



## July Talk Case Study Using laser projection to realize a creative vision

## 🔍 CHALLENGE

With their biggest show to date canceled as a result of Covid-19, Toronto-based band July Talk began looking for safe alternatives. When they ultimately decided on hosting two shows at a drive-in theater, they assembled a multi-disciplinary team to help achieve their multi-media vision of a full audio/video streaming event.

## 🔧 SOLUTION

The team utilized Panasonic laser projectors and several lenses, including a special short-throw lens, to create a cutting-edge visual experience that was integrated into the stage design. A collection of Panasonic cameras both recorded and streamed the event.

## ✅ RESULT

The show was a creative success beyond initial expectations. Using high-focus laser projectors provided enough flexibility for the creative team to truly design the imagery around the band's stage show. The short-throw lens on the rear projection image gave the team the ability to cast a crisp, bright image in the limited space they had behind the stage. Since the initial performance, the band has hosted encore screenings to support providing education to Northern communities during the pandemic.

At the start of 2020, Toronto-based alternative rock band July Talk was planning to announce a major show at Budweiser Stage, a 16,000-person capacity amphitheater located on Lake Ontario. For the band, booking the show was a benchmark - an indication that the eight years spent building their audience and honing their art had paid off.

"It was our biggest show as a band at that point, and we were really excited to headline this big venue," said Peter Dreimanis, co-founder and multi-instrumentalist for the band.

So when Canada went into lockdown in response to Covid-19 and July Talk had to cancel the performance, it was more than just a slight disappointment. It meant canceling an important show in their hometown - one that symbolized the band having reached the next stage as a performing act.

## A new plan of approach

With a new record slated for release in June 2020, the band and their team began exploring alternative ideas for safely hosting a performance. The idea of performing for two nights at a drive-in movie theater seemed like a perfect fit: Both Dreimanis and bassist Josh Warburton studied film in university and have experience producing and directing music videos - including their own.

Suddenly, what had started as a fallback plan was emerging as a new and exciting creative opportunity. With that opportunity, however, came new challenges. So, the band began to assemble the team - and technology - to achieve their vision.

## Bringing it all together

One person tapped for the production team was Tyler Sammy, a creative technologist and CEO of FutureTalk. Working with the band and director Adam Crosby, Sammy brought his extensive background in augmented reality and projection mapping to the project. Together, they designed a stage show that utilized three laser projectors that would be captured on camera, not just for the live audience at the drive-in, but also an audience of streamers watching the performance from the safety of their homes.

"Peter calls me and gives me the idea: 'We're going to be the first ones to do a drive-in show. Let's get projections in there and, ideally, let's figure out how to stream it, too,'" Sammy recalls. "So, I said, 'Let me talk to my friends at Panasonic because they'll be able to help.'"

With his background in film production, Dreimanis agreed that Panasonic was the obvious choice.

"[Crosby] and I had so much respect for Panasonic sensors," Dreimanis said. "They're always making, whether in the camera or projector world, a higher quality camera body or projector that's lighter and easier to use. And the end product is so much more aware of what actual cinematographers want to see in an image."



## Achieving the vision

To achieve their vision for the stage design, the team utilized two laser projectors for each side of the stage, primarily angled at a row of amplifiers, a rear projector casting images from behind the stage, and eight cameras for streaming and recording. As the band began to plan their performance, with marks and cues for various songs, the idea arose of projecting images onto Dreimanis and singer Leah Fay as they stood behind the drums.

Given his experience with projection, Sammy expected that they would need to sacrifice focus with the side projectors to achieve the projections on to the amps and the shift to Fay and Dreimanis. He was pleasantly surprised to discover this wasn't the case.

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Tyler Sammy  
Creative Technologist and CEO,  
FutureTalk

“I was amazed with the focus of the lasers,” Sammy said. “I thought we'd have to choose: 'Do we focus on [the amps] or [Fay and Dreimanis]? Oh, well it looks like we can actually focus on both. These projectors are awesome!”

Sammy also cited the in-projector edge cutting functionality as being particularly helpful in reducing and minimizing spill, stopping additional light thrown from the projector and giving him the ability to feather things out.

“There was just a quick check through the menus to make sure the projectors were in the same color space,” Sammy said, “and then there were, immediately, these vibrant, sharp images.”

## “Super short throw”

Determining the best placement of the projectors was a challenge that took almost all of the limited time the team had to get the stage prepared, so the ability to plug and play allowed Sammy and the group as much time as possible to create the visual impacts they were hoping to achieve.

The placement of the rear projector was of particular concern for the team. This projector an integral part of the visual experience, and a wooded area behind the stage raised concerns that there wouldn't be enough space to throw an image large enough to cover the area they needed. If they utilized a short-throw projector to keep out of the woods, they knew any cover they used to protect the equipment from potential rain could cut the image.

Sammy spoke to the Panasonic team about the various concerns and was able to obtain a special lens. “It's a super short-throw lens that acts like a periscope out the front as opposed to being mirrored out the back,” Sammy said. “It actually gave us better image quality, and it also resolved the issue of being tarped and the image being cut. [The lens] is one of the most beautiful things I've seen.”

Sammy continued, “We were under nine feet away and hitting a 16x16 square. Based on my understanding of projectors, optics and lenses, this is insane. We just couldn't believe it.”



# Panasonic

Dreimanis and Sammy both emphasized the way artists and technicians from various disciplines came together to make this show happen. The final result was a seamless blend of audio and visual technology, as well as connectivity that allowed July Talk to stream the concert across the internet. Sammy said the Panasonic team’s support freed him to focus on achieving their ambitious creative vision.

“Having the support from Panasonic where I can tell them what I’m going for, what my restraints are, get their input, then weigh our options and bring it to life — as a creative and technical director, it just makes me so happy,” Sammy said. “The Panasonic team, as well as the hardware, has really been integral in the last two years in allowing me to elevate my art to the next level.”



## Victory laps

The band has since taken the final product on the road, showcasing the performances captured in encore screenings and streams, including a benefit in October for Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School to help support its efforts in bringing education to students in Northern communities during the pandemic.

For Sammy, success wasn’t just creative, but also civic: The creative team was able to provide an escape and shared experience during a time when people need it most.

“Throughout the pandemic, art has become one of the things that allows people to find common places to exist and forget about it for a minute,” Sammy said. “You can’t forget about it all - you don’t want to live in ignorance - but you do need moments to relax and share in the human experience.”

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