllers or snap zooms—essentially creating a look bible for each sketch.”

Working alongside DIT Chris Hoyle, Sprenger and his team took charge of keeping the production team in the loop about any given day’s schedule. “It was a fun show to work on because every day

Find It Online:

Liz & Liz: [pinterest.com/publizity/](https://www.pinterest.com/publizity/)
Bobby Bottleservice: twitter.com/akaBobbyB

was completely different from the day before it, or the day after, with a whole new set of rules that had to be applied to what you were shooting that day. It was an unbelievable experience,” he says. “It was amazing that our camera team was able to keep up with it, but it was also more than worth it. That level of technical realism adds so much, makes it funnier, and helps the exec producers achieve their vision.”

“It’s a very interesting show,” Sprenger continues. “Not everything looks beautiful. There’s some really terrible looking stuff,” he laughs.

“You have to look at it like it’s something bigger than you,” he explains. “It’s bigger than something always being beautiful, or always being lit perfectly, or always being in focus. You have to put all that aside and give the jokes room. You’re adding to the overall comedic effect if something feels more realistic.”

A huge collaborative effort, *Kroll Show* is the result of painstaking effort combined with



Nick Kroll and Jon Daly as Aspen Bruckheimer and Wendy (Wendall Shawn IV), the show’s two “rich dicks.” Follow them on Tumblr: wendyandaspen.tumblr.com



Liz B. (Nick Kroll) and Liz G. (Jenny Slate) of the PubLiZity PR agency are two very different young publicists trying to have it all.



Nick Kroll as Legs, a new kid who enters a high school filled with kids in wheelchairs and is branded as the outsider

PHOTO BY GREG GANNE

PHOTO BY DANNY FEED



Nick Kroll as Fabrice Fabrice, the outlandish craft services coordinator



Nick Kroll as Bobby Bottleservice, entrepreneur, record producer, ladies man, MMA aficionado.



Nick Kroll as Gil Faizon, one of Manhattan's most eligible bachelors

an obsessive eye for detail. "There was such an enormous amount of information floating around the camera department, it was like doing ten shows at once," Sprenger says. "In narrative television, you set a look during the pilot and then, for better or worse, that's the look you have to stick to. Showrunners can be very nervous about making those types of changes, and it can become a little grey or boring if you're coming to work and

shooting the same exact thing every day, shooting the same close-ups with the same lens."

"In terms of skill set, this is the most exciting thing I've done in the camera department in a long time. At the end of the day, I'm really happy with how everything came out. I learned a ton, everyone learned a ton, and it was just a lot of fun. It was like doing a new television show every day." **dv**

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