

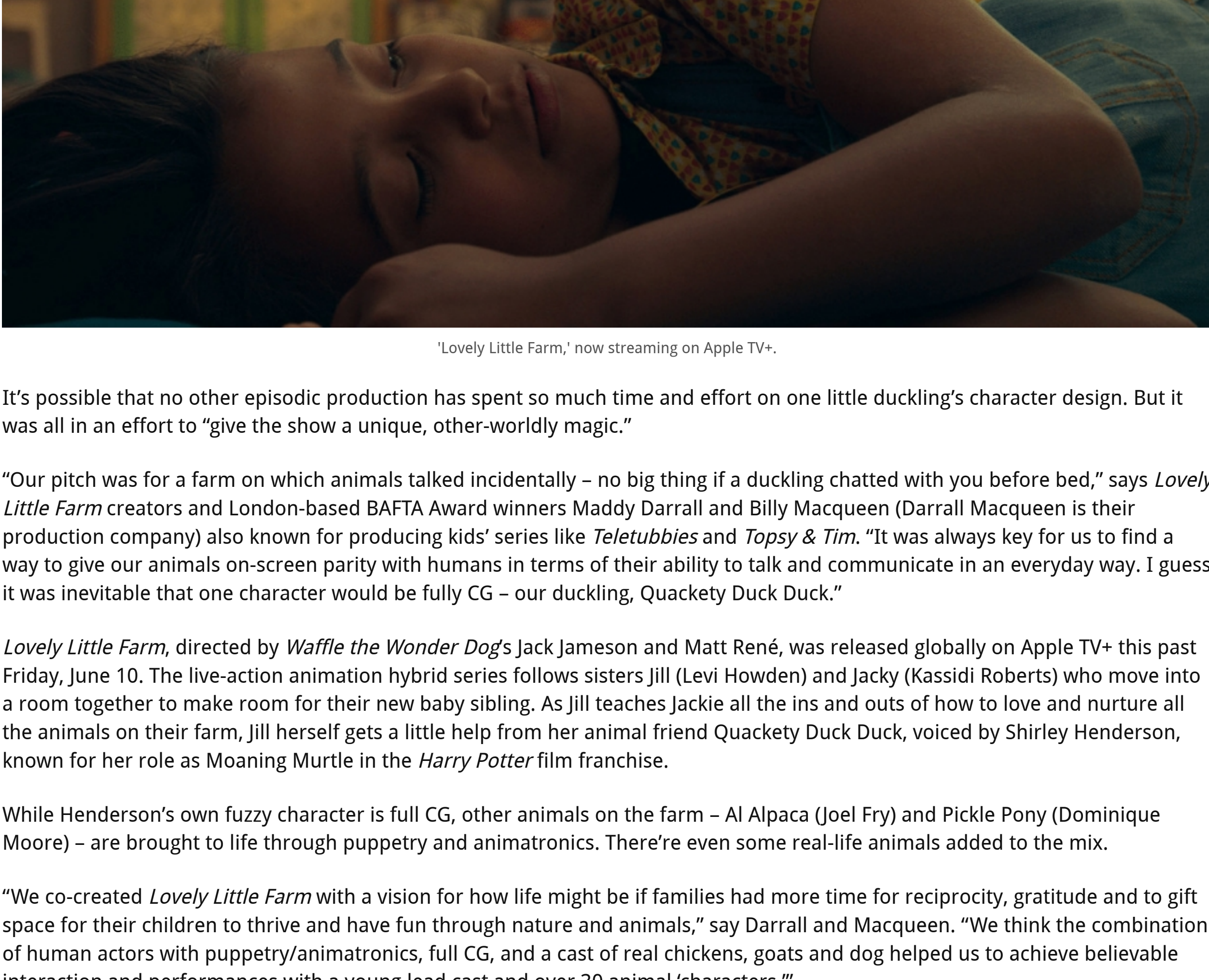
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Apple TV+'s 'Lovely Little Farm' Boasts Some Pretty Lovely Little CG

Creators Maddy Darrall and Billy Macqueen talk about their new live-action / CG animated kids' series, now streaming, about 2 sisters caring for the animals on their family farm, and how ILM's single biggest challenge... was creating Quackety Duck Duck.

By Victoria Davis and Dan Sarto | Wednesday, June 15, 2022 at 1:07pm

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'Lovely Little Farm,' now streaming on Apple TV+.

It's possible that no other episodic production has spent so much time and effort on one little duckling's character design. But it was all in an effort to "give the show a unique, other-worldly magic."

"Our pitch was for a farm on which animals talked incidentally – no big thing if a duckling chatted with you before bed," says *Lovely Little Farm* creators and London-based BAFTA Award winners Maddy Darrall and Billy Macqueen (Darrall Macqueen is their production company) also known for producing kids' series like *Teletubbies* and *Topsy & Tim*. "It was always key for us to find a way to give our animals on-screen parity with humans in terms of their ability to talk and communicate in an everyday way. I guess it was inevitable that one character would be fully CG – our duckling, Quackety Duck Duck."

Lovely Little Farm, directed by *Waffle the Wonder Dog*'s Jack Jameson and Matt René, was released globally on Apple TV+ this past Friday, June 10. The live-action animation hybrid series follows sisters Jill (Levi Howden) and Jacky (Kassidi Roberts) who move into a room together to make room for their new baby sibling. As Jill teaches Jackie all the ins and outs of how to love and nurture all the animals on their farm, Jill herself gets a little help from her animal friend Quackety Duck Duck, voiced by Shirley Henderson, known for her role as Moaning Murtie in the *Harry Potter* film franchise.

While Henderson's own fuzzy character is full CG, other animals on the farm – Al Alpaca (Joel Fry) and Pickle Pony (Dominique Moore) – are brought to life through puppetry and animatronics. There're even some real-life animals added to the mix.

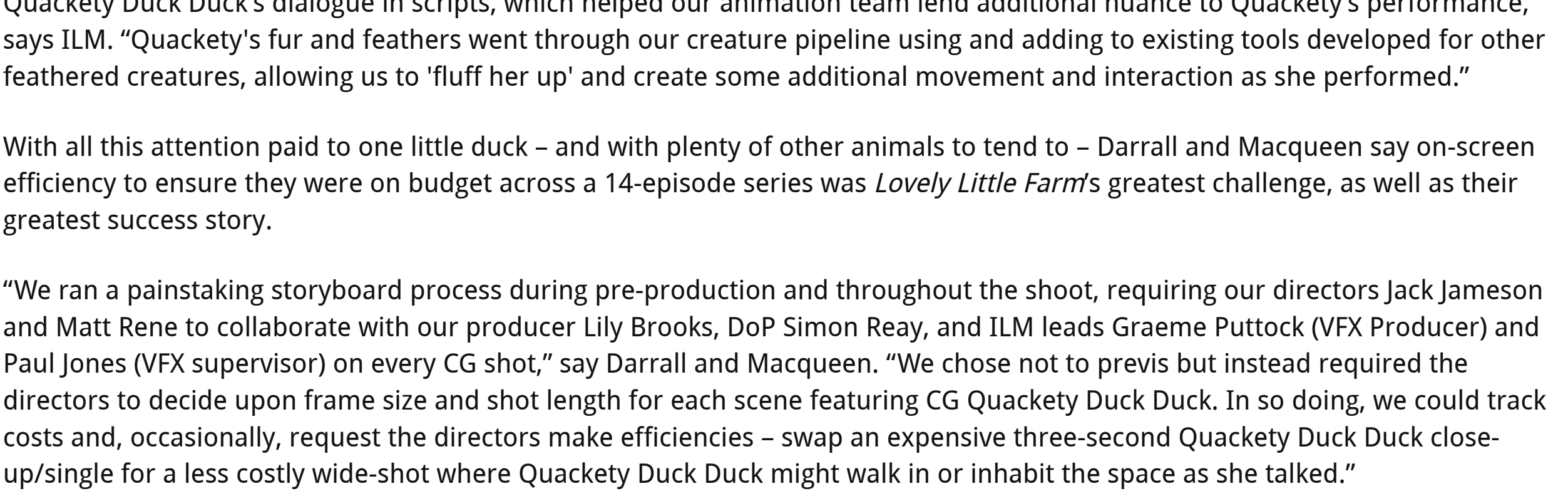
"We co-created *Lovely Little Farm* with a vision for how life might be if families had more time for reciprocity, gratitude and to gift space for their children to thrive and have fun through nature and animals," say Darrall and Macqueen. "We think the combination of human actors with puppetry/animatronics, full CG, and a cast of real chickens, goats and dog helped us to achieve believable interaction and performances with a young lead cast and over 30 animal 'characters.'"

But, according to legendary, gazillion award-winning visual effects company Industrial Light & Magic (ILM), Quackety Duck Duck was "the single largest investment of time and creative effort for our teams, both in terms of building her as a character that can be used in shots, and then animating and rendering her," which is saying a lot considering the company is known for its VFX work on Marvel shows like *Hawkeye* and *Eternals*, the *Star Wars* franchise hit series, *The Mandalorian*, and films like *Jungle Cruise* and the upcoming *Jurassic World: Dominion*.

"One of the early and principal guidelines we used when we started to create the Quackety Duck Duck character in April 2020 was to reference real ducklings," explains ILM. "A specialist offsite breeder and handler used a camera rig that Darrall Macqueen helped us to set up remotely to take photographs of each day of a duckling's development. Ducklings grow very quickly, and the differences between day five and day thirteen are immense. These reference images, captured against a 'Usual Suspects' style background chart, allowed us to build our duckling model to the perfect scale and proportions."

They add, "Quackety was a different challenge from most other productions, in that her scale is so small. We're used to dealing with dragons and dinosaurs, but when you're animating and rendering a duckling the size of a child's hand, you really need to focus on the details and bring all your tools to bear on making her look as realistic as possible without looking like you're trying too hard."

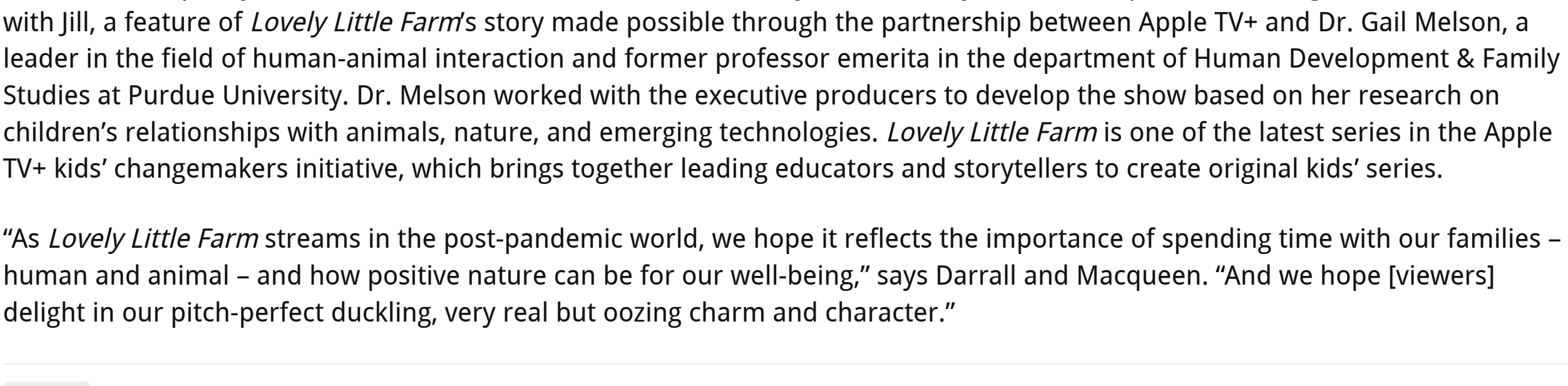
Once ILM had the base model ready and set, they were able to add slight alterations to enhance Quackety Duck Duck's believability, as well as give more character to her design. These adjustments included, resizing her eyes, adding a hint of a smile to the beak, and creating heart-shaped spiracle vents for her nostrils.



"Witness cameras were also used by Darrall Macqueen to record Henderson's facial expressions and body gestures as she read Quackety Duck Duck's dialogue in scripts, which helped our animation team lend additional nuance to Quackety's performance," says ILM. "Quackety's fur and feathers went through our creature pipeline using and adding to existing tools developed for other feathered creatures, allowing us to 'fluff her up' and create some additional movement and interaction as she performed."

With all this attention paid to one little duck – and with plenty of other animals to tend to – Darrall and Macqueen say on-screen efficiency to ensure they were on budget across a 14-episode series was *Lovely Little Farm*'s greatest challenge, as well as their greatest success story.

"We ran a painstaking storyboard process during pre-production and throughout the shoot, requiring our directors Jack Jameson and Matt Rene to collaborate with our producer Lily Brooks, DoP Simon Reay, and ILM leads Graeme Puttock (VFX Producer) and Paul Jones (VFX supervisor) on every CG shot," say Darrall and Macqueen. "We chose not to previs but instead required the directors to decide upon frame size and shot length for each scene featuring CG Quackety Duck Duck. In so doing, we could track costs and, occasionally, request the directors make efficiencies – swap an expensive three-second Quackety Duck Duck close-up/single for a less costly wide-shot where Quackety Duck Duck might walk in or inhabit the space as she talked."



In addition to quality – and cost-effective – CG animation, Quackety's authenticity was also emphasized through her interactions with Jill, a feature of *Lovely Little Farm*'s story made possible through the partnership between Apple TV+ and Dr. Gail Melson, a leader in the field of human-animal interaction and former professor emerita in the department of Human Development & Family Studies at Purdue University. Dr. Melson worked with the executive producers to develop the show based on her research on children's relationships with animals, nature, and emerging technologies. *Lovely Little Farm* is one of the latest series in the Apple TV+ kids' changemakers initiative, which brings together leading educators and storytellers to create original kids' series.

"As *Lovely Little Farm* streams in the post-pandemic world, we hope it reflects the importance of spending time with our families – human and animal – and how positive nature can be for our well-being," says Darrall and Macqueen. "And we hope [viewers] delight in our pitch-perfect duckling, very real but oozing charm and character."

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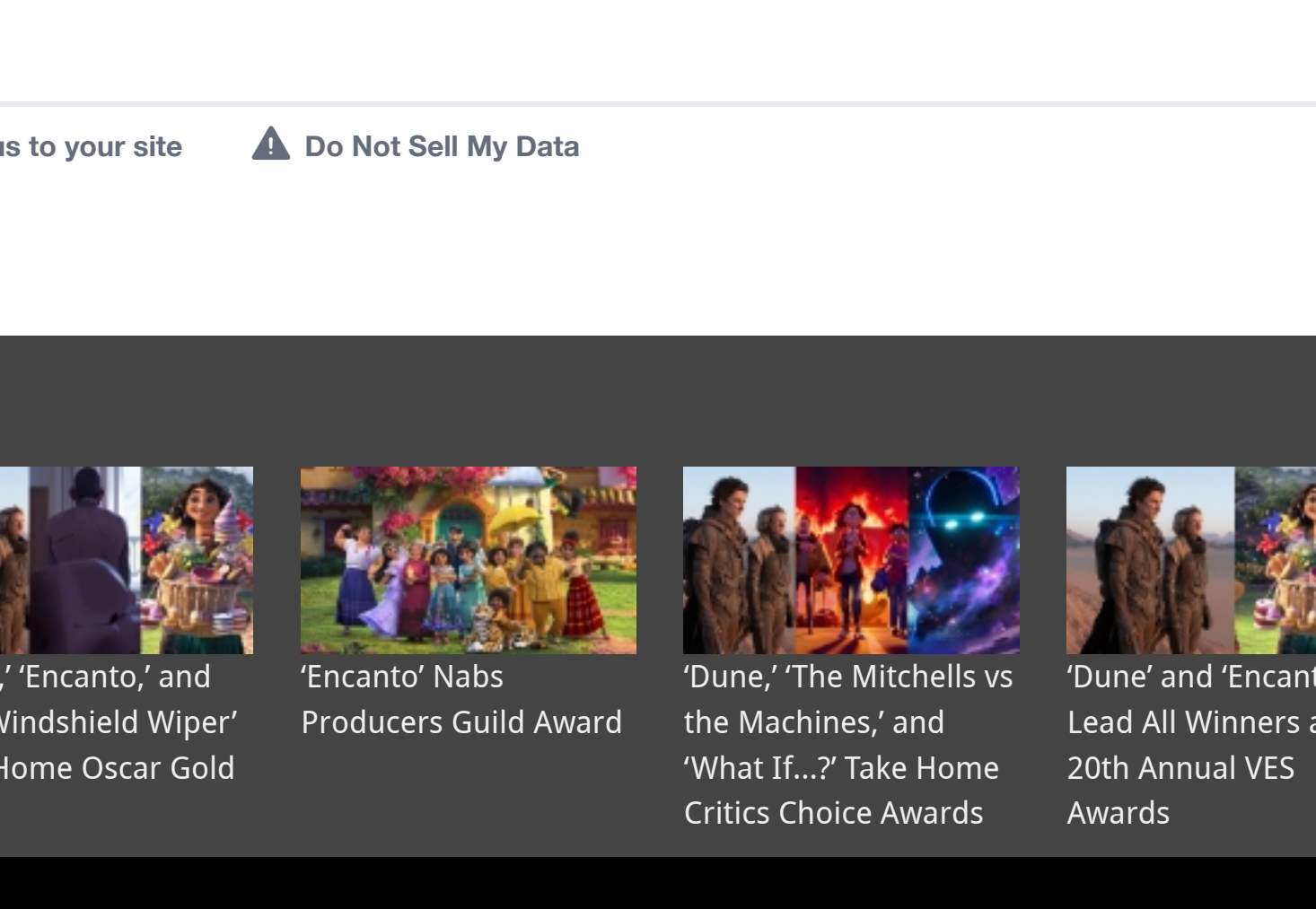
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